

## A is for Attitude

**How you approach life is everything.** Try not to be discouraged, but encouraged. Each positive step you take is worth a celebration, and each step backward is a reason for contemplation. Look at the past as a journey, and the future as an adventure. If you can't do everything, do one thing, and be thrilled with it.

## B is for Bones

One of my favorite yoga exercises is for students to stand in their skeletons. I have them imagine their skeleton hanging from a hook just beneath the base of the skull, without the stress of gravity. The minute they envision this, they immediately relax in their bodies and stand up straight. Next, I have them imagine each set of bones and how they connect. I have them feel the weight of their arms, and then the lightness of their arms. I have them identify the line from shoulder to shoulder joint, and hip to hip joint, and then feel how their arms and legs dangle from these joints. Try it. You'll feel lighter and more mobile. Feel how each set of joints, when moved forward, back, or in rotation, lightens your entire body.

This exercise also helps to align things properly and improves your posture, forcing you to use your core muscles. When we allow the mind and our major muscle groups to run the show (as we typically do), we forget our neck, our back, and our hips. By standing in your skeleton and imagining what keeps you upright and moving, you begin to pay more attention to the body as a whole. Bones support you and help you move, they protect your vital organs, produce your blood cells, store and release fat, and store and release minerals.

So how do we keep our bones healthy? Easy. Eat more vegetables (every day), do strength training and weight-bearing exercises, consume enough protein each day (to calculate multiply your weight in pounds by 0.36), eat high-calcium foods, get plenty of vitamins D and K, add collagen to your diet (they call it bone broth for a reason), and maintain a stable, healthy weight.

## C is for Chocolate

Here's why. It has antioxidant properties, it can improve your focus, protect your skin from dehydration, supports a healthy heart and lowers blood pressure, it can boost your energy, it's full of great nutrients such as iron, zinc, and magnesium, benefits fetal growth in pregnant mothers, and... it's yummy.

Here are the do's, and the don'ts. Buy good chocolate, preferably dark chocolate, and limit your intake. (I like to buy one large bar and eat 2-3 little cubes at a time, taking 3-4 days to finish the bar.) Stay away from 'candy bars,' or cheaper chocolate that is full of other 'not-so-great things'.

A chocolate bar should contain cocoa (solids), cocoa butter, and sugar. With sugar being the last ingredient. If you must have milk chocolate, then it will also contain milk or a dairy product. Dark chocolate is better for you, and if the candy bar is of higher quality, the taste will be there.

Try chocolate in other forms. Look into chocolate for skin care (said to protect against sun damage), for massage (said to burn fat, firm, and moisturize), as medicine (said to alleviate fatigue and pain, prevent heart ailments, and treat snakebites), for meditation (look it up, it's a thing), or simply as a warm drink on a cold day. Whatever or however you choose to bring chocolate into your life, you can't go wrong.

## D is for Dancing

If you want to find joy on any given day, turn on some music and dance. It doesn't matter how, and it certainly doesn't matter what you look like. It doesn't matter for how long, and it doesn't matter what music you choose. If you have limited physical capabilities, dance in a chair. Dance alone or with your friends, partner, or kids. Dance with your grandmother, dance holding a baby, or dance with a ghost. Whatever and whenever there is never a bad time to dance.

When I was raising my child as a single parent, I used dancing in place of 'time out.' When I was exhausted from studying in college, I danced all night and then slept like a baby. When I worked in a nursing home, I danced with my Alzheimer's patients. When I visited my ailing aunt in the hospital, I did 'interpretative dances' at her bedside to keep her laughing. When I go camping I always bring a Bluetooth speaker to dance in the woods or on top of a mountain. I've danced in the water, on land, and in the air.

When you need to relieve stress, grieve, or feel better... dance.

It's good for your health and can be done anywhere, anyhow, with anyone, and at any age. Do it daily, or as often as you can, and do it without inhibition or restraint.

## **E is for Electrolytes**

Or, if you like, Exercise... but we all know that one. Electrolytes, however, are a key component of exercise and are often overlooked. Your cells use electrolytes to conduct electrical charges, which is how your muscles contract and move, and those same electrical charges help with chemical reactions.

The scientific definition is: A medium containing ions that are electrically conducting through the movement of those ions, but not conducting electrons.

In medicine, electrolytes are needed when a person has prolonged vomiting or diarrhea, and as a response to sweating due to strenuous athletic activity. When it comes to hydration you basically need to replenish water and electrolytes (such as sodium potassium, magnesium, and calcium). Water is good, but adding some sort of electrolytes to your hydration (particularly if you work out) is also very important. Note that this list does NOT include sugar. Stick to additives that are 100% sugar-free. Coconut water, some fruit juices such as watermelon, electrolyte-infused waters or tablets, and seltzer or mineral waters are all good sources.

Electrolytes help balance the amount of water in your body, your body's acid/base (pH) level, and help to move nutrients into your cells.

## **F is for Fascia**

These are the bands of connective tissue that surround our muscles and organs. Tightening of the fascia can be the cause of muscle pain and stiffness, as well as posture issues. One of the most common fascia treatments is called myofascial release, which is focused on manual pressure and stretching to loosen restricted movement and reduce pain.

Tight fascia can be a result of stress, a physical trauma (such as an injury or surgery), or the result of inactivity or poor posture. Many studies have found that massage, chiropractic manipulation, and similar manual therapies can help elevate pain, but preventative manipulation with regular massage, rollers, or stretching, can keep the fascia from tightening and causing pain in the first place. So why don't more people do these things? The answer is pain. If you've ever used a roller on your muscles after a good work out you know what I mean. There's that saying, 'no pain, no gain,' but when it comes to fascia release, it's more like, 'no pain, means chronic pain.' If you work the large muscles without releasing the fascia, the inflammation can cause tight joints, tears in the muscles, shin splints,

plantar fasciitis, fibromyalgia, and the list goes on. Prevent these problems by learning about myofascial release techniques, and start incorporating them into your weekly routine. If rollers aren't your thing, do yoga or regular stretching, and most importantly - keep moving!

## G is for Ginger

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is a flowering plant whose rhizome (root) is widely used as a spice and in teas. It is a herbaceous perennial and has yellow flowers. Ginger is in the family Zingiberaceae, which also includes turmeric (another favorite) and cardamon. It is said to reduce inflammation, prevent cell damage, treat nausea, ease menstrual pains, regulate blood sugar and help with weight loss, treat indigestion, increase concentration and focus, boost the immune system, ward off cancer, reduce muscle pain, and it's good for your teeth. While ginger is very safe, it is best not to consume more than one gram a day.

There are many ways to get ginger into your diet, such as:

- Adding finely chopped fresh ginger or powdered ginger to curries or stir-fries
- Mixing it into your smoothie
- Making candied or pickled ginger
- Using it in cookies, cakes, or pastries
- Taking ginger capsules

## H is for Happiness

Personally, I am not a big fan of this word —just saying it sounds like a puppy jumping up and down— but it is a word for something we all strive for in life, whether we realize it or not. When we're young everyone assumes we must be kept happy, or we'll cry, have a tantrum, or get in trouble. This is why we throw our children parties, give them gifts and candy, make their rooms cheerful, take them on fun adventures, read them fairytales, etc. Therefore, as children, we learn that being happy gives us a good feeling and self-confidence. Whereas a lack of happiness at an early age often leads to diffidence and self-loathing. I am not a therapist or an authority on human nature so I'll stop there, but I can tell you that if you are feeling frustrated, angry, or disappointed in yourself, it most likely means you are not happy. I can also tell you that nothing on this planet, other than yourself, can make you happy. **You are your only source of happiness**, and anything or anyone else is an excuse for your **refusal to work on your happiness**. If you complain about work, your partner (or ex-partner), your love life, your children, your health, the government, the traffic, the weather, etc., it means you are not happy about something, and it also means none of those people or things are the reason. You are the reason. It all has to do with "A," or Attitude. Go back and re-read the first paragraph of this list. Your answer to happiness is there.

## I is for Ice

Cold therapy is also known as cryotherapy. It works by reducing blood flow to a particular area, which can significantly reduce inflammation and swelling. It also reduces nerve activity, which can relieve pain. It's also great for skincare. It can eliminate puffiness, especially around the eyes, reduce oiliness and ease acne, soothe sunburn, reduce swelling and inflammation from rashes and insect bites, reduce signs of aging, and boost the skin's healthy glow. When applying ice to a sore spot, use a bag of frozen peas or corn, which allows the ice to curve around your knee, shoulder, etc. Try keeping an eye gel mask in your freezer. Keep a small, smooth stone in the refrigerator and use it to apply serums or masks.

I also find it's great for keeping drinks cold and ice skating.

## J is for Joints

I am referring to those wonderful connectors between our bones. Joints hold our bones together and are flexible enough to allow the bones to move. Some joints have other structures inside the joint cavity, such as cartilage discs (like the meniscus in the knee joint). Other joints, like the hip, have a special shape and completely surround the top of the thigh bone. Joints between our bones are nature's protection against gravity. Remember, we walk upright and are considered bipedal animals, meaning we walk on two legs. This is why the knee and hip joints are reinforced, but the longer we're on earth the more gravity presses on us. If we don't take care of them, our joints can start to break down leading to inflammation, pain, stiffness, and deformity.

Joint changes will eventually affect all of us, but there are some simple ways to prevent the breakdown. The simplest solution is to maintain a healthy weight because being overweight puts extra strain on the weight-bearing joints, such as your knees, ankles, hips, and back. Humans love to talk about fountains of youth, aka, easy solutions. The reality is, we have the answers to longevity and long-term youthfulness at our fingertips. We just have to do the work. If you have pain in any of your joints, try doing the following for a year, and see if things improve:

- Work with your doctor or a dietician to get down to a healthy weight for your age and height
- Do strength training weekly to keep your bones strong
- Try to do a minimum of 5,000-10,000 steps a day (if your doctor allows), and add stretching (like yoga) at least once or twice a week
- Stand up straight and be mindful of your posture
- Drink plenty of water and add those electrolytes
- Avoid salt and fatty foods
- Add non-inflammatory foods to your diet, and season with ginger, basil, turmeric, curry, and garlic
- Avoid alcohol
- Consider CBD or cannabis (one of the best anti-inflammatories available, is non-habit forming and naturally absorbed by the body —avoid THC if you don't want the head high)
- And, if you smoke cigarettes.... quit

## K is for Kissing

With Valentine's Day right around the corner, love is big business. Love —another hefty word that gets tossed around like rice at a wedding— is often shown through the act of kissing. When one person's lips touch another's. Wikipedia says a kiss can express sentiments of love, passion, romance, sexual attraction, sexual arousal, affection, respect, peace, and good luck. I say a kiss is a simple way to happiness. If you want to begin forgiving and forgetting, so you can get on with finding your happiness, start kissing. Kiss your ex, kiss your friends, kiss your dog, and when someone makes you mad on the freeway, try blowing them a kiss instead of yelling obscenities. Kiss your hand and pretend you like yourself. Close your eyes and imagine kissing someone you love. There is a famous poem by Leigh Hunt called, 'Jenny Kiss'd Me,' which is joyous and uplifting, and reminds us that a kiss from the right person can make us forget all of our miseries or reasons for unhappiness, "Say I'm weary, say I'm sad, Say that health and wealth have miss'd me, Say I'm growing old, but add, Jenny kiss'd me."

## L is for Lymphatic

The lymphatic system is a system of thin tubes and lymph nodes that are located throughout the body. They are an important part of our immune system and play an important role in fighting bacteria and other infections. This system allows immune cells to monitor and respond to signals that increase or decrease the immune and inflammatory response, and help protect the body from threats like infections, bacteria, and cancers. The lymph nodes are like little immune hubs found all over the body, but there are three areas that are most influential in our immune response —the neck, armpit, and abdomen. Unfortunately, our lymphatic system can become clogged, causing chronic pain and/or health issues, but pain or swelling is also an indicator of an infection.

Regular exercise and a healthy diet can help keep your lymphatic system working properly, and both Tai Chi and Yoga can be helpful in flushing the system. Massage is also great for lymphatic drainage/release, and many spas have gua sha, dry brushing, and cupping treatments that claim to eliminate lymphatic complications. If you don't know about the lymphatic system, I highly recommend doing some research and learning about it. Regardless of how you choose to keep this system healthy and working properly is up to you, but with ongoing pandemic surges and all the stress we inflict on our bodies, there's no doubt this system is always on high alert. Keeping it healthy is the secret to longevity and optimal health.

## M is for Maintaining

This one is so simple, but often the most challenging. It's the reason why diets and exercise regimes fail. We have good intentions, but it can be very difficult to 'maintain' the momentum. However, there is a secret. If you want to maintain something —let's say a healthy diet that allows you to lose and maintain a healthy weight— you have to **keep it simple**. If you try to change all your eating habits, eliminate all your favorite foods, quit drinking, cut out sugar, and start exercising... you will most likely fail. Start simple. Make a list of all your favorite foods, and eliminate one food group (like dairy for example). Now go back through the list and remove anything with dairy and eat from that list and remind yourself that 'you do not eat dairy.' You can even 'pretend' you're allergic to it if that helps. Maintain that for at least 6 months. See what happens. Be patient with yourself. Take notes about how this makes you feel, any changes you've noticed, your challenges, etc. If you make it to 6 months, go back and read your notes. Make a decision, based on how you feel and any changes (good or bad) to either continue on this path or abandon it. Then set a new goal... and maintain it.

## N is for Nighttime

Sleep is one of the most important things we can do for our health. 7-8 hours a day is optimal. If you struggle with this, take action. Try CBD, get more exercise, cut back on caffeine and alcohol, whatever it takes. If you still struggle, talk to your doctor. There are many reasons sleep is important, but here are the top four:

- Helps the brain function
- Helps keep our emotions under control
- Keeps us healthy and reduces the risk of infection and disease
- Helps keep our weight under control

## O is for Oils

Try to learn more about and incorporate essential oils into your life. Essential oils are concentrated plant extracts and have a multitude of benefits. Also, you need a small amount of fat in your diet for healthy functioning to help your body absorb fat-soluble vitamins such as A, D, E, and K, and plant-derived oils such as olive and avocado can

reduce the risk of cardio-vascular-related disease, cancer, respiratory disease, and neurodegenerative conditions. Here are a few tips for getting more oil into your life:

- Learn about and start using coconut oil for just about everything. It's perfect for keeping lady parts in excellent condition, hair and scalp conditioning, overall body moisturizing, cooking, etc.
- Try Rosemary oil for an itchy scalp, Lavender oil on itchy parts and in your laundry, Tea tree oil as an antiseptic, antimicrobial or antifungal, Peppermint oil for relieving pain, itch and indigestion, Eucalyptus oil for colds, Lemon oil to kill bacteria, Bergamot oil to reduce anxiety, and Cedarwood oil for sleep

## **P is for Pain-free**

Whether suffering from an injury, a chronic condition, inflammation, arthritis, migraines, muscle overuse, or inactivity. Pain has become almost second nature in our stressful lives. There are many suggestions in these ABC's for helping to reduce pain, inflammation, and stress—I hope some of them can help. If you or someone you love is struggling with pain, I recommend doing some research into all the non-opioid options we have available. Many utilize natural products and elements found around you every day (such as ice, heat, and movement). There are also clinics and programs that can help teach us how to deal with and cope with pain—learn about them. Approximately 50 million adults in the U.S. suffer from chronic pain. This is an epidemic that pills are not curing. We need to find another way.

## **Q is for Quartz**

Quartz is one of the most abundant natural minerals found on Earth. It is made up of silicon and oxygen atoms with a chemical formula of  $\text{SiO}_2$  and can present in many forms. It is known to be an energy amplifier or a magnifying glass for energy and emotion and is found in multitudes of energy-healing or energy-inducing solutions. Whether used for meditation, energy healing, chakra work, magic wands, paperweights or jewelry, there is something about the way it absorbs light and feels in your hand that makes it special. It doesn't matter if you truly believe it has healing properties, no matter how it comes into your life it looks and feels wonderful. Bring some into your life, in whatever way pleases you, and let it shine its positive light.

## **R is for Reiki**

Reiki is an energy healing technique that is said to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and help with pain relief, by using a gentle touch. Reiki practitioners use their hands to deliver energy to your body, improving the flow and balance of your energy to support healing. Rei means “universal” in Japanese and ki, refers to the vital life force energy that flows through all living things. Regardless of whether you believe in Reiki, incorporating gentle touch into your life can be very calming. Think about someone brushing your hair or drawing with their finger on your back. Give it a try.

## **S is for Salad and Seaweed**

Here's a secret. If you eat a dish of dark leafy greens every day your life will change. Just one little addition and you will feel healthier, have more vitality and energy, your digestion will improve, and you might even lose some weight. Just by making this one little change. Buy a box of already washed greens, no iceberg lettuce, with a very dark green color. Add spinach or baby kale for variety. Sprinkle on a dash of low-calorie salad dressing (preferably homemade)

or toss with simple olive oil and salt and pepper. That's it. Adding additional vegetables is always a plus, but make sure you get that one dish of leafy greens every day.

Another great green to add to your daily intake is seaweed. One of the most primitive life forms on earth, it has been consumed as food or medicine to promote optimal health in humans for centuries. Studies have shown that seaweed can lower cholesterol and triglycerides due to intestinal absorption, it can reduce inflammation, and protects us from stress and inflammatory diseases. It can also protect us from cardiovascular disease and nonalcoholic fatty liver disease. In other words, it's a super plant. Find it in kelp and nori, as well as spirulina (blue-green algae). Whether added to your meals or your supplements, make seaweed or algae a key component of your day-to-day.

## T is for Tincture

Tinctures are concentrated herbal extracts made by steeping bark, berries, leaves (dried or fresh), or roots from one or more plants in alcohol, vinegar, or another liquid conduit. The alcohol or vinegar pulls out the active ingredients making the liquid concentrated. Tinctures have been around for centuries and are a key component of traditional herbal medicine. They are a perfect way to add healthy plant compounds to your tea, smoothie, cocktail, or under your tongue. They can also be fun to make. Explore the world of tinctures, and if you're curious about CBD or cannabis products (but not interested in smoking or eating candies) a tincture might be the answer for you.

## U is for Uninhibited

Let it go. Be yourself. Try to not compare yourself to anyone else or worry about what anyone thinks of you. If not every day, at least for one day. To be uninhibited means to express your feelings or thoughts unselfconsciously and without restraint. Try wearing something you've never worn before (but always wanted to), try dancing as you've never danced before, and try just about anything without a care in the world. Laugh, fall down, hug yourself, and simply enjoy life. **Let that shit go!**

## V is for Vitality

The pure definition of vitality is to live! It also means to live strong and to be active, to be full of energy and power, and to be present in and with all living things. Live your life with vigor and find energy in all things that surround you.

## W is for Water

Our bodies are about 60% water, and we all know how important water is in our day-to-day lives. Be sure to drink those 64+ ounces a day! But I'd like to talk about the magic of bathing. If you have a bathtub, make it your personal health spa. The word spa originated during the Roman Empire, when hot springs and baths were used to heal aching bodies. These places were called 'aquae' and having treatment was called, 'Sanus Per Aquam' (SPA), which translates to 'health by or through water.' Many spas around the world still use water for healing treatments. Here are some you can try in your bath at home:

- For relaxation sprinkle clay in your bath to detox
- If you feel a cold coming on, add antiviral eucalyptus to your bath to clear your sinuses
- Epsom salts in the bath can help ease aches, but are also great for breakouts on the skin and easing eczema

- Oatmeal in your bath is also great for eczema, or any itchy rash or irritation
- To help you sleep add valerian (said to help insomnia) or lavender
- For sore muscles add powdered mustard or make a mixture of Epsom salts, Himalayan salts, and baking soda (also great for detoxifying)
- Try drops of different essential oils, rose petals, or calendula flowers for added essence and luxury

## X is for Xenacious

Xenacious means, filled with a yearning for change. If you're lacking motivation, get xenacious. First, look within. Identify what changes you might need to make to your environment and ask yourself if you are prepared for a change, and what's in opposition to your change. Then determine if that opposition is merely a state of mind. Go back and read "A," "H," and "M," and remember that change can only be made by you.

## Y is for Yin Yang Yoga

There is a type of yoga called Yin, and another called Yang. Yin is slower and poses are held for longer, working on the tissues and joints in the body. Yang is the more traditional hatha or ashtanga-based yoga that develops muscular strength, stamina, and flexibility. I like it all. It doesn't matter what kind of yoga you do, just do some. If you haven't tried it, take a beginner class or get a video for beginners. Start slow! If you have an instructor who pushes you, get another instructor. Any pushing in yoga should be done by you. As for Yin and Yang, it's in everything. For everything, there is an opposite. If you are feeling sad, you can feel happiness again.

"Go as you wish. That which is yours will always return to you." —Seraphim Falls

## Z is for Zest

Lemon zest to be precise. Lemons contain a high amount of vitamin C and soluble fiber, they can aid weight loss and reduce your risk of heart disease, anemia, kidney stones, digestive issues, and cancer. A simple way to get more lemon into your diet is to zest because the majority of health benefits come from the peel. Use a small paring knife to remove small strips of the peels or a zester. You can also zest other fruits such as oranges and limes. Zest comes from French zeste, the name for an orange or lemon peel, but also means enjoyable and exciting, to live one's life with zest and gusto!

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