Chronic fatigue is not your destiny.

You may feel fatigued. You may have been fatigued for a very long time. You may look good but feel rotten and searched for answers but found none.

In spite of your suffering you may have been told, “there’s nothing wrong with you,” leaving you despairing with no solutions.

Know this: that’s just a story. A story that your chronic fatigue has no fix. A story that’s
simply not true.

“There’s nothing wrong with you” is always a euphemism for “I don’t know what’s wrong with you.”

Not everyone you go to for expert advice will understand you, understand your problem, or have valuable solutions to offer you. When you hear any version of “there’s nothing wrong with you,” even “there’s nothing more I can do for you,” that’s your cue to keep searching.

There’s Always a Reason and a Solution for Chronic Fatigue

Chronic fatigue is an energy deficit that’s stopped you in your tracks. That energy deficit has made you tired and led to the many problems of a body that doesn’t have the energy to function the way it was designed to. The way you need it to.

And guess what? In spite of what you may have been told, there’s always a reason.

You heard me exactly right. There’s always a reason and always a solution for chronic fatigue.

It may be simple. It may be complex. It doesn’t matter. If we tend to the foundational aspects of energy physiology and of living well to support it, we’ll find your solution. Guaranteed. Time to say farewell to chronic fatigue.

Solving the Riddle of Chronic Fatigue Allows You to Claim Your Potential

I know you want the energy to reach your full potential. That’s why you’re here.

But not the hyped up, quick fixes of the latest energy fad. No, that’s not you. You want more. You want a sustainable source of deep, robust, life-giving energy, am I right?

I call this Big Energy: the vigor, the enthusiasm, the vibrancy that creates and sustains all of who you are and are capable of. Big Energy is your potential as a person. That’s where we’re heading.

In this guide, you will learn the roadmap—your Beautiful Energy Roadmap—that will help you create and sustain the energy you need to claim your full potential. To heal.

Join us?
Why Conventional Medicine Doesn’t Work for Chronic Fatigue

Your roadmap—your Beautiful Energy roadmap—addresses the central theme of all chronic fatigue, burnout, and chronic illness: energy. Big Energy. The most powerful indicator of your level of health and vitality, and what you are seeking here.

This may not be a roadmap you are familiar with. It’s not a tool of conventional medicine clinics from which you’ve walked away misunderstood and despairing. And without sustainable solutions.

What’s the problem with conventional Western medicine? It does such a beautiful job with our acute, urgent, and catastrophic problems. Why can’t it fix chronic fatigue and chronic illness?

Conventional Western medicine is designed quite brilliantly for acute and urgent problems. If you break a leg, rupture your appendix, or have a heart attack, you’d better hope they’re there.

But conventional medicine simply does not work for most of our chronic health problems—like chronic fatigue—and our deeper aspirations for healing and claiming our potential.

Where Conventional Western Medicine Goes Wrong in Chronic Illness:

- by focusing on the quick relief of acute symptoms when most of our problems are chronic, missing the chance to help us on a deeper level to create sustainable, root-cause-level solutions;
- by treating just our symptoms, often with toxic drugs that beget their own problems, leading to unsatisfying results, or worse, greater suffering;
- by offering one-size-fits-all treatment protocols that fail to understand us as unique individuals—and therefore fail us;
- by failing to give us the time we need for true understanding, over-simplifying our problems and losing the rich context and complexity of our life stories—leading to incorrect diagnoses and delayed healing;
- by parceling us out on the basis of where we hurt or which organ is in trouble, losing the
integration that is the true wisdom of our bodies.

Recognize these?

_The problem isn’t with you._ You’ve just been barking up the wrong tree—asking to be fixed by a medical system that wasn’t designed for you or the complexities of chronic fatigue and chronic illness.

We can do better. Let’s give up our unrealistic expectations that conventional Western medicine can fix our chronic problems and energy deficit and look to a better medicine for what we need. A medicine that is more personalized. A slower medicine that gets to the heart of the problem and creates solutions that are deep and sustainable.

Hang onto your seat!

To Heal Chronic Fatigue, First Call Back Your Power

One quick but vital lesson before we dive into the analysis and solutions to your chronic fatigue:

**First and foremost, you’ve got to call back your power!**

The power you were taught to give away to a medicine not designed for you.

Your new medicine, the medicine I will teach you, is in your hands.

You were born to heal. It’s your deepest, truest potential.

Stop Asking Others to “Fix” You

But to activate this deep potential that is yours, you’ve got to affirm it. Claim responsibility for it. You’ve got to call back your power from the outside sources you’ve asked to “fix” you. From the “experts” who don’t know you as well as you do. Who attempt to define your problems and address your needs with limited tools and understanding about who you are.
Own the Truth That You Can Change

And you must own the truth that you can change—that chronic fatigue is not your destiny—so you can direct that change to your advantage. You must educate yourself, learn the skills, find the tools, and create the trusted team of supporters and advisors to guide you and create your new paradigm of healing.

Yes, you’re hearing me right—you must claim the idea that you can heal yourself!

This is the path I’m asking you to walk with me.

Know that Healing is the Primary Urge of All Nature

You see, the primary urge of all nature is to heal—all things heal.

We see it all around us in landscapes devastated by forest fires, hurricanes, and tornadoes. As annihilation miraculously morphs into new growth and potential. As hopelessness emerges as hope. Inherently a part of the natural world, we have exactly the same potential for rebirth into something we couldn’t imagine before.

Use a New Roadmap for Your Healing

So how do we do it? How do we claim this power of ours?

I’m about to introduce you to our new roadmap—where you’ll see the terrain of your healing life laid out before you. We’ll explore the Nine Domains of Healing—your beautiful energy roadmap—to see the key elements of energy recovery and healing, each supported by leading edge science of human potential:

Epigenetics:

How our genetic expression and biology are determined by every aspect of how we live our lives.

Neuroplasticity:

How we harness our brain’s enormous potential to change and heal.

Core Systems Biology:

The amazing integrated biological system that we are and that we can modify to heal at every level.
Body-Mind Psychology:

And, of course, we are our biology. We know this. We know it’s how we feel and think that drives our search for solutions to our fatigue and chronic illness. We know it’s our potential as people we’re after and that is the ultimate prize of our healing.

Healing is Not Passive

We can passively accept our innate healing trajectory and fall short of our desires and true potential.

Or we can actively direct this process. We can harness the gifts of nature, of our own biology, to engage and support our healing.

But we must claim responsibility for this. We must own our healing. We must actively lead the journey of becoming our optimal selves.

How?

We show up.

We slow down.

We pay attention.

Without showing up, going slow, and paying attention, none of our self-care efforts will work. Or if they work, we won’t be able to sustain them. They’ll get lost in the noise, chaos, and suffering of our lives.

By showing up we may be asked to step out of our comfort zones. Many of us are used to going fast, striving hard, and reaching for the goals out in front of us. What might happen if we show up for ourselves? Right here, right now. Will our lives and all the dreams and aspirations we’ve worked so hard for pass us by?

No. Our lives—our true lives, our healing lives—are right here. In present-moment awareness. Just waiting for us to see—really see—and participate. Not fretting about the past or worrying (and planning and striving) about a future that does not yet exist.

Then, through our wide-open eyes, in our present-moment awareness, we clearly see the roadmap and the areas of our lives that are calling us. That will lead us to the energy and vitality we seek.
**Introductory Exercise to Taste the Path—Practice Being Present**

Take a few seconds and pause from reading, just long enough to let go of your thoughts—which by their very nature exist in past or future time—and get into your body, which is inherently linked to the present moment.

Take a deep cleansing belly breath. Breathe into the belly, hold just a second, then let go with an audible sigh. Repeat this several times. With your awareness on your breath, you have entered present time.

Now, let’s add a little action. Sit down, and pet and coo over your dog or cat. Smell a rose, slowly inhaling its perfume and let it permeate your whole being. Think of something hilariously funny and let yourself laugh. Lie down on your back (right there on your floor) and let your arms and legs splay out comfortably around you. Feel your whole body against the ground and breathe.

Focus your awareness on your breath and your task. Then come on back.

That was you in present-moment awareness. Not so hard, eh? This is the foundation of our healing and calling our power back. Beyond all the savvy strategies and carefully crafted food plans, this presence is the key to your healing life.

**Choose a New Story of Healing: Vibrant New Energy**

In this foundational way, you can call your power back by choosing a new story of healing.

Your new story of healing includes a roadmap of your choosing that guides your way. Your new story of healing includes tools that fit well in your hands and skills that support your real life.

Your new story of healing is found by showing up, going slow, and paying attention.

**Tell Your Story**

The first act of reclaiming your power is telling your story of becoming well.
Say it, imagine it, breathe life into it.

This is how we reclaim the power we may have given away to the experts. Or the power we subdued through our resistance to change, our fear of failure or not belonging, or our beliefs of unworthiness and not having time.

This is the power we may have lost sight of, buried in our fatigue, our overwhelm, or suffering.

This is your power. The power that is still there, ripe for the taking.

So, before you go further, tell your story of becoming well:

**First, Breathe:**

Breathe in deeply, then let it all go. Let your breath guide you into your body. Your tired body. Your suffering body with potential to heal. Soften your judgments, your shame, your disbelief. Come along with us on this journey.

** Declare Your “Yes”:**

Say yes. Yes to healing. Yes to energy. Yes to a better future. Yes to opening the doors to new possibilities. Say yes in any way you feel inspired: a single word (yes) or long flowing sentences (yes, yes, yes!).

**List Your Goals and Desires:**

On a blank sheet of paper (don’t worry—this is not a quiz!), write down your goals and desires. Sky’s the limit here. This journey is about you—claim it now. (Hint: it is not necessary to diagnose yourself or know anything at all about what needs to be healed. This is simply you stating what you want to achieve: To have more energy? To reach your potential? To feel like yourself again? To be able to compete in your first ironman? To be able to work again or go back to school? See what I’m asking you to do?)

**Imagine You’ve Achieved Your Goals:**

What does your healing life look like? Can you see or feel differences in your world? What do you feel like in your body, mind, and spirit? What are you doing? What do you look like? Who else is there with you at your side? What’s possible? Now that you’ve imagined successfully achieving these first goals, are there more that come to mind? Perhaps goals you never dreamed were possible?

Congratulations! You’ve just called your power back. You may not feel it yet. You may detect just a trickle of hope. You may sense a bit of strength rise up from your gut. This is only the beginning.
Once upon a time there was a hero/heroine named [insert your name here], and they began a wondrous journey...

Introduction to Your Beautiful Energy Roadmap

You’ve called your power back and boldly envisioned your destination. Now what do you need?

On any worthwhile journey it helps to have a mentor (me!), tools (we’ve got lots of tools we’ll explore), fellow travelers (we’re all healing with you!), and a roadmap with suggestions that we choose based on where we are and where we want to be. A nuanced roadmap that knows the best path for us isn’t a straight line from point A to point B that looks like everyone else’s.

Your roadmap—your beautiful energy roadmap—are *The Nine Domains of Healing*, the keys to reclaiming your power, reigniting your energy, and healing from chronic fatigue.

Each of *The Nine Domains of Healing* explores, teaches, and guides you through a different foundational aspect of the healing life. They merge the great sciences of human potential—state of the art physiology, Functional Medicine systems biology, body-mind psychology, epigenetics, and neuroplasticity—with wisdom from Life School: healing insights of your own as well as mine, that cross cultures and contain knowledge and observations from my consultation room, acquired from nearly 30 years of working with people just like you.

*The Nine Domains of Healing* invite you to call your power back to an essential part of yourself, to create your healing life.

How to Utilize Your Beautiful Energy Roadmap

Our primary goal is to heal, but not to inundate you with so much information and so many new tools and practices that you become overwhelmed.

It’s good to see the bird’s-eye view of terrain, so go ahead and have a look at it from above. Scan *The Nine Domains of Healing* to familiarize yourself with them.

Start With Three

Then choose **just three things** to begin working on. More than three is too much. As humans, we’re not designed to multitask. We need to break things down and do just one thing at a time. So, you’ll actually choose three things, then work on just one.
Which three things? Your intuition will guide you to what you need the most right now. Is there a particular topic that makes you feel curious or excited? Are there healing domains that you already recognize as needing your attention? Trust me, you’ll know.

Your Beautiful Energy Roadmap

*The Nine Domains of Healing*

Let Go—
To Create Space for Healing, Let Go of
Toxins, Irritants, and Negative Energy

First, we create space. Healing calls us to create all kinds of space. Why?

Because we can’t bring in the vibrant new you until the old is reckoned with. As we let go, clear out, and slow down we create space for healing and energy recovery to occur.

Letting go …

- of the toxins and irritants that make us sick;
- the habits that don’t nourish us;
- the incessant distractions that consume our precious time, attention, and energy; and
- the negative energy of people and old stories that hold us back …

... brings in new life, new hope, new potential. It literally frees up energy and space for healing to occur.

We can’t bypass this step. Your energy renewal therapies and strategies will never work unless you clear out the roadblocks to healing first.

Consider Mandy’s story:

**Mandy’s Story of Letting Go**

My client Mandy floored me with her insights about what she needed to heal in a deep and sustainable way. Her simple genius helped me clarify the necessary starting point for all our healing: Let Go.

When Mandy came to see me for the first time, she was a mess. She’d been suffering from deep fatigue, muscle and joint aches, brain fog, high anxiety, persistent diarrhea, abdominal pain, and facial nerve pain.

Her symptoms had started the previous year, shortly after cleaning up the black mold discovered in the basement of her house. She remediated the moldy materials herself, deconstructing contaminated walls and floors, and overseeing the placement of new materials.

Extensive evaluation of her lifelong health history and review of her current problems and lab work revealed that she was sick from an overwhelming load of toxicity—but not just from mold. She was highly stressed, anxious, distracted, slept poorly, and made little time to tend to her own needs. She was sick from toxins within the mold as well as toxins from her internal environment: increased intestinal permeability, food sensitivities, imbalanced gut flora, and deficiencies of key nutrients needed to clear toxins from her body.
She enthusiastically embarked on a comprehensive treatment plan that included a strict anti-inflammatory-intensive nutrition food plan, supplementation of essential nutrients, probiotics and digestive enzymes, a strict sleep hygiene program, and moderate exercise. She was able to dive in full on because, as a schoolteacher, she had the summer off to focus extra time on herself, and she was anxious to feel better.

She flourished. By the time I saw her back in the office six weeks later, all of her symptoms were gone except for the facial nerve pain. Mandy was energetic, vibrant, and full of life.

But then school started back up in the fall, and the stresses and time constraints that come with being a very busy kindergarten teacher and mom challenged her. She started eating comfort foods—sugar, gluten, and dairy (her worst offenders as inflammation triggers)—which were all too easily accessible in the teachers’ lounge. She found herself going to bed later and later. She could not sustain her exercise regimen, and she began spending increasing amounts of time on social media after work—an easy way to relax and decompress after a busy, stressful day, but hard to put down.

All her symptoms returned. They weren’t as severe as they had been, since she kept up with much of her earlier regimen, but she was disappointed to lose the vibrancy she had enjoyed for several months. Of course, she wondered what she had done wrong.

In our most recent meeting, she came in with a list. She had thought it through very carefully. She wanted to feel well again and was very clear about what aspects of self-care would get her there. There was no doubt what had led to her complete recovery before. Her challenge now was to sustain her healing in the face of the school year stresses. Because she had paid attention, she learned from her “failure.” She had to create the space, time, and practice for her healing.

Mandy handed me her list of three things:

Get more sleep to open up space for restoration and repair.

She planned to start with fifteen extra minutes per night and work up gradually to an extra hour, then to hour and a half each night.

Stop time wasting to open up space for other self-care tasks.

She put strict limits on the time spent on social media, which had become a huge time suck. A little bit is good—engagement with friends, enjoyment of articles and funny stories. But too much left no time for the self-care she needed.

Begin a meditation practice to open space in her mind, relax, and relieve anxiety.

She had begun using a meditation app we’d discussed at an earlier visit, setting it for just fifteen minutes each morning and meditating before doing anything else. She was already feeling the expansion it was creating, leading to reduced stress and anxiety, and helping her feel a more positive and hopeful outlook as she started each day.
Creating Space is the Key to Success

This woman nailed it! She intuitively recognized the need to create space in her life for healing to take place in a sustainable way by letting go of the things that held her back. Using her own insights into the demands of her body, in her very own words, she beautifully articulated her hierarchy of needs.

And that is the whole point of this crucial first domain of healing: we must let go. We must let go of the toxicity, irritants, and negative energy to make room for healing—to make room for the resources, time, and energy for the active self-care we need.

Let Go of Toxicity—Find Out Where You Might Be Stuck

I hope you’re convinced that to heal and recover your energy you must create space first. Now it’s time to recognize which ones are the most threatening to your own individual healing.

Quiz: Take the Life Toxicity Inventory—Where You Might Be Stuck

Answer the following questions with a “yes” or “no.” Give yourself one point for each “yes” and zero points for each “no.”

Tally your overall score as well as scores for each section. These serve only the purpose of showing you what parts of the Let Go domain deserve your attention. The higher your score, the more chance there is that toxicity is a significant player in the current state of your health and wellbeing.

Guilt, Shame, and Judgment

- Do you blame yourself for not feeling well or your best?
- Do you feel like a failure for attempts to heal that have not worked out?
- Do you feel guilt or shame for low energy, lack of motivation, or illness?
- Do you feel that if you could only “get it right” you’d feel better?
- Are you hard on yourself about self-care?
- Do you feel like you’re never enough just as you are?
Old Ways and Habits

- Are there regular parts of your daily routine that you know aren’t good for you but you do them anyway?
- Are there parts of your regular daily routine that you would like to change?
- Do you skimp on relaxation?
- Do you wish there were more play, laughter, and fun in your daily life?
- Do you eat food that you sense is not good for you?
- Do you eat too much?
- Do you drink less than two quarts of water (sixty-four ounces) per day?
- Do you spend a significant part of your day sitting?
- Do you burn the candle at both ends and consistently feel time pressured?
- Do you have trouble implementing new healthy activities in your daily routine?

Negative Energy of People

- Do you feel anxious or overwhelmed around certain people in your life?
- Are there people in your life who don’t support you or your dreams and desires?
- Are there people in your life who are critical of you?
- Do you avoid crowds?
- Do you sometimes say “yes,” to people, when you really mean “no?”
- Do you tend to defer to the desires and demands of others rather than your own?

Distraction

- Do you drive while talking on your cell phone (even hands-free)?
- Do you talk on the phone while out walking or shopping?
- Do you have a hard time disengaging from social media?
- Do you watch or read the news daily?
- Do you have a hard time pulling yourself away from news notifications?
- Do you watch TV for more than an hour every day?
- Do you have cluttered surfaces or drawers in your house or work place?
- Do you ever lose track of things among the clutter?
- Do you ever feel anxious or overwhelmed by clutter in your living or work
environment?

**Not Enough Sleep or Rest**

- Do you habitually skimp on sleep, knowing you need more?
- Do you forego sleeping enough to stay up for other things?
- Do you not sleep well—either struggle to fall asleep or wake up during the night?
- Do you wake up in the morning feeling tired or unrestored?
- Do you consistently get fewer than eight hours of sleep per night?
- Do you do everything fast and rushed to cram it all into your day?

**Environmental Pollution**

- Are you exposed to pesticides or industrial pollutants?
- Do you use plastic containers for heating or storing food?
- Do you use single-use plastic water bottles?
- Do you have a wireless network in your home that is on 24/7?
- Do you sleep with a cell phone turned on in your bedroom?
- Do you live or work in a poorly ventilated building?
- Do you live on or near a farm that uses pesticides and herbicides?
- Do you eat nonorganic produce, meat, or animal milk products?

**Toxic and Irritating Food**

- Do you eat sugar of any kind (table sugar, fructose, agave, honey, maple syrup, etc)?
- Do you eat grains (even “healthy” whole grains)?
- Do you have a hard time staying away from sugar?
- Do you eat/drink food containing high fructose corn syrup?
- Do you eat any foods that make you feel bad?
- Do you feel like you drink too much alcohol?
- Do you ever feel sluggish, bloated, or unwell after a meal?
- Do you have irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO)?
Stress

- Do you often feel stressed-out or overwhelmed?
- Do you do everything quickly and rushed to cram it all into your day?
- Do you feel like you consistently fail to meet your expectations for yourself or for the day?
- Do you consistently leave little time for your own rest, relaxation, fun, or restoration?

How to Start Letting Go

Acknowledge Where You’re Stuck and Own It

Accept responsibility for the fact that you (yes, you!) have toxic habits (we all do!). Then give them a name—you know them. What are your old ways and habits that no longer serve you?

Take Baby Steps

Change the small things first or small parts of the big things. It’s okay if it doesn’t all get done today—it can’t. Less is always more. Make sure your actions are doable and sustainable.

Chewing off too much leads to failure and frustration. Small steps lead to small wins and that feels good to the soul and creates a foundation to build upon.

Create Time

Yes, you do have time. Realize that. Acknowledge that. Your current priorities may not support what you want. Your call is to slow down and let go of the distractions and time-wasters that get in your way.

Make a List

Make a list of the old ways and habits that you know make you feel sick, depleted, or overwhelmed. Include any of the “yes” responses from your Life Toxicity Inventory. Write them all down. Do this quickly and don’t limit yourself—just blurt them all out. Realize that you don’t have to change all of them today, but this exercise helps us get the ball rolling and gives us a focus for beginning this journey.

Then, Choose Three Small Things

Pick three small things from your list—or take a big thing and break it down into three smaller pieces. Write down how you plan to change or let go of these starting today.
Stick with three—three is a power theme for human engagement—compelling the mind, enhancing memory and pleasure, and increasing chances for success. And keep them small. Start today.

Always Give Yourself Thanks

Now, congratulate yourself! You’re building on the healing already begun, opening more space, letting go, and making room for healing. Getting better and stronger already! And you did this all for yourself.

Love—

Love and Connect (Yourself First, Then Others)

Now, with your newly created space, let the love in—the love that is your destination, your purpose, and your path. We all thrive when love flows into our lives. But though love is all around us, accessible to us all, we can lose our connection to it.

In our chronic fatigue and suffering we can forget our worthiness for love. Even now, you may find yourself squirming or dismissive of this idea—how can the story of love be about me?

At our very core, love fuels it all. Everything we need. All the self-care that must be part of our healing. It can only happen when we love ourselves enough.

In this domain of Love, we realize the necessity of loving ourselves first. Self-love is the foundation and the fuel of our healing. Self-love, put into practice, becomes the fuel that extends our hearts out to others in the fullest, deepest, and richest way.

The circle of love that is the strength of our humanity and the source of our healing begins with us.

First, We Love Ourselves

“Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.”

—Lucille Ball

Don’t we? Have to love ourselves?

How do we know? What if we think we love ourselves, but can’t make ourselves a priority in
our lives? We put everyone else and their needs first?

*How is that self-love?*

To heal, to reclaim our energy, to live to our highest potential, we’ve got to love—really love, love-as-a-verb love—ourselves. First. Always.

Don’t believe me? Check out Sally:

**Sally’s Story: The Weight of the World**

Sally skidded into extreme exhaustion after the birth of her second child. She went back to her full-time job after a six-week maternity leave and found herself working eight-hour days, picking up her three-year-old daughter and new baby at daycare on the way home, fixing supper, putting the kids to bed, then doing all of the household chores before collapsing into bed herself.

(I’m feeling exhausted just imagining this, aren’t you?)

It didn’t occur to her to ask her husband for help. He was the major breadwinner for the family, after all. Sally was the living embodiment of the idea that a “good” wife bears all, does it all, and puts her needs last.

I first saw her about a year into this saga when she was barely making it. Her sleep was short and not of good quality. She often had a hard time falling asleep and would be awakened by one or both children multiple times through the night. She woke up in the mornings feeling exhausted, stunned by her alarm going off far earlier than she was ready for. She had migraine headaches, vague joint pain, constipation, dry skin, weight gain around the middle, sugar cravings, and depression.

Sally felt trapped.

She had become completely overwhelmed and was on the brink of emotional disaster. She was sick. This life was not sustainable.

This is where Sally’s work had to begin: with self-love.

Intellectually she got it, but in practice she still believed that it was solely up to her to take care of her family, work—the world. This was her story. She was so physically depleted and lacking in energy that she didn’t have the emotional fire to advocate for herself, to ask for help, or to set personal boundaries. She was tanked.

I had her start with a few very simple steps that she felt she could manage. We negotiated these carefully because the balance of her life was precarious.

While sitting in my office, she crafted simple affirmations about honoring herself. On note
cards she wrote: “I honor myself,” “I am worthy of my time and attention,” “I receive the love and support that I need,” “I am fully supported by the Divine Universe.” She planned to copy these onto sticky notes and place them on her bathroom mirror, in the kitchen, and on her desk at work—places where she would see them often and sink herself into them.

As she wrote and said these affirmations out loud, she told me she felt a palpable release. She felt the space they created for something new—something for her.

Sally also agreed to very small healthy changes in her food plan, sleep schedule, and movement to get her feeling better faster. But baby steps, so she could succeed at them and not pile on guilt about not following them.

She planned to avoid sugar and add more vegetables to her diet. She moved up her bedtime by just half an hour, and she enlisted her husband’s help with the nightly chores. I suggested she stand more at work, use the stairs instead of the elevator, take a bag and carry groceries at the store rather than use a cart, and take short walks with the kids on weekends. She immediately had a standing desk installed in her office.

Sally gradually made progress. The positive affirmations had a powerful effect on her, bringing relief, inspiring new hope, and reinforcing what she already knew—that it was not just okay but necessary to tend to herself and her needs first. And instead of the backlash and disappointment from her family she expected, they supported her. Her husband was happy to help out, and everyone has benefitted from her more relaxed and lighthearted presence.

She continues to be a work in progress but has made huge strides and is feeling much better.

Self-Love is Not Selfish

Putting self-love first strengthens us for others. It’s not selfish. We must care for ourselves before we can make the most effective and valuable contributions to others.

This isn’t fluffy positive thinking. This is the way our personal and social relationships operate best. There’s a reason the airlines always tell us to secure our own oxygen mask before helping those around us. If we don’t put our own mask on first when the cabin pressure is compromised, our oxygen-deprived brains won’t get it together well enough to be of useful assistance to those around us.

The same principle applies to every other aspect of our lives. When we love and care for ourselves first, we’re better, stronger, and more competent for others. When we don’t, we’re deprived of exactly what we need in order to succeed.

Low Self-Love Contributes to Chronic Fatigue and Illness

One of the most common problems I hear about in my consultation room is how clients don’t make themselves a priority. Most bad habits that contribute profoundly to chronic fatigue and
chronic illness—not eating well, not sleeping enough, not exercising, not playing or having fun, and so on—stem from people not leaving room for themselves in their own lives. They fill their days with obligations to everyone else and leave themselves out. Coming in last means fatigue, illness, dysfunction, and misery.

And how does a life of self-neglect play out, ultimately, for family, friends, and coworkers? That exhaustion, suffering, and incapacitation impacts everyone. When we suffer, everyone suffers with us.

Self-Love is a Verb

Self-love is what we do for ourselves.

It’s not just a nice feel-good platitude—it must be fueled by action to transform our lives and the lives of those we love. Although it may sound counterintuitive, we don’t have to feel it to create it and have it work for us. That spontaneous feeling of joyful love and acceptance of ourselves can be hard—especially when we’re suffering, tired, or overwhelmed. The buoyant kind of love comes with practice.

You Are Worthy (And the World Needs You to Know It!)

Be certain of this: if you feel unworthy or unlovable, you are wrong.

Your greatest, truest, most beautiful being is absolutely inside you and has been there all along just waiting for you to wake up to it. This beautiful you must have your full attention and acknowledgment to come forth and shine its light into the world.

This will be your challenge for this healing journey, and nothing less will do. To see your light. To embrace your light. To be brave and step over your fear to accept what your family and community and world needs you to do: exude your light all around you. As Marianne Williamson famously wrote in A Return to Love, “Your playing small does not serve the world.”

Sound harsh? It’s a clear call to action and recognition that how we understand ourselves and live our lives affects everyone: you need to love yourself, and we all need that too. Your light is necessary for your healing, and we’re counting on your light, joined with our own, to heal our world.

Self-Love Action Steps
Show Up for Yourself

Remember your list of three things you plan to let go of to create space for healing? Whatever those actions are, expand them. Allow yourself fifteen extra minutes of sleep in the morning. Take a short walk over your lunch break. Call someone you love. Write something. Plan a healthy meal. Hug your dog. It doesn’t matter what you do. Start somewhere. Start small.

Start with three.

Write them down and start right now:

1.

2.

3.

Make Yourself a Top Priority

You are as important as everything and everyone else in your life. You belong on your schedule just as much as they do. Don’t let a single day pass without placing yourself front and center on your calendar. Be as militant about keeping those commitments to yourself as you are about keeping commitments to others. Everything else can wait. Make sure that whatever you plan to do for yourself does not always get scheduled at the end of your day. Try putting yourself first.

Go on, open your calendar and schedule yourself in right now.

Celebrate Yourself

That’s right: celebrate, brag, pat yourself on the back. For doing this work. For all of your achievements. Just because you are awesome. What do you think happens when your mind and heart soak in that appreciation? You got it—they expand, they rise, they soar! Think of something you totally rock at and write it down or say it out loud!

Or how about this: I am a total badass because [fill in the blank] _______________________.

Heck yah!

Break the Rules

Be disobedient! There’s no more profound way to honor yourself and who you are. You get to decide what’s right for you. The way everyone else does things may not be for you. What they think of you for being who you are is not your concern (and you are none of their business!).

Honor your needs and factor them into your decisions. Stop trying to please others all the
Can you think of one thing right now you’re going to do differently because it feels right to you? Say it out loud or write it here:

Practice Balance

Life isn’t meant to be all work. Let yourself incorporate rest into your day. Create needed balance on your own terms. That may take the form of an electronics-free time in your day, limiting the number of times you check email, or turning off all notifications on your phone. It may be a short nap or a walk. Try driving, eating, or shopping without simultaneously talking on your cell phone. Turn your phone off entirely. Walk a little bit more slowly. Find ways to honor your need to be at peace, to focus on just one thing at a time, and to pause by pulling back and letting go.

Insist on Love

Surround yourself with people who affirm your worth and who are kind to you. Minimize your time with people who devalue you or make you feel uncomfortable. You may have toxic coworkers, bosses, or friends. You can’t completely avoid some of these people but protect yourself by affirming your worth and minimizing contact with them. Change what you can.

Know that you deserve to be fully loved and supported by the people around you. A friend of mine used to work with some tough people. She took to carrying or wearing a talisman and would touch it periodically throughout the day to remind herself of her strength.

Tell a New Story of Self-Love

Strengthen your mind pathways for self-love by working with affirmations that support it. Affirm gratitude for yourself. Do this whether you feel it or not. The practice will ultimately shift how you feel.

I am enough.
I love myself.
I am worthy.
I believe in myself.
I am a blessing to this world.

If you find negative self-talk competing for space in your mind, substitute one of these affirmations. Write them on sticky notes and keep them where you can frequently see them to remind you. As you look at them, take pause. Let the words wash over you. Feel them. Then, live your self-love. Live like you love yourself.
Permission Slip: Love Yourself as You Are

We begin here: permission. Permission to acknowledge our worthiness and wholeness. Permission to unwind the mind pathways of shame and strengthen those of love and self-acceptance. Write yourself this permission slip (or your own version) and read it out loud when you’re done. I have many such permission slips written on sticky notes that I carry around with me.

Dear [your name here],


Balance—
Find Your Strong Center and Become Stress Resilient

Having a strong center is vital to heal from chronic fatigue.

Having created space for your healing and committed to self-love, you now can find, nurture, and fortify your center. A strong center makes you powerful and stress resilient. It is the core of chronic fatigue energy recovery.

Our center is us—our wise inner self, our strength, and, like a compass rose, our internal place of biological power and life balance. From this core of our being we take on the challenges, struggles, joys, and the daily chores.

In this domain of Balance, we explore how to create a strong center to support our dynamic vitality. We learn how to bolster the biological energy that sustains our center:

- We learn how the stress response engages the physiology of energy and the power of our core.
- We learn about the brain-thyroid-adrenal-mitochondrial (BTAM) energy operating system.
- We learn to savor how the BTAM energy operating system fuels us in the face of all that life brings us.
- We learn to heal the BTAM energy operating system to recover biological energy and
Balance is a Choice to Engage with Our Lives

Balance is a dynamic force within us. It’s a rhythmic push-pull, leaning in and stepping back, rising up and taking pause. This rhythm reflects how our center is always evaluating, adjusting, and responding to who we are, what challenges us, and what we need at every moment.

Homeostasis and Equilibrium

In science we call this dynamic balance homeostasis, or equilibrium. It’s not an option—it’s simply how the natural world works. Every biological system achieves a certain balance between the needs, stresses, and resources of its circumstances. Increased rainfall makes the river run faster and wider, and the plants grow new leaves and bloom. Decrease the rainfall, and the plants curl their leaves to preserve water.

As humans, we’re part of this very same world. Our bodies-minds-spirits will establish a balance based on our circumstances.

The Advantage of Conscious Choice

However, we have one key advantage over the rivers and plants—we have conscious choice.

Rather than accepting a point of balance based on our current circumstances, we can work to change the circumstances that influence it. We have the opportunity to intentionally nourish and strengthen our center to create a dynamic vitality. We get to actively, purposefully engage with our lives in ways that are more durable and that direct our equilibrium to support how we choose to live.

What is Healthy Balance?

What does healthy balance feel like in our real everyday lives? Of course, that answer will vary from one person to the next. Risk takers and thrill seekers might feel dissatisfied with what the quiet homebody feels quite content with. But we can still generalize some ideas about what balanced lives have:

Healthy Balance

- enough energy to live lives that make us happy,
- enough internal fire to follow our curiosity or go after our dreams,
- strength and resilience in the midst of life’s changes and challenges,
- ability to manage stress well, without depleting ourselves,
ability to manage time well, without the sense of rushing all the time,
a strong sense of self—who we are, what we believe, what we want,
ability to maintain strong personal protective boundaries.

Self-Reflective Exercise: What Healthy Balance Feels Like

How does healthy balance feel in your life?

First, write down three areas of your life that you balance well. These should be parts of your life that you feel good about how you are managing.

Then, list three areas of your life in which you feel out of balance.

Compare and contrast your two lists. What can you learn from one that you can apply to the other?

For example, I have great balance in many self-care arenas of my life, particularly when it comes to food, sleep, meditation, and movement. I have a structure I follow—a food plan that fits my needs, a sleep routine, a daily meditation practice, and scheduled opportunities for movement and exercise. I need these things, and I’ve found the right formula that takes care of me. But in my creative life as a writer, I get over focused, obsessive, and can have too many projects going at once, leading to overwhelm. The overwhelm is teaching me to moderate this part of my life, as I already have with the domains that I do well with. And like those other domains, I’ve learned I need a structure to follow—like working on just one project at a time, allowing rest periods, and accepting delays as a necessary part of my creative process. It’s all a work in progress.

Build Your Strong Center

We build a strong center to create balance—the dynamic equilibrium that supports us in everything. This balance is essential to heal and recover from chronic fatigue.

To build our strong center, we must:

• Find and connect to it.
• Protect it.
• Nourish it.
Find and Connect to Your Strong Center

Listen quietly, and you’ll sense your center.

Many of us have lost touch with our center. It often becomes lost as we shift our attention and allegiance to the “experts” in our families and culture, feeling they know more than we do. Or, we’re seduced by the false cultural promises of “easy,” “fast,” “simple,” or “certain.” We may have forgotten that we’re the captains of our ships.

Or we’ve suffered, and in our suffering, we’ve lost our awareness of it. But whether you’re aware of it or not, your center is there.

Let’s find it. Daily practice will solidify your knowledge about having a center, and help you begin a relationship with it that is tangible, accessible, and reliable. As you experience its location within you and learn to trust its strength and wisdom, your center becomes . . . you. Your core. Who you are. No longer just a place of refuge, you’ll learn to inhabit it and live your life from it … with strength and personal power.

Exercise: Find Your Center with Breath

Stand, bare feet on the ground, your feet approximately hip-distance apart. Squeeze your buttocks just a bit and tilt your pelvis forward while engaging your abdominal muscles. Open your chest, stick your heart out, and flip your hands so palms face forward. Let your arms dangle at your sides, shoulders back, allow your shoulder blades to slide down your back.

Breathe slowly and deeply in and out. Feel your breath expand within you with each inhale. Allow an audible sigh on the exhale. Stand tall. Place your hands over your midsection. Become aware of your core. Breathe in deeply here.

This is your center. Pause and memorize this image, this feeling, this emotion of this place inside you. This is your core. The place of strength and wisdom within you. This is you. See and feel it. Feel the comfort of it as you breathe deeply into it.

Pause here for as long as you like and continue to breathe deeply in and out of your core center.

Listen: Do you hear anything? Any whispers? Words? Messages? If you don’t hear anything this time, don’t worry. Introduce yourself to your center and be sure to come back soon!
Daily Practices for Strengthening Your Strong Center—Be Still, Feel, and Listen

_Breathe._

Allow your breath to navigate you straight to your center. Conscious breathing slows you down, diminishes distractions, and helps you feel and hear your center and its still quiet voice. Repeat the simple breath exercise we just did. Take a few deep, mindful breaths into your center throughout your day.

_Meditate._

Meditation does not have to be a prescribed esoteric practice, it does not require a guru (you are your own guru—it's your wise center), and it can be most anything that you simply do mindfully, quietly, and without distraction. Done reverently and with deep presence, doing the laundry and mowing the lawn are meditation practices.

Daily meditation is a beautiful and effective way to connect to your center and prepare you for engaging with what’s to come in your day in a more balanced way.

You might choose a moving meditation—a quiet walk in the woods, a yoga practice, or a mindfully executed workout in the gym. A quiet seated meditation is also suitable and allows for the deeper quiet and focus that many of us desire in our meditation, using a variety of techniques: breath work, mantras, affirmations, prayers, and visualization.

Choose a meditation style that suits you. Commit to it every day. Begin with baby steps. Three to five minutes first thing in the morning using a smart phone meditation app is a beautiful way to start. Gradually increase your time as you go. Use briefer versions of your meditation to help relieve stress of a difficult day—one or two breaths during a bathroom break will help you greatly. Your center will be grateful for the check-in.

_Laugh._

Cultivate humor in the face of challenge. It allows us to instantly diffuse the negative impact of stress within our bodies and minds. Laughter shakes our cores (literally), releases tension, and mobilizes resources we need to engage with our challenging situations. I love how author Anne Lamott describes laughter as “carbonated holiness.” Laughter is a sure indication that we don’t take ourselves too seriously and allows us to punch through negative aspects of stress, getting us closer to the transformation we need to move through difficult times.

Protect Your Strong Center

Once we’ve connected with and strengthened our center, we must also be prepared to protect it. It’s so easy to take some things for granted, especially ourselves—a key theme
we’ve explored before. There are so many things in our lives we work hard to protect that we can forget to protect ourselves!

How do we protect our center? Many of these are common themes we’ve talked about: self-love, simplifying and relieving distraction, and healing guilt and shame. We’ve also got to protect our center from powerlessness and burnout. Addressing these potent strength-sappers creates more room for risk taking and pursuing our passions.

Protect Your Center from Feeling Powerless: Trust Yourself

Being confronted with life challenges without a sense of control over the outcome leads to persistently high stress.

Case in point: my internship and residency in internal medicine were nightmarish at times, with nights on call, thirty-six-hour work shifts, and life and death situations to manage—sometimes alone. But what helped me was to frame it in the understanding that I made the conscious choice to be there. There was a larger goal and purpose for me in spite of the difficult conditions, and there were important ways in which I was supported through the process. It was still traumatizing at times, but I kept my sights on the higher purpose.

My own equilibrium swung from days of wondering why I was putting myself through this to days of amazing connections with grateful patients whom I was able to help and learn from. But through it all, my center was strong. It was my anchor. It gave me peace and direction every day. I had to move through that world, but it was my center that guided me.

Self-Reflection Exercise: Use the Strength of Your Core

Think of one of your own challenging situations. Then think about the strong center of your body.

How can you use your core to empower you in the midst of that situation? You don’t have to take control of the situation or walk away from it (unless that’s how your inner wisdom guides you). But can you find some aspect of your situation—a higher purpose, a goal, a hoped-for outcome that resonates with your core? That sustains and strengthens you?

Protect Your Center from Burnout, While Making Room for Passion and Grit

Burnout can occur when we’ve not adequately supported our center.

Passion, creativity, and genius (yes, we all have these!) all require energy and resources to sustain them. For instance, I get excited about a project I am working on, and then think about it all the time, use every available nook and cranny in my life to work on it. I am usually driven by passion and excitement. But I can suddenly feel tired, weak, and wimpy—burned-out. This is when I know I’ve gone too far, that I’ve fueled my passion without replenishing
my reserve of resources. But by listening to my center, I now read these signs from my body sooner. I recognize the imbalance before it goes too far. Sometimes the solution is rest, other times it’s to find a new strategy.

It helps to know our great accomplishments don’t have to be done alone. I recently heard an epic talk on the origin of burnout by Dr. Joan Borysenko, a widely acclaimed mind-body psychologist and researcher, in which she explored the roots of burnout and found it is often driven by a passionate sense of service to others. She recommended that we tap into “soul Universal energy” rather than our bodies’ more limited supply of “adrenal energy.” In other words, we need to know it’s not all up to us. We can trust the universe or our trusted champions for support, and take care to replenish the resources we utilize in our efforts. (We’ll get back to the adrenals in a bit.)

**Nourish Your Strong Center**

You’ve now become acquainted with your strong center. You know how to connect to it and protect it. But like all living things, it also needs to be nurtured and nourished to make it strong and resilient.

**Nourish Your Center by Creating Resilience through Self-Care**

That is what you’ve shown up here for. It’s everything you’re learning and practicing from these series of articles about healing from chronic fatigue. Self-care works by building resilience—the strength and resources we need to successfully face the many challenges of our lives.

You know what I’m talking about here, right?

**The nourishing fundamentals of our self-care:**

- Letting go of toxins, irritants and negative energy;
- Love and connection (with self-love first!);
- Building a strong center and becoming stress resilient;
- Taking time for the best sleep, rest, pause, and play;
- Movement, exercise, and good posture;
- Excellent food and energy nutrition designed for your unique needs;
- Learning to trust and harness the power of our minds;
- Learning to trust and understand the power of our emotions;
- Slowing down, showing up, paying attention, and practicing presence;
- Learning to leverage failure as our most valuable teachers.
Nourish Your Center by Literally Strengthening Your Core

One of the easiest, quickest, and most accessible ways to strengthen your center is to engage your physical core. This can be done by moving more in a vertical position (as simple as sitting less). That's right—**strengthen** your core. Engage it, squeeze it, lift it, hold it, and let it stabilize you.

Work with a pro: learn yoga or Pilates, or work with a good trainer at the gym. They all will train you to find, focus, and strengthen your core safely. Then use it throughout your life—move more, stand and sit well, walk with strength, hug more tightly. Stand tall, strong, and wise from your beautiful strong center.

Nourish Your Center by Creating Strong Personal Boundaries

Actively stand your ground and say “no,” when necessary. This amplifies the energy of your center.

How to Create Strong Personal Boundaries

- Say, “no” when you mean no.
- Check your assumptions about **what will happen** as a result of saying “no.”
- Be willing to stand alone (but tall and proud) if you feel like the only one saying “no.”
- Give up playing “nice.” Nice isn’t the truth, right? Nice can kill you.

Nourish Your Center by Creating Equanimity: Meet Linda

My client Linda has suffered crushing blows to her health, vitality, and sense of self over many years of illness from persistent Lyme disease and co-infections. She has spent months barely able to get out of bed due to fatigue and pain. But she is the fiercest warrior in the face of illness I have ever witnessed.

What does she do? Quite simply, she never gives up. She keeps the faith. She mobilizes her team of experts and supporters. If solutions aren’t apparent, she moves on to discover someone else who can help her. She asks her friends, neighbors, and fellow church members for help, which they gladly do. Perhaps most importantly, she wakes up every single day with a dogged determination to live her best life—even if that means spending the day in bed—and to find the meaning even on the darkest days. She would be the first one to say that in spite of her suffering her life is rich beyond measure. I bow to her.

Resilient people, like Linda, are able to thrive in the face of stress, challenge, catastrophe, or whatever life throws at them. They fall down. They experience devastation. But they don’t give up or let what happens to them define who they are. They are able to embrace the uncertainties of life and see setbacks or crises as opportunities. They are challenged by failure but remain undaunted—they don’t give up. They embrace change and know that it’s okay to release control.
Who are these flexible people who can maintain a balanced life even through the trials of stressful times and extraordinary situations while many of us struggle? What do they have?

Resilient people are the most successful at living and being happy because they have built a reserve of equanimity—the ability to stay calm in the face of stress and to engage with life’s challenges without becoming overwhelmed by them. They have a reservoir of personal skills, attributes, and practices that help them stay balanced when faced with a challenge. Equanimity is their antidote to the barrage of stressors that come at them constantly. Stress is just as much a part of their lives as it is for all of us, but their attitudes and practices in the face of stress support them and help them maintain a strong center.

Equanimity can be learned. It comes about from the practice of present-moment awareness that we explore within each of the domains of healing: awareness of ourselves, our bodies and their sensations, and what’s around us right now, in this moment. This simple presence—a focus on what’s in this moment right now, not the past or future, not our stories or other distractions—allows us to be fully available to the good things that are happening right now, in addition to the challenges and suffering. Presence allows us to access our strong center, keeping us in balance, and shifting us into a more positive perspective.

We can practice equanimity through presence by using all the exercises and practices we’ve discussed so far—mindful breathing, meditation, laughter—even while doing laundry, mowing the lawn, or cleaning the house. They all engage our awareness about what’s real, right here, right now.

Equanimity Exercise: Open to Strength

Think about a challenging or stressful experience in your life. Sink into it. Remember what it felt like. Can you feel your body responding to the mere memory of that stressful time or experience? Spend just thirty or so seconds immersing yourself in that memory to prepare you for a quick antidote.

Now, let’s create a posture that engages the strength of your core: stand up, place your feet hip-distance apart, and feel your feet against the earth. Once again, squeeze your buttocks just a bit, tuck your pelvis for stability, and let your arms fall to your sides. Feel your chest open as you flip your palms to face forward. Standing here in this pose, take three deep cleansing breaths. Breathe in slowly, filling your entire torso and chest with air, then breath out, letting it all go, perhaps sighing and making noise with that exhalation.

After your three breaths, turn your face to look skyward and raise your arms up into the air, creating a large V. Relax your shoulders, let your shoulder blades release down your back, relax your face, and hold this position. Engage your abdominal muscles to stabilize your core as you continue to hold this pose. Continue to breathe deeply as you look to the sky, arms wide overhead, core strong, heart open. Spend about a minute in this pose—open to receive, open to
Observe: What did you feel as you held this pose? Was there a shift from the stressful memory to something else? Perhaps calm, strength, confidence, fortification? Amy Cuddy, a psychologist who writes and speaks about the value of power poses, focuses on poses like this one in her book, Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges, and her famous TED Talk. After just a minute or two of holding a power pose, there is a profound physiological shift from stress and anxiety to stress resilience—with lower cortisol and higher testosterone levels. People who practice power poses report a stronger sense of strength within themselves. They enjoy increased confidence, greater calm, and deeper engagement with what is happening in the moment.

This is a simple pose that you can do anywhere quickly to shift the discomfort of stress or anxiety instantly through use of a positive, open posture into greater equanimity and control.

Challenge Your Strong Center

Of course, balance demands both equanimity and challenge. Challenging your center means inviting stress to become your wise teacher.

Whoa! Wait a minute. Say what? Invite stress? But I thought all this core strength and balance stuff was going to reduce my stress!

Indeed, it will, grasshopper. But it’s always the challenges of life that make us grow strong. Hear me out, please!

We must engage our center with challenge: we must have stress. That’s how our biology works.

Challenge trains every aspect of who we are to keep us alive and thriving.

Stress is Power

Stress, stripped of its emotional context, is how we power ourselves to engage that challenge. The dread and overwhelm that stress can cause are stories—they’re how we perceive stress. The stress itself, is a messenger and, simply put, is the biology of our center—it powers our life energy.

Yes, I’m trying to tell you that stress is good. In fact, stress is the genius of being human. Stress is all about the challenge we need to grow and learn and engage successfully with our lives.

And more to the point for those seeking chronic fatigue resolution, stress supports the energy
we must have to get up every day, to survive, and to be present for our lives—to slog through the muck, pursue our passions, and rise to our potential.

Now we must take a deep dive into stress—the ultimate challenge, feedback about how we’re doing, and foundational source of our life energy.

How to Power Your Strong Center to Create Life Energy—
The Brain-Thyroid-Adrenal-Mitochondria (BTAM) Energy Operating System

The stress response is what powers up your core. It’s how you create energy to face all of life’s challenges. Yes, the brain, thyroid, adrenals, mitochondria, stress hormones, and your feelings of stress are part of the way you make energy. Your stories about stress aside (we’ll deal with those later!), you’ve got to understand the Brain-Thyroid-Adrenal-Mitochondria (BTAM) energy operating system.

The core problem in chronic fatigue of any cause is a primary energy deficit resulting from dysfunction in some aspect of the BTAM energy operating system.

Primary Components of the Brain-Thyroid-Adrenal-Mitochondrial (BTAM) Operating System:

Brain:
This is literally the “brains” of the operation: the brain perceives our energy needs and orchestrates all the aspects of manufacturing and transporting energy throughout the body. Key components of the brain-energy axis are the hypothalamus and pituitary glands, where key hormones involved in energy production and transportation are regulated.

Thyroid gland:
This is the thermostat for energy regulation throughout the body. Makes thyroid hormones to regulate “work” or energy needs within all body cells.

Adrenal glands:
These provide critical hormonal energy regulators: cortisol (makes available carbon atom sources used as fuel to make energy), aldosterone (regulates circulation for energy substrate transportation throughout the body), and DHEA (protects the brain from potentially harmful effects of cortisol and participates in learning aspects of stress).
Mitochondria:

These are tiny subcellular organelles within most body cells that use carbon atoms and oxygen to manufacture chemical energy (ATP).

All aspects of this BTAM energy operating system must be functioning at full capacity to meet our energy needs optimally. This system is very complex with many moving parts, so there are innumerable ways things can go wrong.

What Happens to the BTAM Energy Operating System in Chronic Fatigue

We’re all familiar with how it feels to over exert, skip a meal, or skimp on sleep. We feel tired from the temporary energy debt but can recover when we get back on track.

In chronic fatigue the problem with the BTAM energy operating system is more complex—or it’s simple but has been going on too long—leading to more profound and persistent fatigue, and not enough energy to sustain basic body functions.

BTAM Operating System Damage=Energy Loss

When any aspect of our BTAM energy operating system has been damaged, we’re at risk for critical energy loss. Damage to the brain and its structures, the thyroid gland, adrenals, and mitochondria can occur as a result of trauma, infection, toxins, or widespread inflammation. All these conditions can be discovered and treated.

Dysfunction of the hypothalamus, pituitary, thyroid, or adrenals are easy to diagnose and can be treated with appropriate measures such as nutrients, hormone replacement, and removal of the damaging influences.

Mitochondrial dysfunction can be genetic, though more commonly it results from loss of essential mitochondrial nutrients and the systemic effects of mitochondrial poisons such as drugs, environmental toxins, infections, allergens, and inflammation. These conditions can likewise be readily diagnosed and treated. Persistent fatigue always raises the question of mitochondrial dysfunction.

To resolve problems with the BTAM energy operating system, work through the basics of self-care that we’re addressing in this article. For fatigue that persists beyond that, or if it feels like you’d like additional help, work with a health practitioner who is an expert in Functional Medicine. [link]

Common Symptoms of BTAM Energy Operating System Dysfunction:

The profound dysfunction of the BTAM energy operating system in CFS is directly responsible for all the most common symptoms experienced by CFS sufferers:
- Fatigue
- Muscle pain—short, contracted muscles don’t have enough energy to relax.
- Brain fog and cognitive dysfunction—the brain is highly energy dependent.
- Dizziness and orthostatic intolerance (POTS or postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome)—an entirely appropriate response of the cardiovascular system to try to shunt additional blood to vital organs in the face of an energy deficit.
- Sleep disturbance—normal sleep patterns require an energy-rich brain, and any form of sleep deprivation will cause energy depletion.
- Exercise or exertion intolerance—there is no energy reserve for more than survival-oriented functions.
- Mood disturbance—caused by the energy-depleted brain and the emotional response to illness.
- Irritable bowel symptoms—caused by the energy-depleted gut and/or underlying gut disturbance contributing to the energy debt.

How to Treat the Brain-Thyroid-Adrenal-Mitochondrial Energy Operating System Dysfunctions in Chronic Fatigue

The BTAM must be treated as an integrated system, not as discrete parts. Rarely will you find just thyroid or just adrenal or just mitochondrial dysfunction. Review this expert guide on how to treat chronic fatigue, work through the Nine Domains of Healing, and consult with an expert in Functional Medicine to diagnose and treat your unique constellation of dysfunctions.

Restore—Sleep Deeply

As we embrace the challenges of our lives and create our strong center, we must also rest. Sleep is powerful medicine and a magical, mysterious time that allows us to power down, repair, replenish, and renew, providing the deepest restoration of energy and wellbeing available to us.

Sleep is absolutely our boss. It can’t be hacked, passed over, substituted for, or shorted without devastating consequences. Good sleep is essential to chronic fatigue recovery and is often a key contributor to chronic fatigue.

How to Heal Chronic Fatigue with Beautiful Natural Sleep

Dive right into the essential sleep fundamentals here and the 13 beautiful natural sleep solutions for chronic fatigue here.
Move—Move, Balance, and Carry Yourself Well

We were born to move—to survive, to seek, to play, and to love. Established by our ancestors long ago, there is an exquisite genetic relationship between movement and our biology, our biology and function, our function and wellbeing.

*Movement is a primary driver of our ability to make energy.*

This central biology was calibrated to operate optimally at our ancestor’s level of activity—on the move constantly to meet their subsistence needs.

But our immediate survival no longer depends on such a hard-working life. Many of us hardly move at all. This relative lack of movement and strength contributes greatly to our experience of chronic fatigue and chronic illness through profound energy deficit and loss of core physiological function.

We need our bodies strong, stable, nimble, and ready to engage. And we must be in our bodies. For this we must learn to show up for them, unravel old entrenched habits and create new ones through how we move, balance, and carry ourselves well.

**BECOME A CONSCIOUS MOVER— GET HEALTHY AND FLOW**

“The obstacle is the path.”

—Zen proverb

Move More, Sit Less, Engage with Life

You don’t have to become an athlete to benefit hugely from movement. You don’t have to exercise at all. I’m not saying exercise is bad. In fact, it can be fantastic. But I want to make a clear distinction before we move on: *movement is not the same as exercise.*

Exercise is a subset of movement. It has value—we know that. It can be therapeutic, allowing us to work on strength and balance we’ve lost as a result of our sedentary lifestyles. Exercise can supplement daily activities and address injuries. And it can be fun. But it is never a substitute for the wide range of movements and behaviors that support us throughout our days.

The real challenge is not how to find time to go to the gym. The real challenge is to figure out how to move more in the course of our daily lives. This means how to give up sitting, how to
stand more, how to create new and innovative opportunities to move and experience a multitude of loads and sensations.

To begin, we build on what we know and have applied to other parts of our lives: to benefit from moving more and sitting less, we have to let go of our old stories:

*I can’t.*

*I don’t have time.*

*I’m not worthy (of attention to my own self-care).*

And let’s add a couple more that I hear all the time from my clients:

*It’s inconvenient.*

*It’s uncomfortable.*

What are these stories we tell ourselves really saying?

We’re spoiled! Come on—you know it’s true! Our comfortable and convenience-driven lives have made us wimpy and soft. The ease we seek decreases the challenge, the loading, and the good stress we need to strengthen and remodel our bodies, to make energy, and fortify our strong center. We know this is a huge issue. And we’ve all learned the ramifications of living physically easy lives: it leads to a world of hurt. As we’ve discussed, most of what ails us has come about as a result of our behavior.

So, what can we do?

First, Slow Down!

Slow down? Yes, we’ve talked about this before. So, we’re all experts at slow now, right? We all get the point, right? We have to go slow to observe, to feel, to *be*. And that’s what conscious moving and embodiment are all about. No short cuts. No hacks.

Then Move into Your Feet

That’s right, start with your feet. The feet you stand on the earth with. The feet that move you forward. The feet that keep you balanced. We need robust feet to stand tall and move strong. But our lifestyle of comfort and immobility has taken its toll on us. The shoes we wear with arch support, thick cushions, immobilizing structure, and even heels (yikes!), destabilize and make our feet (and us!) weak.

Feet, just like the rest of the body, need to be engaged to stay strong. Our feet are highly complex with many bones, joints, muscles and connective tissue. When we wear “supportive” footwear, we significantly immobilize them. This leads to loss of strength, mass, and function that impairs their ability to carry us around and keep us stable. The stresses and strains that evolve as we wear shoes lead to injuries. After those injuries we tend to coddle our feet even
more, which may feel better temporarily, but doesn’t give us sustainable solutions to our problems by addressing the underlying causes.

Likewise, many of us wear shoes with heels, placing further stress on our feet. No matter how high they are—though higher ones are certainly worse—heels alter our bodies’ alignment all the way up to the neck and head. Heels are terrible for our feet and exacerbate the full-body trauma created by our sitting lifestyle by forcing unnatural shapes. When our feet are not in close contact with the ground beneath us, (sorry, platform shoes don't solve the heel problem!), we lose the exquisite sensory information (like proprioception—how we neurologically know where we are in space) that keeps us steady and safe.

Working with your feet opens the doors to chronic fatigue resolution through the embodiment, self-awareness, strength, and stability we must have to move well and enough. And it will resolve a multitude of problems that may surprise you through creation of a more robust platform from which to move.

How to Enhance Your Energy by Waking Up Your Feet

Start the process of waking up your feet slowly, especially if you suffer from foot pain, or are unused to spending much time barefoot. Initially, spend just a few minutes at a time, standing and walking barefoot. Gradually work yourself up to spending most of your indoor, and perhaps some of your outdoor time, without shoes.

It took me many months to work up to freedom from wearing shoes—I’m at the point where I’m always barefoot inside my house. I also take my shoes off at work frequently and walk around my yard without shoes. I remain barefoot at the gym and wear minimalist athletic shoes for walks in the woods—no arch support or cushion, just a bit of rubber under the sole. Do I completely avoid heels? Mostly, but not completely. I love the look of them, though I hate anything over an inch or two. They’re not only uncomfortable for my feet, hips, and back, but they make me feel ungrounded—I always feel desperate to kick them off to feel like myself again.

So, ditch your shoes and wake up your feet! Do it slowly and mindfully. When barefoot, put your awareness into your feet. Spread your toes and stretch them against the floor. Consciously allow your feet to hold and balance you from all aspects—toes, front, back, and sides. Briefly stand on your tippy toes, then your heels. See what that feels like. Use your feet to pick up a tissue, small towel, or ball. Generate sensation by rolling the bottoms of your feet out on a tennis or lacrosse ball, massaging them gently.

Stand Well

We must stand well to prepare us for strong, stable, balanced movement. Standing well is a skill which takes instruction and practice, especially for adults whose bodies have lost the feel of optimal stability, strength, and functional body mechanics due to lack of movement and excessive sitting with poor posture. It’s not enough to simply stop sitting. When we attempt to stand after prolonged sitting, our standing posture tends to continue to reflect the
shape of sitting. The various bends (knees, hips, pelvis, shoulders, neck and head) persist, destabilizing the intended standing postures.

What should standing look like?

Start by standing in front of a full-length mirror so you can see your front and sides. Stand with feet pointed directly forward, hip-distance apart. Stand up straight. Drop your arms to your sides, palms facing forward.

Tuck your chin slightly and lift your heart up and out. Now, stick your butt out behind you. Then, squeeze your gluteal muscles (your butt) and tuck your pelvis underneath you without thrusting your legs forward. Feel the strength of your butt, legs, and abs. We want pelvis and spine in good alignment. Do all this while still maintaining heart out and shoulders back.

Now, feel your feet against the ground beneath you, strengthen your legs, engage your thighs, and lengthen the sides of your torso. Inflate your midback with each breath without changing your spinal alignment.

These cues place you into a variation of a standing pose in yoga, called Tadasana, or mountain pose. Deceptively, it’s one of the hardest poses in yoga because it asks us to stand correctly when our bodies are accustomed to sitting, followed by standing poorly in a partially sitting posture. This simple practice takes us out of our comfort zone. However, with enough practice it will reestablish the alignment and balance we are meant to have standing on our two feet.

Standing well is the base from which to move to other life “poses.” Standing is not naturally a static position. We were no more meant to stand all day than we were to sit. Standing initiates movement. From this basic standing form, we can shift from one leg to the other, take off into a walk, adjust our leg position, move from standing to sitting or squatting, and prepare for more complex and strenuous movements. Standing is home base. We always come back to it.

Sit Well

“No chairs make for short meetings.”

—Henry Ford

Sitting is our modern adaptation to a more comfortable lifestyle and more sedentary work. While prolonged sitting is one the most lethal of all our behaviors, it’s so entrenched in our culture that we can’t always avoid it. There are times we must sit.

So, we can learn to sit well. There is much we can do to optimize the sitting posture. As a physician-consultant, I must sit with my clients. This is the most comfortable, relaxed, and safe posture for the lengthy conversations we engage in. It is never ideal but I have found ways to mitigate some of the problems that can arise for both my clients and me, such as stiffness and fatigue.
First of all, I sit well: on a comfortable seat, squarely on my sit bones, back straight, arms comfortably at my sides, chin slightly tucked. I have a tendency to stick my chin and head forward while listening intently, which can lead to pain at the base of my neck later on. I try very hard to keep my neck in good alignment. If I forget, my sore neck will let me know!

Like all other postures, sitting well is not meant to be static. We need to vary the shape of our sitting posture. I like to fidget. I cross and uncross my legs, sit with legs even and straight ahead, move the placement of my seat around, move my arms around, shift my pelvis and head around. Of course, these movements are happening subtly and somewhat unconsciously. With practice and self-awareness I have become attuned to my alignment and need for movement and I make adjustments frequently, trying not to provide comic relief for my clients.

I also create times within lengthier consultations for us to open up our posture by standing up, taking a bathroom break, and moving around. I like to take a quick star fish pose with arms up overhead and head back. We then get up to move to another room for the physical exam and reconvene back to our seats when finished. Once my client has left, I take my shoes off and remain standing. I go to my next tasks and purposefully remain standing to counterbalance the effects of so much sitting.

The overarching goal with sitting is to not stay absolutely static, allowing for as many variations in the forces acting upon us as possible.

Outside of my consultation room, I can vary my sitting posture even more. I’ve recently begun to sit on the floor more, changing up my position frequently. This was really hard in the beginning because my body was no longer accustomed to the hard floor or my haunches! Initially I felt stiff and sore and could only tolerate positions for a short period of time. But like anything, with practice, I’m gradually becoming more nimble.

Balance Well

In the last section, we talked about inner balance coming from our strong center. That paradigm of balance is part and parcel of physical balance. In addition to moving more, varying our movements, and learning to align our bodies well as we sit, stand, and walk it’s also good to work on movements that challenge our stability. Feeling unstable begets emotions of vulnerability and not feeling safe in our own bodies—and we are less safe, at increased risk for falls, injuries, and bone fractures.

Try this: balance on one leg in a static position. Can you do it without holding on to something to steady yourself? If not, that’s your starting place. Stand next to a chair or wall. Lift up your leg and balance on the other. Hold the position for thirty seconds and gradually increase over time. Work toward balancing on one leg without holding on for support. Do both sides. Gradually increase your time. As you become proficient, try standing on something squishy, like a pillow or pad. Make it harder. Can you balance while looking up at the ceiling? Can you close your eyes?
What else challenges your balance? Some may feel greatly challenged by moving from walking on a flat sidewalk to a bumpy trail in the woods. Or squatting down to your haunches and getting back up without support. Or sitting on the floor, then rising to standing without using your hands as leverage to assist you. Being able to get up from a seated position on the ground to full standing without using support has actually been shown to correlate with overall health, functional status, and mortality.

Whatever that challenge is for you, walk into it. Embrace it. Your brain will love it. With practice, your balance—and power—will soar.

Looking for a great way to work on strength, alignment, balance, breath, and embodiment all in one practice? Try yoga. Yoga combines mindfully executed postures in a way that allows us to work on all aspects of conscious movement.

Moderate Exercise and High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)

While exercise cannot be a substitute for daily movement, it can be an important part of our lives—it can be fun, therapeutic, and social. I’m a huge fan! Moderate exercise (like walking thirty to sixty minutes) performed every day, and HIIT, frequent but short bursts of high intensity activity, several times weekly for just a few minutes has been shown to increase protection from oxidative stress, improve energy production, reduce inflammation, and increase all measures of strength, stability, and performance.

Not only do these activities make us healthier, they improve mood and psychology through favorable effects on hormones and neurochemistry and contribute to the power of embodiment.

How to Address Challenges

As you practice and develop your movements, they will all become easier. Your body will adapt to the new balance and you will find more flow with your movements. But no path worth walking is entirely smooth. There will be challenges. Here’s how to address the big ones.

Change It Up

In the course of our daily lives, it is ideal to use our whole body, varying our activities to challenge and mobilize us in different ways. The idea is not to do the same thing over and over again. Like I found out the hard way, only running lends itself to creating imbalances in other parts of the body, increasing vulnerability to injury.

It is ideal to work on as many movement parameters as possible over the course of time. We might stand, sit, lift, and squat in the course of our daily chores. We might cross-train at the gym and do yoga. We might take walks in the woods, go up and down hills, and step (or leap) over fallen trees. The variability in our daily activities will eventually use our whole bodies, strengthening, supporting, and maintaining our adaptability, and keeping things interesting.
for us.

Build a Team

It’s easy to feel lost and alone when starting something new or when going through a setback due to injury. It’s also more difficult to keep going when you feel you’re the only one doing it. So don’t be alone!

I’m a huge fan of working with a team of people who support you in your efforts to move. It takes a village to unwind decades of sitting, immobility, bad habits, and injuries, and to finesse new skills and challenges. Your team may simply start with a workout or walking buddy or a yoga or fitness class. You then build it into what you think you need.

Because of a multitude of injuries, my own team is quite substantial and has consisted of many experts coming and going over the years—chiropractors, massage therapists, physical therapists, surgeons (hope you can avoid that one!), trainers, yoga teachers, workout buddies, and podcast creators (for listening to on long hikes).

And because progress is a life journey that calls us to step up, have grit, and recover from the discouragement of setbacks, our team includes those who give us solace and support us emotionally—our friends, partners, children, and dogs!

If the professional team concept is new to you, start with bodywork. A skilled massage therapist and chiropractor will support your efforts to release old, negative patterns from the body as you step into your new life of embodiment and increased movement.

Move with Joy

If we don’t enjoy the way we’re moving what’s the point? Our physiology responds to bad behavior as well as our negative emotions. If we hate what we’re doing, it’s not worth it, even if it’s “good for us.” Don’t do what you hate. That is not to say that there aren’t times when we have to suck it up a bit to do something hard or that pushes us to our limit, or when trying something new that takes us out of our comfort zone. But how do we feel afterward? How do we feel over time as we repeatedly show up for ourselves and as our strength, balance, and function improve?

Do what you enjoy, what you learn to enjoy, or what you believe in. Focus on the performance of your chosen activity and how you feel when you do it and when it’s done. Observe what happens to your level of function and wellbeing as your skill and proficiency improve over time.

Don’t make the mistake of focusing solely on biomarkers or measurements of improved health—like blood pressure, lipid levels, blood sugar, weight or waist measurement. While these measurements have meaning, they are not what sustains our actions. Joy is. So choose what makes you happy and keep at it.
Address Injuries

It’s important to realize that the vast majority of our musculoskeletal injuries are not problems with the body part per se, but rather problems with our behavior.

So, instead of blaming my hamstrings for the chronic pain I feel in them when I sit for prolonged periods of time, I must claim responsibility for my behavior that led to the chronic hamstring injuries in the first place.

The fix may well include therapeutic modalities directly to the hamstrings, but it must also include changing movement patterns. For me, this includes less sitting and more variation in movement.

For many problems, this may take a team of consultants to figure out. It will require persistence and work. It will always result in global improvements in strength and health not necessarily planned for, as you address the root cause.

**How to Move When You Are Persistently Ill, Fatigued, or Debilitated**

For some the idea of moving vigorously, or at all, feels overwhelming, and perhaps impossible. No problem. We can gain energy and function by varying our postures, or adding loads in novel ways, whether you can actively move much or not. Try these:

- Walk slowly and mindfully, in bare feet, to your tolerance level. Repeat throughout the day as you can.

- Shift your lying position as often as possible. Challenge yourself with positions you may not normally use, such as front lying, perhaps with upper body bent up, resting on elbows—a good position to read or write for short intervals.

- Try seated positions on the floor: cross-legged, side lying, with pillows, without pillows.

- Try novel or non-uniform surfaces to load and stimulate body parts in new and different ways. For example, roll the bottoms of your feet out on a tennis ball, or stand/rest your feet on a pebble mat or similar textured surface.

- Roll out all of your muscle groups on a foam roller.

- Receive bodywork: massage, chiropractic, physical therapy. These all introduce forces that help mobilize muscles, stimulate circulation, and improve cellular energy production.

In addition to actual movement, consider *imagining* yourself moving. By actively visualizing
movement, we induce neuroplastic changes in the brain (neuroplasticity is our brains’ potential to develop both structurally and functionally) that lead to enhanced physical mass, strength, and function. Athletes and musicians employ this technique to improve performance. It has also benefited people unable to move due to paralysis or neurodegenerative disorders. Actively imagining movement of the affected limb—or the entire body—leads to measurable improvements in strength and function.

Exercise: Move Your Body with Your Mind

If you are experiencing a period of enforced immobility, spend time imagining yourself performing the movement of your choice. What you imagine yourself doing will activate neuroplasticity by recruiting dormant movement-related parts of your brain, increasing blood flow to your brain, and strengthening your brain’s connections with the rest of your body.

Have a specific movement goal in mind, like hiking on your favorite trail in the woods. Be there. See yourself clearly in your mind, fully mobile and enjoying your hike. Hold onto that scene as if it is happening at this very moment and include as much detail as possible, engaging all of your senses. What are you wearing and how do those clothes feel on your body? Who are you with? Feel the breeze against your skin. Hear the leaves rustle and the birds singing. See the deer and squirrels. Smell the dirt and the flowers. Feel the uneven surface of the trail and the effort in your thighs as you climb those hills. How do you feel—what emotions are you experiencing?

Spend fifteen to twenty minutes twice daily with this active visualization practice. Include as many other scenarios as you would like to deeply activate your brain, support it as it forms new connections with the rest of your body, and improve your mobility.

The Key Is To Start—Somewhere, Anywhere

If you find yourself stuck and not knowing where to start or how to continue, I have a few recommendations for you.

Start With Three

Remember the power of three we talked about previously? A similar approach keeps your strategy simple (the brain prefers simplicity over multi-tasking) by starting with just three things, while engaging the power of your brain (it loves the number three) to make this whole movement thing happen successfully.

Utilizing the power of three may mean taking a big goal and breaking it into three parts to work on every day. It may also mean choosing three ways to add more movement to your
life. For instance: begin using a standing desk for part of your workday, spend more time each day in bare feet, and enlist the help of a friend to become your daily walking buddy.

Consider these movement starters:

- Keep your plan simple and nonthreatening. Choose something you are likely to succeed at to get yourself started.

- Buddy up—working out with a friend inspires accountability and makes it more fun.

- Reflect on your barriers to change—old stories keeping you from moving forward? Check out the “Discover” domain of healing. [link]

- Hire a fitness trainer or join a class with a professional leader—group fitness, yoga, dance, swimming or water aerobics, or other class of your choice.

- Commit to working with your trainer or group at least two days per week in the beginning. Put this on your calendar and make it nonnegotiable.

**Nourish—Eat for Vitality**

You knew we’d get to this, didn’t you? Yes, we literally are what we eat. The molecules we eat become us, for better or worse. Our food turns on and off our genes to make us exactly who we are. To fuel our energy and support all function.

If the food you eat does not support your unique needs for energy and function, you will feel it. You may be a world of hurt. You may feel exhausted. It may be the primary reason you feel the way you do.

**Food is a Powerful Point of Control**

*Good news:* We all get to choose at this powerful control point of our biology. We get to choose every bit of food we place in our mouths. We just need to learn how.

Food is a foundational, nonnegotiable part of the journey to energy recovery and healing. I’ll share powerful stories of healing through food, and suggest a compelling, science-based, and thoroughly street-tested roadmap for your energy nutritional healing.

Our goal for resolving chronic fatigue is to flood your body with high quality energy nutrition while removing all food irritants that may be key roadblocks to your healing.
How to Treat Chronic Fatigue with Energy Nutrition

Dive into the fundamentals of energy nutrition in my article, How to Treat Chronic Fatigue with Energy Nutrition.

The Foundational Intensive Nutrition Energy (FINE) Food Plan

This is the foundational energy nutrition food plan I teach to clients for deep energy restoration.

Beyond Energy Nutrition— Heal Autoimmunity and Chronic Fatigue with Food

Autoimmune disorders and chronic fatigue go hand and hand. The following is my foundational food plan that focuses on healing the gut, restoring normal immunity, and provides intensive energy nutrition.

The Gut-Immune Restoration Intensive Nutrition (GRIN) Food Plan

The Gut-Immune Restoration Intensive Nutrition (GRIN) food plan is designed to help heal those whose chronic fatigue is part of a chronic inflammatory or autoimmune condition and take their healing to a deeper level.

The GRIN food plan is an extension of the [Foundational Intensive Nutrition Energy (FINE) food plan], going a bit further by excluding additional food groups that are common irritants to the gut lining (thereby increasing intestinal permeability—see discussion below), as well as triggers for inflammation and toxicity.

GRIN provides foundational gut-immune-nutritional healing that leads to improvement in biological energy, with resolution of chronic fatigue and the constellation of problems arising from the energy deficit.

Who Needs to Follow the GRIN Food Plan?

This plan should be considered for anyone with persistent gut or inflammatory-autoimmune disorders who do not achieve optimal healing with the FINE Food Plan. Chronic autoimmune disorders that respond beautifully to GRIN are: rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, Hashimoto’s thyroiditis, celiac disease, multiple sclerosis, inflammatory bowel disease, ankylosing...
spondylitis, as well as others.

The GRIN food plan may also be appropriate for people with chronic disease or dysfunction without an obvious inflammatory component who fail to recover with less aggressive approaches. Often inflammation is covert, without a readily recognized presentation, but may still be a factor. I see this in my practice frequently with people who have fatigue, chronic mood or cognitive dysfunction, or difficulty losing weight. They don’t have sore joints or other signs of overt irritation in their bodies, but we know that inflammation can be a “hidden” player in these issues that respond well to gut-healing, anti-inflammatory approaches to healing.

How the GRIN Food Plan Works: Restoration of Normal Gut Permeability and Immune Function

A central theme to chronic inflammatory and autoimmune disorders is impairment of the gut lining that leads to increased gut permeability (“leaky gut”). This problem inevitably leads to an increase in immune cell responsiveness to food and gut microbes. It also leads to increased transfer of gut-derived or ingested toxins out of the gut and into the systemic circulation, engendering additional immune activation and inflammation.

A normal gut, some thirty feet long from mouth to anus, and the surface area of ten tennis courts, provides us with a very tightly controlled interface between the inside and outside worlds. As you can imagine, just as our skin is a crucial barrier for keeping the outside world out, the gut lining is designed to protect us from all potential threats, while at the same time selectively allowing in nutrients the body needs.

As vast as the gut interface is, the body must contribute more than seventy percent of its immune cells to stand guard along its borders. If the barrier is breached, there is an instantaneous response by immune cells. That response is quite complex and involves a direct attack to the offender as well as chemical signaling to other immune cells throughout the body, inviting them to participate in the protective response. This rapidly becomes a full-body process, amplifying protection as well as potentially spreading havoc from the gut to tissues throughout the body, as far away as the brain.

The gut lining damage that is a foundational part of systemic inflammatory-autoimmune disorders arises from many potential stressors and irritants to the gut. The susceptibility to injury varies from one person to the next. Common offenders are:

- anti-inflammatory drugs such as Ibuprofen, Aleve, aspirin, and steroids
- antibiotics
- alcohol
- acid-blocking drugs (like proton pump inhibitors and H2 blockers)
- heavy metals (from environmental contamination, contaminated food, dental mercury amalgams)
• infections (bacteria, parasites, fungi, viruses)
• food proteins
• excessive exercise
• excesses of stress
• persistent insomnia or suboptimal sleep
• nutrient deficiencies and nutrient-poor diets
• microbiome imbalances

Current scientific thinking is that a key aspect of initiating and perpetuating chronic inflammatory and autoimmune disorders is activation of the immune response when the normal gut barrier is compromised. Exposure of the immune cells that line the gut to ingested food components and toxins results in immune activation that begins and sustains the process. To heal chronic inflammatory and autoimmune disorders we must heal the gut by:

• repairing the gut lining through targeted nutrition and removal of toxins and irritants,
• restoring normal gut permeability,
• restoring normal digestion and absorption of nutrients,
• restoring the microbiome, and
• decreasing immune system responsiveness through food modulation and intensive targeted nutrition.

This comprehensive gut healing effort, when combined with other approaches to reduce physical stress and restore immune balance, will lead to improvement and sustainable resolution of symptoms at a root cause level. The process involves many steps. Food is where we start.

GRIN Is Not Meant to Be a Lifelong Plan

The GRIN food plan is designed to heal your gut, remove the common triggers for inflammation, intensify nutrition, and reverse systemic symptoms related to gut-immune dysfunction and nutrient deficiencies. GRIN is not meant to be a lifelong eating strategy. The vast majority of people use this plan to heal, then are able to successfully reintroduce food groups into their diet without a recurrence of symptoms.

When working with clients one-on-one, I make personalized recommendations depending on how sick they’ve been and what their preferences are. It can be very helpful to have the support and experienced guidance from a Functional Medicine practitioner or functional nutrition professional. However, many people successfully navigate this journey on their own.
The GRIN Food Plan Details

The foundation for the GRIN food plan is [FINE]. We will be modifying that plan by excluding additional food groups that act as irritants to the gut and immune system.

Recall the Foods to Exclude in **FINE**:

- All grains and grain-based products;
- All animal milk products;
- All processed, synthetic foods, preservatives, and additives;
- Unhealthy meats;
- Excesses of sugar;
- Artificial and non-nutritive sweeteners;
- Unhealthy fats.

Recall the Foods to Include in **FINE**:

- Healthy meat choices, eggs, and fish;
- Non-starchy vegetables;
- Low sugar content fruit;
- Nuts and seeds;
- Bone broth;
- Spices, condiments, food supplements;
- Healthy fats
- Beans and legumes;
- Teas;
- Fermented foods;
- Fluids;
- Smoothies;
- Appropriate nutritional supplements.

Additional Foods to Avoid on Your GRIN Food Plan

Follow all guidelines for foods to avoid listed under the FINE food plan. [link]

In addition, you will need to exclude the following foods and food groups: (But, remember, this food plan is not about deprivation—though it may feel like that right now—it’s about substitution. Eat as much as you like, just of the good stuff.)
Eggs: Proteins contained in both the whites and yolks of eggs are common immunological triggers, commonly seen in the setting of impaired gut permeability. Avoid using eggs and all egg-containing products.

Beans and Legumes: This includes all beans, legumes (such as lentils and other dals), and dried peas. These contain abundant lectins on their surfaces, defense molecules that are known to trigger immune cells, resulting in inflammation and gut lining injury.

Nightshades: Nightshades are sources of alkaloids, plant defense molecules that can injure the gut lining. Avoid all white potatoes, tomatoes and tomato products, eggplants, sweet bell peppers (all colors), hot peppers, cayenne pepper, goji berries, paprika, pimentos, tomatillos and some curry powders (check ingredients!). Ashwagandha, an herb commonly contained in adrenal support formulas, is also a nightshade, so look at your supplements carefully.

Note: sweet potatoes and yams are fine to eat.

Nuts: Avoid all nuts and nut-derived oils. This includes almonds, walnuts, cashews, pecans, Brazil nuts, pine nuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios, along with all nut oils, flours, butters, and milks.

Alcohol: Alcohol is always a gut lining irritant and detoxification challenge in spite of evidence that it is health promoting when consumed in moderation. Avoid all alcohol in beverages as well as cooking during this initial intense phase of the food plan. Moderate alcohol consumption may be added later for many individuals.

Seeds: Seeds contain protease inhibitors, enzyme inhibitors which may contribute to maldigestion and gut lining irritation. In my experience, seeds seldom result in true food sensitivity, and can be eaten in quantities small enough that the protease inhibitors they contain should not create a problem. I generally allow them in the GRIN food plan, but recommend removing them if sufficient healing and symptomatic progress is not made otherwise.

Most Protein Supplements: The only commercially available protein supplements allowed during this intensive phase of your GRIN food plan are gelatin and collagen derived from grass-fed beef, hemp seed, and other seed-derived proteins (if allowed). I like the hydrolyzed collagen from Great Lakes. It is odorless, tasteless, and performs extremely well, dissolving completely in any liquid at any temperature. It can be added to veggie smoothies, soups, stews, bone broth, and all liquids you wish to consume.

GRIN Strategy and Reintroduction of Foods

As I said, GRIN is not meant to be a lifelong food plan. We want to put the fire of inflammation out and heal the gut. We want to build tolerance to foods and create resilience. Once healed, many people are able to put food groups back into their diet without recurrence of symptoms. Following are some simple guidelines for food reintroduction.

Strictly adhere to the GRIN food plan guidelines for at least three months. Your body needs
this time to remove immunological debris, heal damaged tissue, restore normal gut permeability, reestablish a healthy gut flora, and decrease the overall responsiveness to culprit foods.

Keep a detailed daily log of food and symptoms.

If your symptoms are not resolved by three months, keep going with the strict GRIN food plan and consult with a Functional Medicine professional.

If your symptoms have resolved, choose the foods you would like to reintroduce first—do not plan to reintroduce gluten or animal milk products initially, or other foods you know for certain have caused you significant problems in the past.

Start with just one food at a time:

- Have one healthy serving (one-half to one cup) of a pure form of the food you are reintroducing, for example one half cup of almonds or one cup of a nightshade vegetable.
- Do not eat more of your chosen foods (or other foods on your forbidden list) for three days as you carefully observe for symptoms that may be related to the introduced food.
- If you feel well, try it a second time, and this time eat one serving per day for a week, while not introducing any other foods you’ve been avoiding on GRIN. This will allow you to discover if your sensitivity to this food occurs gradually with repeated exposures. If all goes well, feel free to add this particular food back to your diet, but don’t eat it every day (increases the risk of re-sensitizing to it). Instead plan to include it on a rotational basis every three to four days.
- If a food makes you feel unwell at any time during this process, stop eating it and strictly exclude it from your diet.

Once you’ve finished exploring your first food, move on to a second in the same careful fashion. If you go too fast, you may end up with symptoms and not know which food caused them, necessitating going back to strict GRIN eating and starting this process over.

Discover—Realize Your Mind’s Infinite Potential

Change the Stories that Get You Stuck

Great. You’ve come so far! The pieces of your savvy, personal self-care plan crafted so
brilliantly just for you—by you—are coming together.

But, wait... many of us have been here before. How come we can’t make our genius plans work? Why, with all our sophistication about what we need to do to recover our energy, can’t we make it work? Why can’t we heal?

The answers are right here—in our very own minds. And the stories they tell. The stories we believe and let get in our way. The stories that get us stuck. Hang on, please, you’re in for a ride!

Stories Have Helped Us Survive

Our minds are our greatest tools and advisors but understanding them is never simple. Our brains were designed to keep us alive by telling stories. Our stories have great power—they can strengthen us, or they can stop us soundly in our tracks.

We must honor the stories of our lives and how they may have served us at one time and helped us survive. But it’s time to scrutinize our stories for their value and truth as we step into our power and potential. We must release the toxic stories that hold us back.

We’re entering the realm of the human mind—of neural networks and neuroplasticity—the biology of stories—and the promise of our brains to change to create new, intentional, powerful healing stories. Stories that get us unstuck. Leading us to? You guessed it—energy, potential, healing.

“The” Truth is Really “Our” Truth

Stories and their lessons can save us in times of danger. Most of the time, however, we aren’t in any real danger. But we still make rapid, unconscious assessments about what’s going on that serve as the foundation for our beliefs and understanding. We do this all the time.

Many of our assessments are laser sharp and spot on. But jumping to conclusions can be wildly problematic under the more ordinary circumstances of our lives.

We often forget that our stories reflect our own uniquely biased interpretations of the facts rather than the facts themselves. Our stories represent only a singular view (our own) of what’s happening.

We’re all familiar with the well-known observation that groups of people looking at the very same set of circumstances (a crime, for instance), tell vastly different accounts of what happened. The details of their stories were determined by the unique lenses through which they saw the facts.

We draw conclusions about our subjective understanding of what the facts mean. We create stories, calling them “understanding,” or “the truth,” or “how it is.” But there is danger in holding on too tightly to what we think we know for sure.
Our Stories Are Assumptions About the Facts

We are often lured into believing that our stories *are* the facts themselves. But, really, our stories are assumptions *about* the facts—assumptions that may be incomplete, or not at all true. And in limiting ourselves to these assumptions, we lock in the story, not leaving room for something better to emerge.

Our Life Stories Are Not Fixed

We’re never trapped by our stories, the “truth,” or “the way things are.”

Understand that this is not a choice to see things through rose-colored glasses. It’s a conscious choice to reframe the facts as we know them and to allow that we don’t have *all* the facts. It’s the perspective shift of a mature mind.

“I am stuck,” “I don’t have time,” or “I am hopeless” are all stories we tell ourselves when we’ve run out of creative solutions to our problems. But they are not the truth, are they? At least not the whole truth. Each of these can be reimagined to become:

- “I may feel stuck right now, but I’ll regroup and find someone to help me,” or
- “If I let go of time-wasters, I will have time for what I care about,” or
- “I feel hopeless at this moment, but this will pass as I affirm my infinite potential to heal.”

We do not have to be limited, defined, or maligned by our stories. While we are powerfully influenced by them, we are not our beliefs or our stories. They are *constructs* of our brains. We create them, but they are not *us*. And this is our ultimate point of control over our lives and our potential to claim our energy and healing.

Stories on the Brain: Neural Networks and Neuroplasticity

Our stories have a biology. In the body we call stories *neural networks*—brain pathways that integrate all our experiences, learning, and beliefs.

Our brains and their neural networks change from moment to moment. The biological energy behind this change is called *neuroplasticity*. This process operates constantly to shape structure and function. It is influenced by our thoughts, memories, intentions, actions, and condition of our health.

Given the right circumstances (say, a healthy body, and loving, positive, hopeful outlook), neuroplasticity is the promise of how our brains can change to serve and support our best lives. This is how we change our stories.
Universal Example of Neuroplasticity: Learning to Walk

A universal example of neuroplasticity is how we learn to walk by ourselves as small children, with no prior experience. No one really teaches us to walk. We yearn for the motion that will transport us toward what we are curious about. We struggle and experiment and fail, but we don’t give up. Our practice leads to the development of the neural networks of locomotion.

Our brains change as the circuitry for strength, balance, coordination, and muscle memory grows and expands. We gradually, miraculously, master this complex skill. The energy of neuroplasticity lays down the neural networks to support the growth and precision of our new skill.

We Create Our Stories—And We Can Change Them

We create and guide the development of stories in the same way that we learn a physical skill, like walking. Through the genius of neuroplasticity, what we learn, remember, imagine, decide, and do, all converge to create and strengthen our stories. Like walking, with enough practice, our stories become our reality.

What We Practice is What We Become (and Believe)

If our tendency is to ruminate about all the bad things that have happened to us, we’re practicing a negative way of being.

We strengthen the neural networks that perceive our life stories through a negative lens (self-condemnation, disempowerment, being a victim, for example). Our brains will operate according to these “facts.” We will persist in seeing our lives this way (“the way it is”), and all new experiences will be seen through this lens, reinforcing the old stories and limiting our ability to change.

Neuroplasticity is also what gives us the ability to change our stories—not the facts, but our stories about those facts.

If we practice perceiving our life stories through a positive lens (brave, scrappy, hopeful), our brains enter this data into our neural networks, and we see the world more brightly. We add new experiences to our stories that reinforce the positive, and we realize there are no limits to what we can do.

We Can Choose Better Stories

In other words, we can consciously choose to create new, more positive life stories—by harnessing the energy of neuroplasticity through our intentions and actions. The new neural networks of our creation will compete for space in our brains, growing and strengthening as we practice.

The take-home? Our brains and our bodies quite literally change as a direct result of our thoughts, intentions, and actions. Our potential function evolves by how we practice. We can
apply this power to any aspect of our lives we want to change. By actively choosing and defining our stories and the lens through which we choose to see the world, we can change our physical being.

Five Common Stories that Slam the Brakes on Healing Every Time

- The Story of Our Power
- The Story of Our Worth
- The Story of How We Belong
- The Story of Fear About Uncertainty and Change
- The Story of Not Having Enough Time

The Story of Our Power

“*I am the expert on me.*”

We have lost the idea that we can heal ourselves. We turn to others who know more than we do, who have more experience than we do, who do this “for a living.” But none of them knows us better than we know ourselves. None of them has more experience in being us than we do.

Our healthcare professionals are certainly skilled and valued. I honor them all. But, none of them are an expert on *me*. They practice for the masses. They have to. And if in times of acute crisis I need their help, I turn to them gratefully.

But the world is changing. As we know, most of our illnesses are now chronic. The very real need for fast short-term treatments that drove the development of modern acute-care medicine through the last century is no longer what most of us need. But we still turn to the principles and players of acute care every day. We turn to the experts. We look for the single cure. But if we don’t find it, we’re out of luck. Who do we turn to then? Who’s the expert?

In the past, before the voices of those many experts drowned out our own, we *knew* who to turn to—*ourselves*. We *knew* what we needed and *knew* how to heal. Our own inner wisdom guided us through all but the most acute and catastrophic of illnesses.

None of us are immune to our culture, to the stories that tell us “how things are.” But in the modern world, many of the most destructive stories lead us to believe that forces beyond ourselves and out of our control are in charge of our health and healing.

As a physician with nearly three decades of experience, working with clients with complex chronic illnesses (for which chronic fatigue is the common denominator), often referred from the universities who don’t know what to do with these folks, I don’t believe any of these
myths. Not only are they untrue, they sit squarely in the way of healing. Only by claiming our power and agency over our own lives can we capture the healing and energy recovery we seek.

The Story of Our Worth

“I deserve and must have my reverent attention and care.”

Stories of judgment, condemnation, blame, or of not being enough are things we’ve learned from our tribe or soaked up from our culture. We have adopted them as our own, but they’re not ours. And they’re never true. Not ever.

And these stories of judgment, condemnation, and blame slam the door on our healing every time:

- Who am I to make my needs a top priority?
- Who am I to ask for help ... yet again ... when everyone else has said there’s nothing wrong?
- Being chronically ill makes me less valuable to my family, friends, and tribe.

Know this: We’re born worthy. Inherently complete, lovable, and whole, just as we are. We don’t need to be “fixed,” or given permission from someone else. Sick as we may be, exhausted as we are, we are worthy of the very best care and resources for healing. And further, the world needs us to heal.

Our inherent worth is here, right inside us, having just gotten lost and fallen out of sight. Buried beneath fatigue and overwhelm or drowned out by the noise of our dominant stories about our unworthiness that we practice over and over and over. We’ve strengthened the neural networks of shame, while the intrinsic knowledge of our deepest inner wisdom—wisdom that we are whole and holy—is beyond our ears to hear. We must reclaim this wisdom to heal and find our true potential.

Permission Slip: Permission to Be Your Whole True Self

*We begin here: Permission.*

Permission to acknowledge our worthiness and wholeness. Permission to unwind the mind pathways of shame and strengthen those of love and self-acceptance.

Write yourself this permission slip (or your own version) and read it out loud when you’re done. I have many such permission slips written on sticky notes that I carry around with me.

Dear [your name here],

The Story of How We Belong

“I stand tall and strong and courageous in my personal health choices.”

We’re genetically wired to belong to our families, tribes, and communities. Strong communal ties kept our ancestors alive when being left behind or ostracized meant certain death.

For most of us, the reality of our modern world is that our survival is not so fragile. Whether we live on the edge or in more comfortable surroundings, our evolutionary experience has shaped the development of our brains so feeling safe and secure is strongly tied to the bonds of our births, allegiances, shared beliefs, and ways of living.

Beyond survival, we find comfort belonging to the friends who share pizza and beer together on Friday nights. We gain strength belonging to the work community who collaborate, share stories by the water cooler, and burn the midnight oil together. We grow along with our bad-assed comrades pounding it out at the gym. We cherish belonging to the families who love one another through food or seal their ties through shared beliefs and behaviors. It feels good. It feels comfortable. It feels safe.

Our deepest inner beingness thrives through these connections.

But this healing life we’ve chosen asks us to make new choices.

We must change the things that need to be changed.

We may choose not to eat pizza or drink beer. We may choose to create a more balanced life of work and play and self-care. We may make choices that go against the grain of our pack.

But to claim healthier choices in the face of what our friends, co-workers, and family are doing can seem radical, challenging those relationships, inspiring scrutiny and criticism, breaking seemingly vital bonds.

However good and imperative our choices may be, we may feel lonely and scared as we bravely take a stand for our own healing.

But while these feelings are normal, they’re not our whole story: we are also strong and brave.

Beyond the choices we make and the outcomes we expect, we still wonder: what happens when we become well? How does our vibrant new energy, happiness, or ideal body weight effect our relationships? Will our friends and family support us and cheer us on? Or will we
get backlash from their misplaced jealousy, anger, or their own feelings of abandonment?

This is one of the tests of our healing life: To whom do we belong?

How do we survive when our path to healing challenges us to stand apart from the crowd? How do we quiet their voices so we can hear our own? How do we make choices and take actions that are best for us but make us stand out or leave us behind?

The end to our suffering means courageously embracing our true authentic selves. To live a healing life we are called to belong to ourselves. We must use that strong center we’ve worked so hard to find, connect to, and nourish. We must shine a bright light on our lives and use our own minds and hearts to decide what’s best for our healing.

Brave souls called to belong to themselves soon learn: Loneliness is temporary and not fatal. The backlash of others is not personal. Our anxiety is just energy. The rewards are eternal.

Remember what happens when we care for ourselves first?

Yes, we’re stronger, wiser, more resilient, and vibrant. We live and lead through the radiance of our healing lives. We pave the road for others.

And we soon realize there’s a reward we may not have expected: we’re surrounded by companions living their own healing lives. We take this journey both alone and with the strength, nourishment, and companionship of others.

While we may let go of those who no longer support us, we’re joined by new travelers in this healing life. This can be hard, but it’s the only true life. It’s the only life in which we can claim the healing and potential that are ours.

Exercise: Expedition to the Terrain of our True Authentic Selves

What if you could practice the call to belong to yourself? To prepare for those times when the way is unclear or when the road gets treacherous? To stand up to the scrutiny of your critics?

We’ve practiced this before: we slip into our strong center. This is the strong center we know well, that we’ve already claimed as our own. It’s the space of belonging to ourselves. Everything we’ve learned to do to support it makes us strong and brave in the face of life’s challenges.

Let’s drop into our strong center now. Place your hands over your midsection. Take a few slow deep breaths into your core. Ah, yes, this is me. This is us. This is our strength.

Say this: I can stand alone here. I can weather any storm, any journey, any challenge from this place of strength. In choosing to be here, I belong. I belong to
myself. I belong to my tribe of companions on this healing journey. I choose what’s best for me without distraction or interference. I trust my strength and wisdom to fortify me as I become more and more my whole, true, authentic self. As I steadily rise into my true potential, I trust my light, which I radiate all around me. This is the light that allows my travel companions to find me, and for me to see them. In being true to myself—belonging to myself—I am never truly alone.

The Story of Fear about Uncertainty about Change

“My potential for growth, healing, and successful change are infinite.”

All efforts to heal require change, and that means an unknown outcome. Always.

We see our problem—we’re not where we want to be yet. We know what we aspire to (energy recovery, getting our lives back). We know what we want to change (starting with our life stories). We know there is a roadmap (the Nine Domains of Healing) that will guide us. And we know there is a community that will be with us to support us and share our journey. We know that others (many others) have succeeded at doing this.

But change still scares us. It’s been said that all change begets mourning. Change is a loss. We have to give something up, abandon our old familiar ways, whether they serve us well or not. No matter how bad something is, it’s ours, it’s comfortable, it’s the way things have been. We know it. We can count on it. We’ve built our life around it. We know how to survive with it. And maybe all our energy has gone into surviving by keeping things the same.

To change, we are challenged to learn something new. To change, we may be called upon to do something hard. To change, we must step up to an unknown outcome—we might fail.

In his book The Discoverers, Daniel Boorstein writes a different story about change: “The most promising words ever written on the maps of human knowledge are terra incognita, unknown territory.”

What he’s saying is that moving into the unknown is the only thing that releases us, giving us the promise of untapped potential. It’s our freedom. It’s how we change our story to find our energy and healing.

It’s important to remember that change is not only what we can do now, it’s what we’ve been doing since the day we were born. Just as healing and love are parts of us, so too is succeeding at change. When you learned to walk—wow, what a change. What amazing new potential!

Our fear-of-change stories often operate on a subconscious level, making them more destructive because we often aren’t aware that they’re sabotaging our efforts to create positive change. But if we follow the fear to that story, if we can unpack it and see it for what it is—the product of our imagination and assumptions—we open up the opportunity to create a better story. A story that supports our healing.
What Our Fear-of-Change Stories Look Like

Think about some ways in which fear can get in the way of healing. Think of some ways fear might make you question the decision to focus on your health. Here are some that I’ve heard from my clients:

- What will be required of me if I feel really good? Will I have to go back to that job I hate?

- How will feeling well change my relationships? Will my loved ones still take care of me? Will they still love me?

- How will succeeding at feeling well change me? I’m afraid of who I will become.

- If I am strong and healthy, will others feel jealous of me? Will I still belong?

- If I am strong and healthy, I will be amazing and powerful. That scares me.

Are you squirming yet? These commonly held unconscious stories can be the most difficult because they expose areas of our lives where we feel profoundly vulnerable. At the root of these stories are assumptions about our physical and emotional safety and survival. About our place within our tribes, our families. About our worth and lovability. About our personal power and creativity.

But all these fearful stories can be rewritten:

- What will be required of me if I feel really good? What new exciting opportunities will show up that I haven’t even thought of yet?

- How will feeling well change my relationships? How much richer will they be when I have this extra energy to put into them?

- How will succeeding at feeling well change me? When I build on this success, what other tasks can I take on and succeed at?

- If I am strong and healthy, I can be a role model for those I love.

- If I am strong and healthy, I will be amazing and powerful. That excites me.

Our minds and brains are amazing in the ways they innately step in to protect us from danger and deep suffering. However, to heal, we must transform our fearful stories with gentle self-awareness and loving softening. The smallest shifts can open the doors to hope, love, and infinite potential.
The Story of Not Having Enough Time

“I always have time for what I care about.”

We’ve talked about the distractions that sap our time, leading us to the false conclusion that we don’t have enough of it. We discussed simple ways to create more time by letting go of the barrage of distractions and disruptions we often allow into our lives.

We also use “having no time” as an excuse for not taking the steps we need to create change. What’s with that?

It all ties back to what we’ve just discussed—disempowerment, unworthiness, belonging, and fear of uncertainty.

“I have no time” is often our euphemism for “I’m scared.”

No more. We can’t use that excuse anymore. We may consciously choose to put off the change we need. It may be all too much right now. Often times those baby steps are best. But no way are we going to lie to ourselves. We now know those untrue stories dismantle our power and our futures. To heal, we must become truth warriors. No excuses. No lies.

And beware of pretending not to suffer by numbing ourselves into oblivion—this saps all our time.

To make conscious choices about our healing, we must stand strong in our centers—whole, true, authentic, worthy. In this way we create time. We always have time, and we revere and amplify it by ditching distractions and excuses.

Is There a Tenacious Story Standing in the Way of Your Healing?

How do we know what’s stalled our healing? How do we know if our “reality” is a story that’s not supporting us? What do we look out for? This is not easy. Our minds can be tricky.

Remember all the dangerous stories that we’ve discussed in this section. For some of us, getting unstuck is a matter of finding the resources and support that we need but haven’t had thus far. New information, education, or ideas may be just what we need to jumpstart a new phase to our healing. We may revitalize a stuck healing journey through a new perspective or direction of a new resource, mentor, or consultant. We can add new members to our team or call in the support of family and friends to help us.
But what if we’re stuck with a tenacious story and can’t see it? Here are some clues:

- You know precisely how to solve your problem but just can’t get it done.
- You feel stuck. “I’m stuck” is always a story.
- You’re afraid to commit to change you know you need. Fear is a story about an unknown future.
- You feel unlovable, undeserving, guilty, hopeless, or shameful. Always a story!
- You worry your loved ones won’t support your healing. Big assumptions. Big story.
- You’ve done it all but are still suffering. This is the most tenacious story of all. This is a story of fatigue, of suffering, of not seeing the way forward. I know you’ve worked hard and it’s been a long road, but I promise you haven’t done it all. There is always a path forward. There’s always space for change, for compassion and love, for progress.

Power Tools for Story Mining

If you feel stuck, scared, or unable to move forward with your healing, there is always a tenacious story getting in your way.

You need power tools to evaluate how your ideas about the “truth,” “the way things are,” or how you’re stuck may not serve you well. And how they can change.

These tools are perspective changers. They don’t change the facts, but they allow you to see the facts of your life through different lenses. These are lenses that let you cut through the muck, the bullshit, and the lies that cling to your truth—your real truth, the truth that will set you free.

- The lens of love.
- Life School point of view (POV).

The Lens of Love

When we understand our stories through a more positive and ennobling lens, everything changes. Love changes everything. It changes our brains, changes our genetic expression, and it changes our stories through a foundational perspective shift, not by conjuring new
facts. Through the power of neuroplasticity to change our neural networks, love changes our futures and opens up possibilities for growth and healing that are impossible in its absence.

Love is broad and unlimited. Love of our families. Love of nature. Love of the littlest things in a day. Most importantly, love of ourselves. We are worthy and deserve a loving life story. There is nothing more you need—not the approval of someone else, not the permission of someone else, not someone else’s story about us.

Each of us, in this moment, is filled with love. It’s who we are. It’s the lens we’ll use to retell our stories—the lens we’ll use to heal.

As we’ve discussed before, the reality is that many of us may be struggling or suffering in life and not able to feel love at this particular moment. Exhaustion and suffering make it hard to feel much of anything. But we can still practice. We can take small steps to build the neural networks of love. We can shift the overwhelmed, pessimistic thoughts to more hopeful ones.

The lens of love is now how I evaluate all my life stories. Through this lens I scrutinize how I see the facts of my life—do I keep love as my boss, or do I sink to blame, shame, and guilt? I remember that love always ennobles, never judges.

And through the lens of love, I evaluate my future stories and actions. Does this decision support love? Does this course of action serve love and connection, or does it serve fear? Those are the only questions you need answers to as you move forward on your journey.

Life School Point of View (POV)

The Life School POV is a powerful tool to remind us that all the events of our lives have made us exactly who we are today. The person we love and are satisfied with. Or the person who needs some work—but without the Life School POV would never realize this. Not that those events were somehow preordained, but they are all available to us to derive meaning and foster strength and wisdom.

Even the bad—traumatizing and painful—stuff has shaped us into who we are today. It’s led us to create resources to support us, to call in help and love that have amazed us when they arrived, and filled us with wisdom that has strengthened us for the rest of our lives.

The Life School POV doesn’t let us sink into the passive position of being the victim of our circumstances. We make sense out of it—we learn, we grow, we rise. We drop all blame and excuses. This life is ours, plain and simple. We claim full responsibility for all of it. There is no other path to sustainable healing.

Flow—Trust Your Emotional Wisdom
(Find Your Truth)

Here we explore the wisdom of our deepest, wisest selves—our emotional genius.

To heal, we must learn to honor our emotions, feelings, and sensations of our bodies as pure unadulterated feedback about the truth of us—who we are, what’s going on in our environments, the people around us, and the conditions of our lives.

Taught by our culture to cut ourselves off from our emotions in favor of our more rational minds (and stories), we may be entering unfamiliar and uncomfortable territory.

Yes, we’ll squirm, but we must step into our fear to claim the raw truth of our emotional wisdom.

**Emotions—the Flow of Life**

The flow of life. That’s why we’re all here. That’s what we aspire to: being strong, buoyant, present . . . ourselves.

Emotions are the current of this flow, the rhythm of our interior lives. Carried by primordial waves of energy, our feelings bring us the innate, intuitive, primal, noncognitive wisdom we must have to decode our lives, to grow, and to survive.

While often pleasing and exhilarating, our emotions can also confuse and befuddle us, scare and destabilize us. Our feelings—the ways we instinctively perceive and discern our world—are also what make life seem so hard!

*Pause*

Now, pause here. Breathe. Tap into your strong center. Breathe into your core and feel your strength. Be present right here, in your body. We’re entering territory that may feel treacherous. But we’re born to do this. We’ve come prepared.

Nothing exhilarates or challenges us quite like what we feel. But for the challenges, it’s not really our emotions themselves that throw us off. It’s the stories we tell about them that twist their true meaning. How we judge and condemn them, shut them down, and fail to understand their unadulterated truth.

It’s absolutely critical to our own emotional intelligence to understand that our emotions are not *us*. What throws us off balance and makes life seem so hard, is how we identify ourselves as our emotions (*I am* guilty, *I am* unlovable), rather than as the witness to them (*I feel* guilty, *I feel* unlovable). Only as the witness are we prepared to receive what we need to know.
Pause

In no other arena of our lives are we asked to be so brave in calling our power back. To step up to our feelings. To feel. Then let go of the tenacious stories that blame, belittle, and deny our true wisdom.

Yes, we feel. We know.

Breathe deeply. Trust your strong center, your anchor. Let’s explore what our emotions have to teach us. To do this we must be present within our bodies.

We Must Feel

We have to show up for this flow of life we aspire to. We want it. We crave it. But there’s a price. To really show up, we’ve got to go slow and pay attention.

And when we go slow and really pay attention, we feel.

No longer will the intensity and distraction of our fast-paced lives block us from feeling. This is our challenge, perhaps the greatest challenge of our lives: to allow ourselves to experience the full range of our emotions and learn to trust the wisdom and intelligence they deliver.

“But I do feel,” you say.

You’re probably like so many of us—yes, we do feel, but we’ve learned to control and restrict our feelings, choosing only what’s pleasing and comfortable, not scary.

After all, why would we want to feel bad or scared?

With Joy Comes Pain

But the problem is that we can’t choose one without the other. When we shove down pain, we also lose joy. The best we can do is some lukewarm approximation of the true glory that is possible. Our emotional censorship invariably comes with that price.

But by showing up, going slow, and paying attention, we get it all: truly feeling. The suffering that is our genius, that brings the truth, that leads to mind-blowing transformation. The joy that lifts us up and lights the world.

Feeling will inevitably take us into discomfort we’d rather avoid.

Feeling will make us squirm, will make us suffer, will ask us to face up to difficult truths.

But feeling is the only path to deep learning and discovery of ourselves. It’s the only path to growth. It’s the only path to the grace and magic of our humanness. It’s our connection to the people and world around us.
We must have our emotional genius to be in the true flow of our lives.

Isabella’s Emotional Healing

Isabella is a fellow physician with a busy practice. When she first came to see me, she was suffering from severe fatigue, migraine headaches, and achy, stiff muscles. She was also intensely irritable and intermittently resentful and angry. At thirty-three years old, she considered herself happily married, and was the mother of two smart, active children. She found it challenging to manage her busy life.

Her emotional symptoms seemed to escalate every month just before her period started. Each month, as she passed the midpoint of her menstrual cycle, she would feel the dreaded tension build, reaching a crescendo a few days prior to her period onset, when she would feel intense frustration, time pressure, and rage toward what she admitted were little things.

She was exhausted, achy, and anxious. She felt disabled by her physical symptoms and bewildered by her powerful emotions.

As Isabella told me her story, she sobbed. She felt helpless to the power of her emotions, ashamed for how she felt, and completely out of control. She described herself as “a monster” for a week out of every month. While she never acted out her anger in abusive ways, she believed that her deeply troubling emotions were something wrong with her. How could she possibly feel such anger and frustration when her life was so blessed? She felt like a failure for having them. Eventually, these feelings would subside, and she would tuck her concerns away until the next month when they would arise again.

As we explored her story, many contributing elements came to light.

First of all, she was sleep deprived. She was frequently awakened by her children, and she was always the one to get up with them in the night. She routinely went to bed late, after the household chores were completed, and got up early to get herself and kids ready for the day. She picked them up from school in the afternoon, helped with homework, drove them to their activities, got supper ready for the family, then managed baths, story time, and tucking them into bed.

Her husband came home from work around six, enjoyed supper and family time, then retreated to his study before going to bed. Essentially Isabella took care of the family and household duties on her own, in addition to working full time. In the telling of this story, her fury and resentment were palpable. Something had to give.

When I asked her if she had ever spoken to her husband about how she felt, she looked at me, stunned, and said no. She explained that she didn’t want to burden him after he worked hard all day. Isabella did not realize that it was not necessarily all up to her to take care of everyone and everything. Intellectually she felt like she was a modern woman who could partner with her husband to share the duties of taking care of the family and house. But once the kids came along she jumped in, without thinking it through, and took over the role of sole caretaker.

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Our priority was to deal with her unresolved anger and frustration about the division of labor within the household between herself and her husband. This was driving much of her distress and fueled her physical symptoms.

Because women tend to be more tuned in to their emotions during the second half of their menstrual cycle, it was no surprise that Isabella’s powerful emotions, that she otherwise tried to suppress, would come up each month to hit her between the eyes, warning her that her life was seriously out of balance. But she didn’t see that. She saw herself being a “monster.”

She literally internalized her anger. The physical stress of repressing these powerful emotions resulted in profound physical and emotional symptoms. For Isabella, anger and frustration were taboo when she had so many blessings in her life. Instead of listening to what her emotions had to say to her, she felt guilty for having them, worked hard to push them away, then shamed for the tsunami of rage that struck each month.

Isabella spoke with her husband about how she was feeling, and while he was surprised because it had never come up, he agreed to help out. He had assumed she wanted to take care of everything and went along with it, but admitted that he’d actually wished he could participate more in bath time and reading bedtime stories. She always jumped in and did it, and he was too frightened by her anger to question it.

So they divided up supper duty, bath time, and reading stories. He started doing more food prep and helping to clean up after supper. They hired a housekeeper to come in weekly to do the major household cleaning. She also cut back on her work hours a bit so she would have more time for the self-care she badly needed.

Isabella’s tension eased substantially. She had trouble letting go of her well-practiced tendency to jump in and control everything in her life, and still felt a ramping up of irritability at the end of her cycle, but it became much less intense as she became acquainted with the true messages her body was sending her through her emotions: that she needed to be less vigilant about everything, to claim better boundaries for herself, to ask for help, and leave room in her life for herself.

The Emotional Realm is Tricky—Truth, Intuitive Guidance, and the Intelligence of the Body

Enter the realm of the emotions. They’re wild. Spontaneous. Unpredictable. Forces to be reckoned with, they find their way into our consciousness in spite of our best efforts to shove them away, numb them out, or deny them.

Our emotions can be so scary! Why? They bring us the truth. Truth we may not want. Truth that may disrupt the comfortable status quo of our lives. Be warned—but also celebrate—that emotions represent the energy of our deepest wisdom.

We must become savvy about the common ways we manage discomfort about our emotional
truths: how we tame them, blame them, numb them, disconnect from them by playing “nice,” and polarize them into “good versus bad.” We must call back our truth, intuitive guidance, and intelligence of the body. Our power.

We Tame Emotions

We’re taught to tame our emotions from an early age. In our culture we downplay the value of our emotions in favor of the more factual, logical, and rational inputs of our minds. We fear emotions’ raw, wild, and untamed nature and how they might lead us to danger and destruction.

We fear their power and unpredictability. We fear the way they operate outside the bounds of our conscious control. We are trained to resist, control, and cast them off, but this leads to the loss of emotional intelligence.

We Blame Emotions

Emotional information is very pure, but our lack of emotional fluency makes them seem cryptic and difficult to understand. Because our logical brains don’t always trust our emotions, we scrutinize them with deep skepticism, interpreting their meaning through rules and rationality, and disbelieving them when they don’t tell us what we want to hear.

By filtering our emotions through our dominant intellects we lose the nuance of their raw data. We see them, instead, through our stories—engendering blame, judgment, fear, shame, guilt, mistrust, and confusion. We all know these stories: “It’s all my fault.” “It’s all your fault.” “I don’t belong.” “I’m a terrible person.” “I’m crazy.”

We Numb Emotions

We’re terrified to feel our “negative” (yet entirely normal) emotions. Fear, guilt, shame, anger, and jealousy are particularly scary.

We numb ourselves to them in the many creative ways we know all too well: perfectionism (we’re never enough), excessive work (idle hands are the devil’s playground), compulsive, pleasure-seeking behaviors (like shopping, gaming, social media, sex, television watching, gambling, and so forth), drugs (alcohol, stimulants, sedatives, opiates), or adrenaline-seeking behavior (going fast, creating drama, gossip, danger).

We’re Nice

On the other end of the spectrum, we become obsessed with experiencing only “positive” emotions. We do this through addiction to exhilaration, seeking experiences to engender connection, excitement, and bliss, even when we’re not genuinely feeling them.

Or we may only allow positive emotions, so we force them—we act “nice,” pretending things are good when they’re not.
This is not to say that we shouldn’t cultivate positive emotions, like love and gratitude, or act with kindness, empathy, and compassion toward others. We need strong neural networks for love, and our relationships, communities, and planet need more kindness and empathy.

But life and the world aren’t all good. We need to know and accept that. Our emotions bring us this essential wisdom from all our experiences, which we use to learn, and make discerning and wise choices.

Nice is distinct from kindness, compassion, and empathy. Nice is dangerous. Nice disguises our authenticity. Nice shuts us down and shuts others down. It keeps our relationships, interactions, and experiences superficial by closing the door to the truth we all desperately need. Truth that must be heard and will find its way in, one way or another—like the anger, resentment, jealousy that Isabella felt. We’ve all been there. We all know this.

We Polarize Emotions: Good versus Bad

Our discomfort with the subterranean energy of our emotions leads to polarizing them as “good versus bad.” But emotions themselves are value neutral, so these judgments only apply to the stories we tell about them. Many of these “good versus bad” stories are learned from our families and tribes. They’re born from anxiety about the intensity of the emotions, concern for our stability and survival, and fear about grappling honestly with what’s not working.

Some of these stories are about power. The family structures and social institutions we were born into are often built on outdated notions of power—their dogmatic, hierarchical foundations deny and disempower true feelings seen as threats to the status quo. In this way, many of our voices, experiences, and innate wisdom are crushed through the “good versus bad” story. That means we lose this precious resource that would help us understand ourselves better, grow wiser, and strengthen our social structures.

But That’s Not Us

None of this is us. None of this is what we aspire to. We’ve shown up here for a different experience.

We’re changing and going after our true potential.

We’re rising up.

We’re healing.

We’re stepping over those social and tribal ideas that stifle us.

We’re claiming our emotions as our own, as our birthright, as the wisdom within us.

We’re removing the value judgments and inviting it all.
No more nice. No more dishonesty. We’ve built a strong center. From this core we have the strength to reckon with all our emotional wisdom.

Permission Slip: Permission to Feel

“I am so blessed by so much in my life, but I feel miserable.”

“I’ve accomplished so much in my life, but I never feel like I’m enough.”

“Everyone loves him, but he makes me feel uncomfortable.”

“If I speak up about what I feel, I will be persecuted.”

“I am suffering, and feel I have no right to.”

“I am in pain, and for this I feel shame.”

So many feelings! Too many of these feelings we judge ourselves for and feel uncomfortable about, letting them drive us to complete distraction.

If we go slow, we will feel.

Going fast is often a strategy we use (often unconsciously) not to feel. For example: If I go fast, striving for more and more accomplishment and success, I may not realize that guilt and shame are what drive me. I know I’m never satisfied, but I just keep going. By going slow and paying attention to my feelings, I get close to them. I feel them. I feel the guilt and shame for not being enough. Feelings that are never sufficiently soothed by the hard work I do. When I slow down, I come face to face with the truth that drives me. To claim my freedom, I must reckon with these feelings. To reclaim my present-moment life I must slow down, stop working so hard, and feel.

See how that works? Once more, we’re called to action—to show up, go slow, and pay attention. We can passively live our emotional lives and never know who we are, or we can actively call our power back, feel our feelings, and step into sacred knowledge and freedom.

We start with permission to feel. Remember our permission slip from the last section? Let’s write another one:

Dear [your name here],

You have my full permission to be your whole, true self, with all your feelings. Every. Last. One. All your feelings are sacred, essential parts of you. Each one will tell you something you must know to help you heal, to help you become whole, to lead you to freedom.
Let your feelings be exactly what they are. Let them flow. Let the uncomfortable ones have their space. You must hear them all!

And remember, you are not your feelings. You are awareness. You are the simple presence that sees and feels. The witness. The compassionate observer. Breathe into this knowledge and slow it all down. Be in your body and breathe.

No shame. No guilt. No need to hide. Only love. Let those sacred feelings fly. Let them rise up and be your truth. Let us look at them in the light of day and find the beautiful truth of who you are. For whatever you feel, no matter how dark, lonely, or lost, you are also love. However you may be suffering, you are love. You have my permission to do this. And I will always be at your side. Protecting you. Cheering you on.

Love, Me.

The Intelligence of Negative Emotions—Navigating the Storm

“Not all storms come to disrupt your life. Some come to clear your path.”

– Rumi

Why are there emotions that make us squirm? What is it about them that feels so uncomfortable?

We have a strong attraction to negativity. Negative information, negative stories, and negative feelings take up a lot of space in our minds. This trait, known as the “negativity bias,” is a survival strategy of our brains. We glom on to thoughts, feelings, and experiences posing potential threats, allowing them to take priority space in our minds.

This negativity bias drives a physical stress response, flooding us with energy, anxiety, and discomfort to get our attention and mobilize us to action. It may keep us alive at times, but more often, the negative experiences crowd out the rest—the good and the beautiful. Our negative stories and uncomfortable feelings get way more credit for power and significance than they deserve.

Emotional Navigation: It’s All about Balance

But we need all our feelings. Good and bad. It’s not either/or, good versus bad, brave versus fearful, sad versus happy. No. It’s a mess. Our human mess. A mess that, if we’re present for it, is the beauty of our lives.

We’re living real lives. We’re challenged. We must be at the helm of our ship, with our hands
poised on our ship’s rudder, ready to change course as we heed the navigational intelligence of our emotions. Without all our emotions, we’re just drifting. We’re nowhere. We need our strong center to achieve balance. To be present. So let’s look at the big ones.

Anger, Rage, and Hate

The energy of anger is powerful. Whether our own or someone else’s, it feels unpredictable and dangerous. Where might it lead us? How might it destroy us? We throw anger under the bus, misconstruing it as “meanness,” “loss of control,” or “irrational.” We take the anger of others personally, whether it is directed at us or not.

But anger has a purpose. Anger is about fairness, justice, and where our boundaries have been breached. We must find ways to express this vital information and to receive it with the keen eye of a compassionate observer.

Repeatedly denying the message of anger by subjugating ourselves to the control of others, allowing unacceptable circumstances, or casting blame where it doesn’t belong, will take its toll. Suppressing anger will always lead to the amplification of its message, escalating to resentment, rage, hatred, explosive behavior, and physical symptoms—fatigue, depression, headaches, and insomnia.

Denying the truth our anger brings leads us to the toxicity of powerlessness and resentment toward others. Denying the truth of others’ anger closes the door on them and gets in the way of what we may need to learn about ourselves within those relationships.

Exercise: How Do We Reckon with Anger?

Own it. Know that anger is an entirely normal, necessary, and healthy human emotion. But receive anger as the messenger and don’t make it personal—no blame or shame.

Breathe. Tap into your strong center. Soften. Anger will rise up from your strong center to help you see the personal energy, perimeter, and fairness violations that inevitably happen in our everyday lives. Anger is always a call to reflection and action. It doesn’t have to be destructive.

Get into your body. Anger rises up from the root and core of the body with strong energy to mobilize us into action. Move your body—walk, run, do yoga, do chores. Get into a power pose—strong, receptive, open stance. Engage with anger in a positive and constructive way by allowing its energy to move rather than get stuck, escalate, or explode.

Affirm: I am safe. I create strong personal boundaries.

Consider: What does your anger have to say? What’s the message?
Fear

Fear, like anger, has been socially maligned and misinterpreted.

We’ve been taught to think feeling scared means we are “weak” or “wimpy.” We polarize fear from bravery, thinking we must contain one or the other, rather than both. As a result, fear makes us feel vulnerable, unsafe, inadequate, and easily overwhelmed.

We work hard to hide our fear, depleting our energy, and making our lives feel unsafe.

Fear is often a constructive response to real danger, which we should heed for our safety. It is an innate response to change, feeling uncertain, and taking risks.

Fear can be tricky to work with because it comes with the discomfort of stress hormones that heighten our anxiety and trigger our innate impulse to fight or flee. This can muddle our perceptions about what we fear, making it difficult to discern the true message.

Exercise: How Do We Reckon with Fear?

Mark Twain once wrote, “Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”

So, in that spirit, first step up to fear. Recognize that fear is a call to action. Know that we can be both afraid and brave at the same time. We can be firmly in our strong center and still feel fear.

Breathe. Find your strong center. Breathe here. Feel the strength within you. Feel your courage.

Get into your body. Fear is a call to action but can also be overwhelming and befuddling. We must have a way to manage the intense stress, anxiety, and physical energy that can arrive with fear. Jump right into your body—walk, run, work out, do chores. Become completely engaged in your full-body movement and mental concentration on the task at hand.

Affirm: I am safe. I am strong. I am guided and protected.

Consider: Trust your inner wisdom and guidance. Fear is a teacher, guide, and energy source to power your actions. Ask your fear, “What do you have to teach me?”

Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame are the most toxic of emotions, particularly when allowed to persist. Still, in small doses guilt and shame may be valuable as internal signs that we’ve done wrong. They get our attention and guide us to take responsibility for our actions, to make amends, to say...
we’re sorry, and to help heal wounds we’ve caused. The challenge is in claiming our bad deeds, without sliding into the toxic cesspool of guilt and shame.

Persistent guilt and shame are self-condemning stories that sap our strength and stomp on our souls. They’re not our stories—we’ve learned them. We’ve learned how we’re to blame for how others have behaved. Or how we’re unworthy for not meeting others’ expectations. Guilt and shame weaken us in the face of the important work of our lives.

Exercise: How Do We Reckon with Guilt and Shame?

Breathe. Tap into your strong center. Breathe deeply here.

Get into your body. Engage your strong core. Stand straight. Shoulders back. Be in your strong core center. Move or hold your body from this place of strength.

Affirm: I am enough just as I am. I am strong.

Consider: How have you taken others’ actions or words personally? What assumptions have you made about yourself that aren’t true? What blame, judgment, or social/family “rules” have you unfairly imposed upon yourself? On others?

Know this with absolute certainty: You are enough just as you are. You are love and light. You were born worthy. Period. Nothing that ever happens is personal.

Jealousy

Jealousy. We all know the sting of it and have been smacked down by the shame of it, but it’s really a normal part of being humans who thrive on connection. It comes up in a flash, unbidden, and hits us between the eyes. At its worst, it shoots us straight into a primal, painful swamp of sadness and unworthiness.

We hear a lot about the extremes of jealousy, the leading cause of spousal homicides in the United States. Perpetrated by controlling, possessive people who fly into jealous rages, lacking the support or skill sets to find better ways to deal with their feelings of unworthiness.

But that’s not us. We’re not stalkers or bad people. Jealousy has a purpose. The entire human race is wired for jealousy as a mechanism for keeping us connected. That’s right, jealousy is about survival. It’s not a character flaw or something we must pay penance for. Jealousy does not mean we have low self-esteem, are mean spirited, or wish others harm for having what we don’t.

Jealousy is what we feel when faced with the threat of not belonging, of disconnection, of being left out, or of having our trust betrayed. It’s a warning sign that we’ve been abandoned or are at eminent risk of losing something or someone we value. Jealousy is born from our
deeply primal need to belong.

Exercise: How Do We Reckon with Jealousy?

Spend a few minutes tapping into a current or past situation in which you felt jealous. Sink into it. Ugh. Yes, a toxic swamp of confusing emotions. Consider these positive strategies for managing jealousy successfully:

Breathe into your strong center. Be there.

Then, get into your body. Blow out the strong energy of jealousy through intense full-body movement—a brisk walk, run, big chores, or a tough workout at the gym. Disconnect from your stories about it. Let it flow through.

Affirm: I belong. I belong to myself. I am my whole, true, authentic self.

Consider: What assumptions are you making? Do you have all the facts?

Check your self-judgment. You’re not a bad person for feeling jealous!

Claim full responsibility for your painful feelings and let their wisdom guide you to constructive change. Learn to celebrate the successes of your friends as well as your own.

And, suck it up! In the end, life is and always will be unfair. There will always be people who have the goods and the successes we wish we had. Who are better at something, more fortunate, born to more privilege, or are bigger, faster, richer, smarter, prettier than we are—always! Why limit yourself? Perhaps there’s a bigger, better ship waiting for you right around the corner. Life’s unfairness is a simple matter of how we choose to see it (our stories).

Despair and Hopelessness

It’s so easy to sink into despair and hopelessness when we’re suffering. Persistent fatigue, pain, and debilitating symptoms that go on and on are the conditions that make us vulnerable to losing hope, especially when we are unsupported in our journey.

The antidote to despair is hope. Hope is a decision. It’s a practice. It becomes our strength and resilience in the face of despair.

Exercise: How Do We Reckon with Despair and Hopelessness?

As always, first we breathe. We find our strong center. We sit right here in our strong center and breathe.
We get into our bodies. We walk in nature and receive her beauty and energy of the ground, sky, plants, and animals. We hand her our despair and hopelessness. We reach out to our most trusted friends and family, those who can hear us and hold the space (not judge or “fix”).

Affirm: Yes. This too shall pass.

Consider: As we breathe into our strong center, we recall that we can do this hard thing whether we believe in it or not. Then, maybe, just maybe, we make the decision to hope. We say “yes” to hope. Whether we believe it or not. Without clinging to a particular outcome, we say “yes.” And we persist. And in so doing, we open the gate to our path, and open ourselves to infinite possibilities.

Eight Strategies to Claim Your Emotional Genius

You’ve learned many strategies throughout this article for strengthening yourself in your pursuit of healing. Let’s draw from those now, integrating them to help you learn from this powerful source of wisdom.

Once again, you’re showing up, going slow, and paying attention.

You’re finding and inhabiting your strong center.

You’re employing your breath, your present-moment awareness, and being your own compassionate observer.

You’re claiming your power as the true leader of your own healing.

Claim Your Emotions as Your Inner Wisdom

Your emotions are your soul’s gift of knowledge and wisdom to you. No emotion is wasted. They are always pure and true and on your side.

Become Grounded and Embodied

This makes you sturdy as you get close to your emotions. They are physical sensations. The only way to know them in their pure form and observe them directly is to get into the body. Use movement as an antidote to anxiety or emotional intensity that makes you feel muddled.

Let Your Emotions Speak

Resist the temptation to dismiss, judge, or suppress your emotions. Hear them out. Establish a practice of daily reflection about your feelings through writing, meditation, or contemplation. Let your emotions flow. Let them have their voice. You must create space and get quiet to hear them.
Express Gratitude to Your Emotions

Your emotions bring you wisdom. You may not feel grateful. That’s okay. But honor this part of yourself regardless. This practice will shift you out of the limits imposed by stories and restricting mindsets and lets you get right up close to your emotions. By seeing them through a positive lens, the judging stories dissolve, and they seem less scary. Even the anger, grief, fear, and jealousy have something crucial to teach us and will lead us toward healing and wholeness.

Take Charge of Your Emotions

Breathe into them. Observe them. Don’t beat them into submission but see them flow from the perspective of the compassionate, neutral observer. Find the discipline to step back from them to give them space to live and breathe. To this end, resist your stories and judgments about them. Let the emotions speak for themselves. Know that your emotions do not own or define you.

Become Discerning about Your Stories

Many of our stories don’t ennoble or serve us. Move your body to shake them off and release intensity. Breathe into them. Find the stability and self-awareness to interrupt your stories, no matter how practiced they are. Resist buying into them. Soften. Is there a more ennobling story? If all your emotions are teachers, what are they trying to say? Looking at them through the lens of love or Life School POV, how do they support you?

Recall How the Emotions You Feel May Not Be Your Own

We are attuned to the energy all around us. The more sensitive among us will easily pick up the energy of others. Scrutinize the unexpected anxiety, irritability, or anger: Is it yours? Or someone else’s?

Take Solace in the Flow Aspect of Your Emotions

Your emotions will always move along, given the chance. I love to say: “This too shall pass” to reassure myself when in the presence of uncomfortable emotions. It’s always true.

A Critical Word About Healing Emotional Trauma

Our stories can be quite powerful. As we’ve learned, they are designed by our brains to protect us. It is important to honor this and work to safely and effectively release trauma from the body.

It’s important to acknowledge that the aftermath of trauma—the persistent stories, fear, and anxiety—has a purpose: to keep us alive. But this trauma can be healed. We can find our strength and learn we are safe again. Even the deepest of suffering can be healed and transformed into wisdom.
For those who have experienced deep emotional trauma and find that high anxiety and intense emotions get in the way of your self-practice, work with a psychotherapist trained in mind-body approaches. They can provide intensive support and guidance in this transformative process and help you learn to trust and feel safe in your body again.

Rise—Nourish Meaning, Purpose, Grace, and Awe (Be Present)

Finally, we rise. We recover our energy. We say goodbye to chronic fatigue.

We rise in small ways—with each intention, each decision, each step, each small victory, each celebration of ourselves and our commitment to our healing life.

And we rise big as our self-care opens space, fuels energy, and nudges (or catapults) us into our potential.

Because our energy, clarity, and practiced intention to ourselves, our bodies, this moment, and the beauty of the world all around us anchors us in present time.

How did we do this?

Remember? We showed up. We slowed way down. We paid attention. To ourselves. With great reverence. We learned that the only path to energy and healing is our full presence. This presence is our ultimate healing, and it reveals the path as well as the prize: the meaning, purpose, grace, and awe of our entire lives.

Grace—A Practice

Pause here. Breathe deeply.

Feel your Presence.

Say, “thank you,” opening yourself to the grace that is all around you.

Grace is all around us. We manifest it instantly through our gratitude for what we have and who we are right now. Gratitude opens the channel for grace to flow into our lives. It’s the divinity in our present-moment awareness that our wide-open eyes and hearts can take in and experience. The grace was always there.
Presence—the Path is the Prize

Meaning, purpose, grace, and awe are the beauty of our lives. Each begets and supports the other.

But the gateway to them all—revealing the path as well as the prize—is Presence.

I had eight domains for the first version of our healing roadmap, each representing the essential elements and practices that lead us to our destination.

Then I realized that our destination is also our path there. Presence is the central thread of all the domains of healing—of all our lives. Our success is in the showing up, going slow, and paying attention that allows us to access our healing.

Presence is the way. It’s how we rise. Presence is also our reward.

We know by now that Presence is not passive.

Presence isn’t about sitting still and waiting. Or hoping things will work out well.

Presence is the greatest challenge of our lives. It’s hard, but it rewards us. It takes courage, but it expands us. It leads us along our healing path. It’s our go-to tool for slowing down and letting go of toxins, irritants, distractions, and negative energy. It allows us to love and connect deeply to others. It shows us our strong center and strengthens us in the face of life’s challenges. It helps us to rest, sleep, and restore. Then to move with strength and stability. It guides us as we make food choices that nourish us and fuel our energy. And it holds the space for navigating our stories and realizing the infinite potential of our lives. Presence helps us hold on as we’re brave to feel, trusting the inner genius of our emotions.

Presence is our tool. Presence is our path. And Presence is our prize. It’s how we rise.

Bow to Failure

In any life worth living there is risk. And with risk comes failure. Failure is, in essence, when things don’t go as planned. It’s not personal.

Failure Deconstructed

When we fail, one of three things is usually true:

- There is something we need to learn.
- There is something else we need to do first.
What we planned is just not meant to be.

Notice how I list those three reasons for failure with no emotion attached to them. We need to learn something; we need to do something first; or it's not meant to be. Period. None of them say we’re bad people. None of them say we’re weak. None of them say anything at all about us.

Each is a specific instruction, a direction, a roadmap for what to do next. My husband failed in his first major research grant proposal because he needed to learn how to write an effective proposal. My son failed in writing his first machine-learning algorithm in graduate school because he needed to preprocess his data first. I failed in my first medical path because I needed to go in a different direction. None of these “failures” were about us as people. Just lessons to be learned. Not end points. We’ve all moved on. My husband has now received numerous grants. My son is creating new computer algorithms daily, and my medical path—well, it’s been mind-blowingly transformational! The only possible failure is in giving up.

In retrospect, I see that if I hadn’t failed at key points in my life, I wouldn’t be who I am or have what I have. Failure has saved my butt. All the rejections, abandonments, injuries, and setbacks were my teachers, without which I would not be who I am today. All Life School. All those “failures” morphed into profound lessons and understanding and have led to deeper freedom and happiness. And all of them have taught me that failure is just a matter of perception. They’re just stories. That’s right. In the end, failure is just a story.

Help! I’m Not Feeling Better: The “Three Tack Rule”

Okay, so all this sounds great and inspiring, but what if you’re working hard to recover your energy and not feeling any better? This happens. It’s important to not mistake “failure” for something not working out. You’re going to find that many of the things you try in order to heal don’t work for you. That may not mean that they aren’t good for you. It may mean that there is more to do.

One of my Functional Medicine mentors, Dr. Sidney Baker, speaks of what he calls the “three tack rule”: If you sit on three tacks, it hurts like hell and no amount of symptomatic treatment will make it feel better. If you take one tack away, or better yet two, you’ve taken care of two-thirds of the problem, but it still hurts like hell. It’s only when you remove that third remaining tack that the pain goes away. Still, removal of each successive tack was critical to resolving the whole problem. We often have to address many aspects of a complex problem before the suffering person feels relief or healing occurs. This doesn’t mean that each step in the process isn’t important. It just means that we are complex beings, and we must tend to the whole to make real progress. If you and your health team believe that what you are doing is important to your overall health and healing, hang in there. There is more to do before there is enough recovery for you to actually feel better. Keep the faith.

There are also times when the treatment plan is wrong for you. It is often impossible to know
this until you embark on the journey and make a commitment to a particular path. In medicine and healing we must commit to a path and learn some of our most profound lessons from what does not work, which provides crucial diagnostic feedback that leads us to the best path.

How do we manage this uncertainty? Remain aware of your body and your feelings. Check in with your team. Work together toward a meaningful change in direction and recommit.

As you keep the faith, ask yourself:

- Is there something else I need to learn?
- Is there something else I need to do first?
- Am I on the right path?

**Exercise: Failure Mining**

*Think about a spectacular failure. How do you feel about it now? Still feel that sting of shame, guilt, or sheepishness? Write this story down.*

*Now, tell a different story. A new, shiny, and ennobling story.*

*What did you learn from this adventure? How did it shed light on a situation that no longer worked for you? In spite of your dashed hopes or unrealized expectations, did it move you in a new and better direction?*

*If you still have not recovered from that failure, I want you to reframe it now. Explore it from the Life School POV and see it through the lens of love. Assume it happened to save you. To steer you in a better direction. To help you create a better life. Write that story in as much beautiful detail as you can. Then live that story—your true story.*

**Stand Proudly**

On April 23, 1910 in Paris, France, Theodore Roosevelt delivered one of the most widely quoted speeches of his career entitled, “Citizenship in a Republic.” He railed against a trend of cynics who looked down at people who were trying to make the world a better place.

Considering what you’re trying to accomplish in your life by reading this, in dealing with the inevitable setbacks, in dealing with the people around you who may not be as supportive as you’d like, I think Roosevelt’s words apply.

How we take care of ourselves is how we take care of our world. This precious gift of
life—ours, of those around us, or our planet—is in our care. Making ourselves better will make the world better. Be strong. Stay centered. And when you fall, stand proudly up, brush yourself off, think of this quote, and smile.

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasm, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.”

Heal

Now go celebrate you. Celebrate your commitment to your healing life. To your potential. To your deep, sustainable recovery from chronic fatigue. To your gorgeous new energy. Celebrate each and every step, no matter how small or humble, made in the spirit of your growth and healing. Know that I am with you—we’re all with you—as we take this journey together. The human journey. The journey of discovery, of enlightened failure, of presence. It is the journey toward the energy and potential we all seek. To heal ourselves, our lives, our world. I bow to you all.

Deprivation: How to Cope

Healing by definition means change. Change is how we grow and create new energy. It’s the path we seek to recover from chronic fatigue for life.

Changing how we eat—or changing anything—can seem daunting, but it’s doable when we get organized and break it up into manageable steps.

The hardest part for most of us is dealing with deprivation. We are attached to our food, our ways, our habits even if they hurt us.

I once challenged myself to giving up all sugar. I was already close, but I needed to kick my chocolate chip habit—yikes. My guilty pleasure, that got me through the “witching hour,” the first few moments of walking into my house after a long day at work, shaking off the intensity of the day, and stepping into the intensity of my household—dogs needing to be greeted, then walked and fed, dinner to get ready, expectations (real or imagined) of my family to tend to. I sought refuge in that bag of Ghirardelli semi-sweet chocolate chips that always, always sat on my pantry shelf. Its sole purpose to provide me with the solace and energy I needed to transition from the frying pan into the fire.
So, I gave them up. And my world turned upside down. Literally. What the hell?

Enter one of my yoga teachers with a simple meditation to manage the deprivation of letting go. She called it, “seeding the gap.” The gap where we feel left hanging, abandoned, desperate by our precious sacrifice. She taught me to “seed” that gap with a new intention. It goes like this:

Create the intention to make that small change. Step up into action. Feel the pain, the loss, the deprivation created by that small sacrifice, and the gap it creates in your experience. Then seed it with something new. An intention. A blessing. A gratitude. Repurpose the deprivation—deploy the energy of it to support your aspirations for yourselves. For me it was, “Thank you, Universe, for supporting my best health and wellbeing.” “Thank you for my perfect health.” “Thank you for my highest, wisest self.”

- List five reasons why you want to change the way you eat. What about you or your life do you want to change?

- Make a declarative statement—your decision—about changing the way you eat (remember: keep the statement positive and present tense):

- Where do you want to start? List the three actions you can take today to energize your decision to change the way you eat:

- Anticipating the deprivation, you may (and probably will) experience as you implement your changes, how will you “seed the gap?”

**Beyond Self-Care: How to Create Your Healing Team**

We were no more meant to heal alone than we were to live alone. Yes, we’re the experts on ourselves and the leaders of our healing, and there are countless ways we are called to step up for ourselves. But we’re communal beings. We must create a team of experts and supporters who can teach us, guide us, and enhance what we can do for ourselves. Working with folks who love us and share their wisdom with us will take our healing to a whole new level.

When I work with clients struggling with chronic fatigue and chronic complex illness, I take on a multi-dimensional role in their healing process. I am physician, partner, teacher, mentor, guide, and overseer. It’s my job to help them sort through what is often a dizzying array of details from their journey thus far. We create a cohesive story of their illness from which to make decisions and guide our path forward. I organize and try to make the complex simple. I keep my sights on the bigger picture (all the details, all the goals), while zooming in on the
priority elements of their journey to keep our focus on.

Another key part of my role is to help my clients identify other team members who have expertise they need: nutritionists, chiropractors, physical therapists, massage therapists, medical specialists, psychotherapists, acupuncturists, energy workers, and many others.

**Where Should You Start in Creating a Healing Team for Yourself?**

First, it is ideal to identify a healthcare practitioner who can work with you as your primary partner, helping you stay organized and constantly mindful of the larger picture and goals of your healing.

If you are seeking sustainable solutions for chronic fatigue or chronic complex illness this person should have expertise in Functional Medicine (FM) with an excellent track record for working with these problems. FM specialists will be able to navigate the complex systems biology of your illness and offer deep, personalized, root cause-level solutions leading to your recovery.

If you already have trusted members on your healthcare team, your FM partner should become a congenial, supportive new member of that existing team. You should fully expect all members of your team to work together to serve you.

Your team members may come and go as your needs change. You may need to fire practitioners who don’t work out. And you may need to add new team members to better address unmet needs.

Most importantly: You are the boss. You create this team. They work for you. You take from them what you need and what is of value for your healing journey. Expert as they may be in their niche, ultimately you are the expert on you and what you need.

And finally, expect excellence. Expect them to care about you. Expect them to create the time you need to have your needs fully addressed. Expect them to understand you as unique and not treat you the same as everyone else.

Remember? You are worthy. Now, go and **heal**.

**Resources**


Karyn Shanks MD. *How to Treat Chronic Fatigue for Life*. 2019.


Karyn Shanks MD. *How to Heal Chronic Fatigue with Beautiful Natural Sleep*. 2019.


The Institute for Functional Medicine. *Find a Practitioner*.  


Karyn Shanks MD. *Protein: A Primer*. 2018.


Karyn Shanks MD. *FINE and GRIN Food Plan Reinforcements*. 2018.


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Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of Liftoff, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.