



# ***A Path to Healing Chronic Illness***

*Stop Focusing on Illness and Start Focusing on Wellness*

# **A Path to Healing Chronic Illness**

Stop Focusing on Illness and Start Focusing on Wellness

By Dakota Knight

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I am offering this book for free because I understand the financial hardships that chronic illnesses can have on those that suffer from them. There is no “gotcha” at the end asking you to buy something and all the information I have is provided with no strings. Several months after I became severely ill in June of 2018, I made a promise to myself and God. If I ever found a way to recover, I would share how I did it openly and freely. This book is a fulfillment of that promise.

I have created a Website and Facebook Page as a place to distribute this book and also as a community so that we can help each other on our journey to health and wellness. I ask that you share this Group with others who may benefit from this book.

[FACEBOOK PAGE](#) | [WEBSITE](#)

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## Introduction

I am not a scientist, a doctor, or a health expert and as you'll soon discover, I am not a very good writer. I am just an average guy who became sick with a mysterious and undiagnosed chronic illness. I refused to give up and after years of fighting back, tons of research, and spending a small fortune, I found a way to recover from my illness. This book is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your doctor with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. This book is meant to simply be another tool to add to your toolbox.

I landed on Chronic Fatigue Syndrome as my own diagnosis because it's what fits the symptoms best. I found later there were some contributing factors but CFS at least gave me a starting point. I believe CFS falls into a group of similar illnesses that are systemic in nature, hard to explain, and even harder to identify because there are few, if any, biomarkers you can point to and say, "yes, it's this disease" or "that syndrome." I also had symptoms of other chronic illnesses that are similar including myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), fibromyalgia, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), and hypothyroidism.

Even though I had symptoms of all of these, CFS seemed the most accurate, and without a biomarker, there is really no way to label it specifically.

Many of the symptoms of these diseases are the same though. Severe fatigue, brain fog, muscle weakness, widespread or non-specific pain, widespread inflammation, tremors, clumsiness or lack of coordination, dysregulated autonomic nervous system functions such as blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, and hormone activity. Also vision problems, migraines, nausea, digestive problems, immune dysregulation, chemical or food sensitivities that you didn't have before, and many more. Some symptoms are just impossible to describe such as that "crash" feeling that's like having the life drained out of you, your body beat up, and set on fire all at the same time. Or that feeling like your brain is literally vibrating in your skull. How in the hell do you describe those to a doctor in a coherent way?

Regardless of the specific symptoms or the labels that doctors try to put on them, most of these illnesses have some things in common. They are painful, debilitating, and there was often a triggering event that started it all. Something traumatic

that happened like a viral infection, toxic exposure, car accident, or in my case, a severe reaction to a medication. Regardless of what your trigger event was, you're supposed to recover from these things and resume your life but for some unknown reason, we didn't.

I want to be very clear that not everyone who reads this book shares my symptoms and not everyone will have the same outcome. I do not claim this book is an outright "cure" for any of these illnesses. Instead, this book is meant to be a guide to improve your quality of life and health. That's why I refer to it as a "path to healing" because it is one of many paths you can choose to take on a long and sometimes difficult journey. For me, the information in this book led to a 90% or better recovery and improvement in my quality of life. I still have some symptoms but at most, they are infrequent, fairly mild, and more of an annoyance. Actually, in a lot of ways, I am much stronger than I was before I became sick. I am physically at least twice as strong as I was before I became sick. I can bench press and leg press double what I could before I became sick, I can do five times as many pushups and sit-ups, and I can do this without crashing. Also, mentally I am stronger and more resilient. I am not as angry as I used to be before I

became ill. I have way more empathy for others who are suffering, I don't let little things stress me out, and when I do have emotional struggles, I bounce back faster.

Let's face reality. For all of the good work that researchers and scientists are doing on these chronic illnesses, and I have the utmost respect for them, even if they did make a discovery or find a biomarker, how long will that take to make it through the regulatory red tape and translate into a treatment? A decade or more? I couldn't wait that long. So, I took my health into my own hands. I buried myself in every bit of information on improving my health I could find whether it was a one-off anecdote of recovery, so-called health gurus on the internet, or randomized clinical trials showing even slight efficacy.

Some of what I write about flies in the face of conventional thinking and may even upset some people in the CFS community as well as those suffering from a chronic illness like mine. That is not my intention.

Yes, I will talk about neuroplasticity and the mind-body connection, but I don't believe "positive thinking" alone will cure you.



Yes, I will talk about nutrition and vitamins, but I don't believe a "cocktail of supplements" alone will cure you.

Yes, I will talk about exercise, but I don't believe "pushing through the pain" alone will cure you.

Yes, I will talk about meditation and prayer, but I don't believe "finding your happy place" alone will cure you.

What I do believe is **using the right combination of these tools at the right time** will dramatically improve your quality of life. If you are open to it, then I am writing this book for you. I am writing this book because I found a way to get better and it is my moral obligation to share it with others. If it helps just one person, then it will have been worth the many months it took to write this book. All I ask from you is to read this entire book with a completely open mind and heart. What you do with the information beyond that is up to you, but I implore you to at least give it a try with your full commitment.

## **Where it all started**

I could point to a specific event, as the genesis of my illness (and I will get to that) but the truth is, it started decades before. I spent most of my life ignoring my health and taking it

for granted. I ate fast food pretty much every single day, snacked on junk food, and rarely exercised. I ate the typical Standard American Diet (S.A.D.) and worked a desk job. Mind you, I was not overweight at all. In fact, according to my biometrics and basic bloodwork, I was relatively healthy, except for one thing. My cholesterol was high.

In December of 2017, I went to my primary care doctor for a routine annual checkup. I got basic bloodwork done plus a lipid panel and it came back that my cholesterol was high. Not crazy high but higher than what my doctor wanted to see. My total cholesterol was 260, LDL 170, and triglycerides 222. My weight, which will come into play later, was 169lbs with a height of 5' 11". I later learned there was a name for this, "skinny fat" which is being skinny but very out of shape. All other bloodwork came back as normal.

My doctor decided I needed to be put on a statin to bring my cholesterol down to what conventional medicine considered a normal range. It's important to note that I have never been on a daily prescription before other than the occasional antibiotic for the sniffles. This will factor into how I became chronically ill. I found out later that my body does not

eliminate medications as fast as most people. So, taking an average dose of daily medications just caused it to build up in my system day-after-day. I didn't know this so, I trusted my doctor, and like a good patient, went on the statin.

### ***The Statin***

Statins are one of the most prescribed drugs in the U.S. and around the world. Health experts even toyed with the idea of putting statins in the drinking water to combat heart disease among the population. They are considered very safe drugs, or at least that's what they want you to think. The truth is statins are not safe at all. Most people can tolerate them well but at some level, they do damage to everyone who takes them and for some people, they have devastating side effects, especially if you are not good at eliminating toxins. I am one of those people.

One of the worst side effects is something called rhabdomyolysis. It is a serious condition due to muscle injury, which is actually mitochondrial damage, caused by the statin. It results from the death of muscle fibers, then releasing their contents into the bloodstream, which becomes toxic. This can lead to serious complications such as renal (kidney) failure.

I was fortunate to not get to full-blown rhabdomyolysis, but I did have severe muscle damage. In fact, muscle soreness, which is actually mitochondrial damage, is the most common side effect and is usually shrugged off by doctors. When I complained about muscle soreness to my doctor, he simply told me to take it at night before bed instead of in the morning so I would just sleep through the soreness. So I did, again trusting my doctor, and went on about my life and it stayed that way for about 8 months.

On about month 6 into taking the statin, I was feeling more tired and weaker than usual and I had lost about 15lbs. The side effects and weight loss happened so gradually that I really didn't notice much and just blew it off as getting older at the age of 44. It wasn't until a couple of months after that it hit me like a ton of bricks. I was on vacation with my family, and as vacations go, it was exhausting. About midway through, I crashed very hard. It's like my body just went into shut down mode. All the life drained out of me. I was extremely weak, dizzy, and fatigued. I could barely walk and at the end of the week, I barely made it back home. But I did and I rested for another week and somewhat recovered, or at least I thought I did. From then on it was a downward spiraling nightmare.

At this point, I want to pause my story to illustrate an important point. Many toxins can cause similar damage as statins and the underlying mechanisms at play. I will dive into this later on but even if your illness was not a result of statins or any other medication, you may be exposed to other toxins that contribute to your illness and are preventing recovery. These can be from your environment or even your food.

Neither I nor my doctor suspected it was the statin causing the problem because they are, after all, extremely safe drugs and the severe side effects are rare. In fact, it took a very long time before I put the puzzle pieces together and a lot of damage had already been done. Now, back to my story.

### ***The Healthcare Gauntlet***

My first trip to urgent care was the day after my birthday in July of 2018. They couldn't really find anything wrong. They tested my urine and blood sugar, gave me an IV for hydration and some anti-nausea medication, and then a bill for \$500 because they considered it as emergency care.

Months went by with intermittent bouts of the same symptoms, but I would just drink Gatorade (a bad choice) and rest and usually, the symptoms would subside in a day or two.

During that time a family friend was diagnosed with stomach cancer originating from the H. Pylori bacteria, which can cause stomach ulcers that can turn cancerous. My wife tested positive for the same bacteria and so I got tested as well, which came back negative. The situation with my wife's friend raised some red flags in my mind because nausea and stomach pain was part of my symptoms. So even though I tested negative for H. Pylori I went to see a gastroenterologist. He examined me, gave me some acid reducers, and told me if the symptoms return then he may want to do an endoscopy. I didn't know it at the time, but I was standing at the mouth of a deep and dark rabbit hole.

Another month went by and I felt ill again with the same symptoms as my family vacation except for this time it was worse. Much worse. It literally put me in bed for several days. I felt extremely weak, dizzy, and nauseous almost to the point I couldn't walk. I went back to the gastroenterologist and for the next several months, he proceeded to put me through a battery of tests that included blood tests, an endoscopy, colonoscopy, abdominal CAT scan, x-rays, gallbladder ultrasound, and finally a HIDA scan, which injects a radioactive liquid into your bloodstream. Everything came back negative.

In the end, the GI doctor threw up his hands and pointed me to focus on the dizziness part of the symptoms. Vestibular problems can cause nausea, similar to motion sickness.

By the way, that friend with stomach cancer passed away during this time at the age of 43 because, by the time the doctors found her cancer, it was stage 4. It was very upsetting, and it had a significant impact on my stress level as I considered my own health and mortality. It seems selfish to internalize someone else's suffering but at the time, it was triggering a fear response in me that threw rationalization out the window.

I next went to see an Internal Medicine doctor, which is like a family doctor but focuses only on adults. More blood tests and a thorough physical exam but still no answers. She recommended I see an ophthalmologist and an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) doctor. So, I did.

First, the ophthalmologist, who found nothing of concern like glaucoma and my visual acuity was good. However, I did learn that I was having ocular migraines without headaches. Something I had for a long time but never knew what they

were. Nothing to worry about according to the doctor but there is always the “what if” in the back of your mind.

With that, I moved on to the ENT. He put me through another battery of tests, most of which came back negative. Although, one test did show something that concerned him. I took a test called a VNG test, which is supposed to identify vestibular disorders. Instead, it identified what he called a “central finding” meaning the central nervous system. During part of the test, I showed nystagmus in my eyes. Not enough to be seen with the naked eyes but enough to show up on the highly sensitive instruments he used. The ENT proceeded to tell me, in a very direct and uncompassionate way, that “it could be multiple sclerosis, a brain tumor, or it could be nothing at all,” and recommended I see a neurologist. The “what if” in the back of my mind just got a lot louder.

### ***Que the Panic Attacks***

I’ve never had a panic attack before. Sure, I’ve had moments of high stress, fear, and anxiety but never a full-blown panic attack. Over the next few months, I would have many of them. Sometimes I would have several in one a day.



Panic attacks are a horrible experience, and I wouldn't wish them on anyone.

While trying to find a good neurologist, I decided to go see another family doctor, mainly to establish a new primary care physician for myself. I went over what I had been through and in the span of a 15-minute conversation, he decided that my issues were primarily caused by lack of sleep and anxiety. He completely disregarded everything I said about the months leading up to the panic attack and blamed everything on anxiety. He gave me a prescription for Trazodone, which is an anti-anxiety medication with a strong sedative effect. He called it a "diagnostic tool" to see if my issues were in fact caused by insomnia and anxiety. I was willing to try anything so, I took it once and had a very bad reaction. So bad that I went back to him thinking it gave me a stroke. Numbness and tingling on one side of my face and severe dizziness almost to the point I couldn't walk. He assured me that it wasn't a stroke and that I should try the Trazodone again. No thanks Doc, I'll pass.

It took nearly a month for the dizziness to subside and even longer for the numbness to leave my face. It also took a month to get in to see a neurologist. The neurologist spent a fair

amount of time with me going over my laundry list of symptoms, giving me a couple of balance and dexterity tests, and at the end ordered an MRI, EEG, and more blood tests, this time for autoimmune and inflammatory diseases. More tests, more waiting, and more anxiety

By this point, I had already started suspecting the statin and I went off of it immediately. All of the tests from the neurologist of course came back normal. She ruled out a brain tumor, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, and several other diseases. However, she wanted to do a spinal tap because, despite the negative MRI, that's the only way to truly rule out multiple sclerosis.

## **A Turning Point**

A spinal tap? Just the words sent shivers down my spine and at that point, I had to tap out. I couldn't do it anymore. Spending the better part of a year chasing a diagnosis has done as much damage to me as the statin. All my symptoms had gotten worse and more were showing up all the time. I was in a state of constant fear and panic about what might be wrong. Along with my real doctors, I was visiting Dr. Google daily and doom-scrolling through search results of different symptoms.

Cancer, tumors, MS, Parkinson's ... it was all too much, and I was paying the price physically and emotionally.

By the time the medical world was done with me, I was bedridden most of the time. I was experiencing a constant stream of ALL of the symptoms I mentioned in the opening of this book. I couldn't even take a shower without experiencing a horrible crash. I went to sleep most nights literally believing I was going to die in my sleep. Some nights I went to bed wishing I would die in my sleep. I didn't really want to die, but I didn't want to live like this either. I became so depressed and terrified that I was crying and shaking for hours on end, day in and day out. I just wanted it all to stop.

After some time being at rock bottom, I came to a point that I decided to do something that radically changed my entire outlook and frankly the course of my illness.

***“Stop focusing on illness and start focusing on wellness.”***

This became a mission and a mantra. This is something that not only guided my actions but also my thought patterns, most of which were self-destructive. I had to stop looking for a diagnosis and more so validation of my illness. There was no

validation to be had. Not from my doctors and not even from my loved ones.

This new focus doesn't mean that I am going to simply ignore my symptoms and they'll magically go away. It just means that I am no longer going to let them control me and dictate everything I do. It means focusing more on doing things that are good for me and staying away from all things that are detrimental to my physical and mental health. It means taking care of myself in all aspects of my life... mind, body, and spirit.

This is where my road to recovery began.

## **The Vicious Cycle**

By the time I realized that there was no help for me in the realm of conventional medicine, so much damage had been done to my mental health that it was affecting my physical health. I was stuck in a vicious cycle of symptoms and fear. If you are like me, you have heard the phrase, "it's all in your head" or something to that effect from people that were supposed to help and support you.

They say this because there are no tests that show a biomarker for your illness, so they dismiss it as a mental

disorder. They say this because they don't understand the pain and fear that you feel. They **can't** understand because they've never experienced it. So, I am going to say something that is probably going to shock you and maybe even make you a little angry, but I need you to just hear me out.

***It is in Your Head, but not in the Way They Mean.***

It is in your head, at least to some extent. However, here is the problem. It is not "ALL in your head" and not in the way that those dismissive people mean. I'll explain it.

Anyone who faces severe illness has trauma on some level. It does not matter whether you've been diagnosed with terminal cancer or have gone without a diagnosis like me. In fact, the fear of not knowing what is wrong is sometimes even worse than knowing you have cancer. With cancer, you have a target. You have an enemy to fight against. Going years without a diagnosis just continues to feed this fear in a constant loop. This vicious cycle is also called a "negative feedback loop."

I've read the stories of hundreds of people with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME), Chronic Lyme, POTS, and other similar conditions plus those that have gone without a diagnosis at all. Something I found

interesting that I mentioned earlier, is that most of them have something in common, **a triggering event**. The weird thing is that this triggering event comes in many different forms. Most of the time it is something physical like a virus, severe accident, toxic exposure, or other severe illness. Sometimes it is coupled with some emotional trauma like a family member dying or the illness itself is so severe that it becomes the emotional trauma. It's a good idea to take some time to objectively examine exactly how your illness came about and at what stages it became worse or better. What were the circumstances, the triggers, any contributing factors such as diet, toxins, and even any emotional trauma preceding the illness or the worsening of the illness? You may have to look back decades to see how some of these contributing factors impact your illness. You may have to take a brutally honest look deep inside yourself to find connections.

My case for example. I went over a year with not knowing what was wrong with me. A few years before, I watched my father die of leukemia and as I mentioned, a family friend my same age was diagnosed and ultimately lost her battle with stomach cancer around the time I became ill. It wasn't until **a doctor told me that I might have a brain tumor or multiple**

**sclerosis** that the panic set in and with that my symptoms became worse and new symptoms started popping up. Things like orthostatic intolerance, poor body temperature regulation, peripheral neuropathy, widespread pain, facial numbness and tingling, fatigue, and muscle weakness became worse. I had a burning sensation all over my body that felt like a bad sunburn. I developed sensitivities to foods that I've eaten my entire life. I got literal rashes from simple things like almonds, gluten, and even the brand of deodorant that I've always used. All of this fed back into the fear, making the trauma worse. It really became a vicious cycle. A negative feedback loop, where the symptoms were feeding the fear and the fear was feeding the symptoms.

I have always been a very self-aware person but at the time I didn't recognize the connection. Kind of like the fog of war blinds us from the truth and signs that, in hindsight, should be obvious. I was certain that everything I was experiencing was real. **And it was real.** All of these symptoms were as real as if I had been shot with a gun and had a gushing wound. The only problem is there was no wound, no physical sign, no biomarkers, or even a test that would show these.

What I believe happened is my body went into shock. My autonomic nervous system went into overdrive. My immune system was on high alert and it would not shut down. A self-defensive mechanism that is built into all of us to keep us safe had malfunctioned. Simply put, my body was seeing things as a mortal threat that were completely benign. The mechanism that drives this is called the fight, flight, or freeze response. When we are stuck in a fight, flight, or freeze response, **we can only focus on the thing that is causing it.** Everything else is tuned out.

Here's an analogy that helps you understand what happened to me physically. If you've ever driven a newer car too hard, or a system in that car malfunctioned, the computer (brain) will tell the car to go into what's called "limp mode." The car will not die, but it barely runs and shuts down all non-essential functions and will display all kinds of alerts and warnings on the dashboard to protect itself from further damage. This is overly simplistic but it's what happened to my body. It went into limp mode as a protective measure because of what the statin did and also all of the trauma that followed. I was stuck in limp mode. My natural "fight, flight or freeze" response was stuck in the on position, my sympathetic/



parasympathetic nervous system was out of balance, and my autonomic nervous system and immune system was malfunctioning.

The statin was my triggering event. It caused muscle damage and underlying that was **mitochondrial damage**. Mitochondria is something I will talk a lot about because as you'll discover, it plays a key role in both disease and health. Not only was I experiencing a mental negative feedback loop, I was also experiencing a **physical negative feedback loop**. While my body was stuck in limp mode, my muscles became even more atrophied. My energy levels dropped even more, and more mitochondria were dying off from lack of activity and nutrients. Throughout my downward spiral, I lost 34lbs. I was fairly skinny, to begin with at 5' 11" tall, I was 169lbs before I became ill. I went down to 135lbs before I was able to start turning things around.

The question becomes, how do I get out of limp mode? Unfortunately, the answer is not simple, but it is possible. It took decades of neglect and many different factors to get me into this mode. It wasn't just one thing that got me here, and it won't be just one thing that gets me out.

## ***The Path to Healing***

Before I dive into what I did to regain my health I want to set you up for success by managing your expectations.

Regaining your health is not a straight upward trajectory that you would see on a nice smooth line chart. Improvement tends to look more like a stock market chart. Many ups and downs but if you make the “right investments,” over time it goes up. There will good and bad days. There will be setbacks and you will likely face days where you will not succeed and will want to give up. Do NOT believe the lies that you tell yourself like “I can’t do this.” Self-sabotage will be your biggest enemy. Your negative thoughts will challenge you all along the way. This will not be easy, and it will not be a short journey. It will possibly be the hardest thing you ever do, but you have to ask yourself this question **every single day** ... “Would I rather remain sick?” Then answer yourself every time with an emphatic and defiant

**“HELL NO!”**

Every time I feel like crap and wonder what’s the point, I catch myself and talk to myself like a Marine Drill Sergeant talks to a new recruit. Things like... “Get off your ass and do something. Embrace the pain. Pain means growth. Remember

when you were bedridden? Remember when you missed all your kid's activities?"

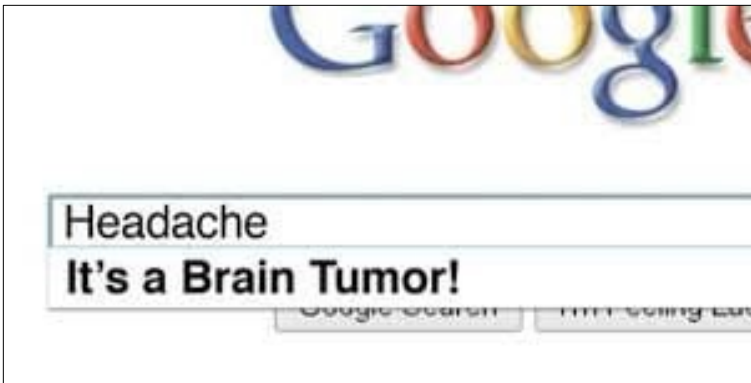
**"NEVER AGAIN!"**

And then once I am done snapping myself out of the funk with some tough love, I just give myself some gentle love by reminding myself how far I have come and that this is a journey. I pick my lowest point and compare that with where I am now and realize the progress I have made.

**"KEEP GOING."**

## **A New Beginning**

I had accepted the reality that even though my illness was not caused by emotional trauma, it was making it worse and more critically stopping me from recovering. I had enough self-awareness to realize that I was in a state of constant fear. Ruminating about what was wrong with me, panicking over every new symptom, and fearing the worst, which was then confirmed by visiting with Dr. Google, who will always give you the worst possible diagnosis.



I realized that if I was going to beat this, I needed to fight back with everything I had and try everything that I could. I spent months researching. I made a YouTube playlist of recovery stories, a playlist of health experts, and dove headfirst into scientific research, most of which I didn't understand. I also explored alternative healing modalities such as mindfulness, eastern medicine, meditation, and even spiritual healing. More importantly, I stayed away from negative stories and Googling symptoms and diseases. After months of this, I concluded that I had to take a full mind, body, and spirit approach. I didn't do just one thing to get well. I did lots of things simultaneously. Some things helped, some things didn't, and some things were complete game-changers. This is where I tell you how I healed myself.

## ***The Phoenix***

You may have noticed a phoenix icon on the cover of this book. A phoenix symbolizes birth, death, and rebirth, as well as strength, grace, and renewal. The entire idea is that this mythical bird is reborn from the ashes of the flames of death and signifies a **journey through fire** or adversity. It's a symbol to express a transformation and survival of a challenge. I use the phoenix as a symbol of how we can journey through the fire, rise from the ashes, and be renewed. Every time I take a step back and think about my own journey and what I have accomplished, the image of a phoenix comes to mind. When our world falls apart, it gives us an opportunity to build something new and better. How can you know what joy feels like without also knowing what sadness feels like? It's the bad times, yin and yang of things, that allows us to appreciate and recognize our good fortune. This journey through the fire is truly up to you and you alone. A doctor cannot take this journey for you nor can anyone else.

As author Cristen Rodgers once wrote, "I've died a thousand deaths, each time reinventing myself brighter, stronger, and purer than before. From the midst of destruction, **I became the creator of myself**. From the midst of darkness, **I became my**

**own source of light.”** The point is that we are the masters of our own experience in this life. We can choose to be the victim and lie down in defeat, or we can choose to continue the fight and rise again.

## **Fixing My Mind**

Your mind has a dramatic and direct impact on every aspect of your body, including your physical health. Researchers call it the “mind-body connection.” If you think about it logically, your brain controls every process in your body, particularly the “older” and more primitive parts of your brain and central nervous system. This includes the autonomic nervous system, amygdala, hypothalamus, hippocampus, and other parts. The mind has the important job of regulating various bodily systems and also has many protective measures that can be helpful. However, sometimes these regulatory and protective systems can malfunction.

I want to be clear that I am not saying that “positive thinking” will cure this illness. It’s more about avoiding the cascade of damaging hormones and biochemicals that come along with chronic stress, chronic anxiety, and persistent negative thought patterns. Check out the resources page on

this book's website for [some videos on how chronic stress impacts the body](#).

After a lot of research, I became convinced that as long I was in a state of trauma, I would not be able to heal physically. Even low levels of chronic stress can have a dramatic negative effect on the body and contribute to illness. It's well known that stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline on a chronic basis can do tremendous damage and this fact has been scientifically proven time and time again. If low-level everyday chronic stress harms health, **imagine what extreme chronic anxiety and panic will do**. I wish it was as simple as going to a therapist and talking about my feelings. Unfortunately, it is not. I went to therapy for several months and even though it was helpful, it didn't resolve all my issues.

In my search for answers, I ran into some interesting science around neuroplasticity and the mind-body connection. There is a lot of information about neuroplasticity out there so I won't spend time rehashing things you can find on your own, but I strongly recommend doing lots of research on this subject. A good place to start is Norman Doidge and his books "The Brain that Changes Itself" and "The Brain's Way of Healing." I

recommend reading these books but if you want some quick information, search out Norman Doidge interviews on YouTube. Check out the [resources page on the book's website](#) for links to some videos worth watching.

The simple explanation is that the brain has the ability to create new neuropathways and those pathways become stronger and more efficient the more that you use them. The reason this is so important is that this holds true for both good pathways and bad pathways. For example, if your mind and body are stuck in a negative feedback loop, those pathways become stronger with time and activate more easily. The opposite is also true. The less you use those pathways, the weaker they become and eventually wither away. If you strengthen your positive thought patterns and experiences, then those will become stronger and more easily activated.

Neuroplasticity is not all about the pathways for emotions, anxiety, and fear either. Take for example the research around stroke victims relearning how to use limbs that were left paralyzed by brain damage. People can regain use of those limbs by creating new neuropathways in the brain and these pathways become stronger the more they use them. Think



about this for a moment. When people suffer paralysis of the limbs from a stroke, it's the brain that is damaged, not the muscles or the nerves leading to the muscles. And when someone recovers the function of that limb, it's the brain that is repaired, not the muscles or nerves. Their brain is literally creating new neural connections.

They call this practice “rewiring your brain” because that is literally what you are doing. The pathways that control the fear response have become so efficient because they have been used so much. I strongly recommend researching neuroplasticity and rewiring your brain to gain a basic understanding of how it applies to both physical and mental healing.

Your objective is to break the cycle of fear and anxiety. You need to stop the negative feedback loop. In order to do this, you must find states of peace and calm and stay there as much as possible. Being in a state of calm and having a feeling of safety will strengthen these neuropathways and weaken the pathways that cause a fear response. There are many different ways to achieve this and many different tools to help you. I recommend trying several different methods and choose a few

that work for you. Below is a list of practices and techniques that I found particularly helpful.

### ***Gather Evidence***

In order for us to break the negative feedback loop, we need to create a different narrative for ourselves. There are usually alternate explanations for our symptoms, but it is **in our nature to fixate on the worst possible scenario**. Paging Dr. Google! Psychologists call it catastrophizing and we are really good at it. It's likely a mechanism that evolved long ago to keep us safe from things like sabretooth tigers similar to the fight, flight, or freeze response. However, when it comes to our symptoms, we have to consider alternate explanations. For instance, consider all of the symptoms of anxiety. We all know about common symptoms like rapid heartbeat, nausea, chest pains, and shortness of breath, but there are more uncommon symptoms of chronic anxiety and panic. Things like neuropathy, tingling and burning sensations, sharp shooting pains, numbness, muscle weakness, hyperactive immune response (unexplained rashes, food intolerances), tinnitus (ringing in the ears), and vertigo. Also dysregulated body temperature (cold and hot flashes), heart rhythm, and blood pressure problems. Consider all of the symptoms that damaged mitochondria can

cause. Mitochondria play a role in every organ and bodily process so it wouldn't be unusual to experience brain fog, vision problems, and also dysregulated autonomic functions like temperature regulation, heart rhythm, and blood pressure. The biggest one from mitochondria (the source of our energy) is fatigue and post-exertional malaise (limp mode).

I've experienced every single one of these symptoms and they used to be chronic symptoms. The keywords are "used to be." Whatever your symptoms are consider how chronic anxiety, nutritional deficiencies, and damaged mitochondria cause them or make them worse. Gather evidence and challenge your own existing beliefs.

One of my earliest and most disturbing symptoms was postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS). For a while, every time I stood up, my heart rate would jump from a resting rate of 65 to over 130. The common medical theory is that the blood vessels do not constrict enough to keep blood from rushing down to your legs when you stand and your heart compensates by beating faster, which may be true, but I knew there was more to it. Blood vessel constriction is controlled by the autonomic nervous system and the strength of supporting

muscle tissue, which can be disrupted by an out-of-control fear response and muscle atrophy. I became afraid to even stand up, which further fed into this negative feedback loop. Once I began controlling the fear response and negative feedback loop, the POTS symptoms faded away. How did I do it? I began by gathering evidence on how the autonomic nervous system contributes to POTS. I then got some compression socks and started doing meditative and breathing practices while standing to calm the fear response and show my body that standing up is not dangerous like a sabretooth tiger. I also flexed my leg muscles to strengthen the supporting muscles. Eventually, I could do it without the compression socks, and then over time, the problem resolved completely.

### ***Set a Goal***

I cannot stress the importance of this piece of advice enough. You need something to work towards. A big goal but not something that is out of the realm of possibilities. My first big goal was getting healthy enough to go with my family to my daughter's national volleyball tournament in Denver, Colorado. I achieved that. My next goal was getting healthy enough that my home gym was no longer sufficient to keep me progressing and I would have to join a gym. As of writing this book, I am

still working on this goal, but I am confident that I will get there eventually. Your goal also needs to be something specific and meaningful to you. Outgrowing my exercise equipment at home is a big benchmark for me.

Once you have that big goal, **you need to set smaller and highly achievable interim goals**. These are baby steps to achieve the bigger goal. There is a physiological and biochemical reason for these smaller interim goals and the process of working towards them. That is the neurochemical dopamine, the body's reward system. Scientists have figured out that not only do we get a big secretion of dopamine when we achieve a goal but also during the process of working towards a goal. Let me repeat that. Dopamine is secreted in route to achieving a goal. We get rewards for the work and that is a system that we can tap in to and we can take advantage of this neurochemical pathway. If we consistently activate these beneficial neurochemical pathways, they become stronger, referring back to neuroplasticity. The opposite is also true. If you fail to achieve a goal, then you get a shot of stress hormones and it triggers the anxiety neuropathways. This is why we set smaller and highly achievable interim goals. So that we can get this pleasurable shot of dopamine on a more

consistent basis and, as much as possible, limit the traps of failure and self-doubt.

### ***Create a Mantra***

Find a mantra that you can make your own. Something that you can hang on to throughout this difficult journey. A mantra should be easy to remember, repeatable, and meaningful to you. My mantra is “I am happy, healthy, and strong.” I was none of those things when I first started, so for me, my mantra was not only a goal to achieve but also a reminder of my progress in that “I am happier, healthier, and stronger than I was yesterday.” I also previously mentioned the mantra, “Stop focusing on illness, and start focusing on wellness.” Another constant reminder. One more quote that I used as a daily reminder is this one ...

**“Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow.” - Mary Anne Radmacher**

Some days we will fail. What matters most is what we do next. I'm sure you've heard this before in some form but **how we respond when we inevitably fail, will determine our overall success.**

## ***Adopt a Ritual***

Don't let the term "ritual" throw you. I am not talking about spiritual rituals or the type of ritual that gets you into a super-secret club for bored rich people. I am simply talking about a routine that is sacred to only you. I call it ritual because it is more important than just a routine or a habit. Rituals have been practiced by humans since the dawn of civilization, preceding all the religions we know today. Rituals are believed to put us in a higher state of consciousness and are scientifically proven to help with anxiety, depression, and other negative emotional states. Consider for instance, when a loved one gets married. We perform rituals to celebrate the union. Likewise, when a loved one dies, the rituals we do such as funerals help us in our grief and to cope with the loss. When we are in a state of grief, anxiety, fear, and loss, we feel out of control. Rituals are a good way to regain that control. If you want to learn more about the science behind the benefits of rituals, [read this article](#) or search for the term "science of rituals."

For all of the beneficial reasons stated, I created a daily ritual of my own that I call **Daily Affirmation Ritual Exercise (DARE)** that takes advantage of the science of neuroplasticity,

cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), neuro-linguistics programming (NLP), and other therapeutic modalities. I know DARE sounds cheesy. I originally called it Daily Affirmations Ritual but added the “Exercise” so I could have a cool acronym. I go into detail about my ritual later in this book and will provide you a step-by-step on how to perform this ritual. Again, it’s not a religious or spiritual ritual but rather a “wellness ritual” for **affirming my choices, my health, and my progress**. You are welcome to use my ritual as is, adapt it to make it your own, or research other programs designed to do the same thing, which is to break the cycle of fear and physical illness.

### ***Find Joy and Happiness***

This is something very difficult to achieve when you are suffering from chronic illness but there is some truth to the old saying, “laughter is the best medicine.” Even the physical act of smiling, fake or not, can trigger the release of neural communication boosting neuropeptides as well as mood-boosting neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin. Part of breaking the cycle of fear and anxiety is finding some happiness in your life. What form that takes is totally up to you. It may be something as simple as watching things on TV that



make you laugh or smile. Maybe it is a hobby that you deeply enjoy. Maybe it is finding a purpose or meaning in your life by helping others or volunteering your time if you are able. Also, be thankful for all the little things we take for granted every day. Do you have a roof over your head? Is there at least one person in your life that loves you? Did you wake up this morning? Be thankful. Finally, bask in the simple pleasures in life by being fully present and soaking it all in. A warm cup of coffee and a sunrise. A meaningful conversation with friends. A long candle-lit bubble bath with your favorite music. Whatever brings joy to your life and is health affirming, **do more of it.**

### ***Learn to Meditate***

Meditation is as old as civilization itself and there is a reason it has been around so long. It works and there is plenty of scientific research to back it up. Long-term, consistent meditation increases resiliency to stress and decreases the inflammatory response to stress hormones. The bottom line is, learn to meditate. It is not easy but practice it every day and stick with it. Look for resources such as books and YouTube videos on how to meditate. It may sound a little “woo woo” but mediation will be a huge part of your healing journey.

## ***Visualizations***

The idea, like many of the other recommendations, is to put your mind in a state of relaxation. The guided visualizations I found most helpful comes from The Honest Guys. They are on Spotify and YouTube and their content is easy to find. “The Healing Spring” is one of my favorites. Besides guided visualizations, you can use your imagination to create fantasy worlds that you get lost in. It’s similar to mediation but instead of clearing your mind, you set it free in a world of your own making. These visualizations are particularly important in seeing a “future you” doing something that is currently hard to imagine. Maybe it’s a vacation to Italy or something as simple as hiking in your favorite park. Imagine yourself doing these things in as much detail as possible. The sights, smells, sounds, and emotions. Use all your sense and describe them in tremendous detail. The goal and my hope for you are to someday you can actually experience one of these visualizations you create in real life. One of my visualizations was hiking among the giant trees of the Redwood National Forest. I am well enough now to make that a reality and the first chance I get, I will do it. Visualizations will also be an

important part of the Daily Affirmation Ritual Exercise (DARE) I mentioned earlier.

### ***Breathing Exercises***

Like meditations, breathing exercises will be critical in your healing journey and something worth learning as much as you can. These are particularly important skills if you suffer from panic attacks and severe bouts of anxiety. There are tons of resources to help you learn but a good place to start is YouTube and the app called Calm, which has a cool breath pacing feature in its free version.

### ***Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)***

I believe CBT has been unfairly villainized in the CFS community because it was rammed down the throats of too many patients as a “cure.” It’s not a cure and anyone who says it is doesn’t understand the genesis of these illnesses and why they persist. I understand the frustration completely, but the fact is that CBT is one of the most tried and true therapeutic modalities there is and it's highly effective for trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and depression. If you’ve suffered at the hands of dismissive doctors and been victimized by the medical community like me, then there is a high probability you have

some level of trauma. We know this trauma is not the cause, but it is a factor (one of many) in why we cannot recover. So why not use the best tools to help manage the trauma? I recommend working with a therapist who specializes in CBT. You can do it on your own, but I recommend at least starting with a therapist until you learn the ropes.

### ***Neuro-Linguistics Programming (NLP)***

NLP can be complicated but there is one powerful element that I found particularly helpful called anchoring. In NLP, “anchoring” refers to the process of associating an internal response, such as a dopamine release or intense joy, with some external trigger so that the response may be quickly re-accessed. The association is considered reflexive and not a matter of choice, meaning it happens in the subconscious mind. Think about the famous Pavlov’s Dog experiment, where scientist Ivan Pavlov rang a bell every time he gave the dog food. Eventually, he could trigger the dog’s mouth to start watering just by ringing the bell. In psychology, this is called conditioning, but the same principle applies. It’s done by associating an intense feeling of joy or pleasure with a physical trigger, like pressing on an acupressure point on your hand. Or by rubbing an object (a totem) that you keep with you, like a

cross pendant or charm. If you anchor an object, it's best if it's something that you can keep in your pocket or purse. If you are able to experience intense positive emotions during visualizations, then use that as an opportunity to create this anchor. Imagine being able to trigger a dopamine release on command by pressing on an acupuncture point or rubbing a charm on your keychain.

### ***The Curable App***

This app is specifically designed for chronic pain, but the same CBT and Neuroplasticity techniques that are used to help with chronic pain can also be used to manage chronic stress and anxiety. It teaches us a lot about how the mind can control symptoms in the body. It is relatively inexpensive and defiantly worth a try.

### ***Other Helpful Apps (iPhone)***

There are other apps you can try. Youper, MindShift, and a Journaling app called Day One are all apps I've used. Also, a game called MyOasis, which is a great little distraction to calm the mind. Most of these you can use for free. The most popular app in this genre is called Headspace but to get the most out of it, you have to pay.

## ***Get Better Sleep***

One of the most important aspects of healing from chronic illness and improving your mental and physical health is getting good quality sleep. Not only is sleep when your body repairs itself, but it's also when your brain does its best work. Long-term memories, for example, are created while you sleep, and more importantly, neuronal repair is more active during sleep. Researchers found that when one sleeps, the brain reorganizes, recharges itself, and removes toxic waste byproducts that have accumulated throughout the day. Scientific evidence demonstrates that sleeping can clear the brain and help maintain its normal functioning. Many of us dealing with chronic illness also have chronic insomnia. Really, it's a package deal. Medication can be effective for the really bad times but like most medications, it's not a long-term solution and comes with its own risks. There are many books written on sleep but one in particular that I recommend is Shawn Stevenson's "Sleep Smarter." Invest in some amber lens glasses and wear them from sundown to bedtime, lower your room temperature, get sunlight first thing in the morning, and shut down everything an hour before bed. If you want the details on

how and why this works plus a lot more things to try, then read the book.

Whatever combination of therapies you choose, it should be something you can stick with and things that you will have an open mind about. It's important to create a routine but you can also mix things up by employing different things on different days. Also, it will change over time, as you progress on your journey.

## **Fixing My Body**

When I changed my outlook and stopped focusing on illness and started focusing on wellness, one of the first things I did was stop going to regular doctors that were simply running their standard tests and telling me there is nothing wrong or it's all in my head. Or worse throwing an unnecessary medication at me and sending me on my way. Instead, I went to a different kind of doctor that goes by various titles. Integrative Medicine, Functional Medicine, Alternative Medicine. The titles really don't tell you much about the difference, but many do have vastly different approaches. Some focus on eastern medicine such as acupuncture, ancient Chinese herbs, meditation, and even hypnosis. Others take a

more “modern” approach and focus on nutrition, supplementation, and uncovering root causes as it relates to bodily systems and how they function. I prefer this kind of approach, which is called Functional Medicine.

I believe a **Functional Medicine** specialist is the way to go but it is definitely worth exploring all modalities because most of them will play some role in your recovery. Particularly the aspects of eastern medicine that deal with meditation and mindfulness will be important to your recovery.

The doctor I chose was an actual MD with impressive credentials and began her career in traditional medicine. This was important to me because I wanted someone who knew conventional medicine along with alternative medicine. Many Functional Medicine practitioners are chiropractors with extended training. I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, I just have my preferences. What’s most important was my doctor’s focus on healing the whole body and not simply treating symptoms. This is key. Most Functional Medicine doctors focus on treating the root causes of disease. If you want to understand Functional Medicine, it’s worth checking out the Institute of Functional Medicine and Dr. Mark Hyman. Dr. Hyman’s content



can be easily found on Youtube and I used him as a model of what I wanted my doctor's approach to be.

Primarily what my doctor focused on was my lifestyle, elimination of toxins, nutrition, and supplementation with things that she found I was deficient in through testing. It is important to note that this will be different for everyone but the basic approach of providing your body with ample amounts of what it needs to function properly and eliminating things that are hurting your health is universal.

To discover my needs, my Functional Medicine doctor ran a series of tests that normal doctors tend to ignore. Some of those tests included the following:

- Tests for mineral and vitamin deficiencies.
- Glucose tolerance tests and other metabolic screenings.
- Methylation and Genomics testing.
- In-depth cardiac health screening with advanced lipid panels.
- Broad screening for inflammatory markers.
- Food allergy and toxin level screenings.

- Gut microbiome and digestive tests.

Through all these tests I discovered five key factors that contributed to my illness and prevented my recovery.

1. My nutritional status was garbage. I had no clear deficiencies that basic tests would pick up on but in looking a little deeper, I was not getting enough vital nutrients for energy production and mitochondrial health. It takes more nutrients to heal than it does to simply maintain homeostasis.
2. My genomics test showed I was homozygous for an MTHFR gene mutation that caused my body to lack the needed methylation capabilities. What this means my gene expression and inhibitions were not running efficiently and possibly contributing to my symptoms.
3. My mitochondria were damaged and needed support to regenerate. I believe this is the root of my inability to recover and possibly yours as well. I will go into detail about the importance of mitochondria and the consequences of damaging them later in the book.

4. My gut microbiome was a train wreck. Not the worst my doctor had seen but I was not properly digesting food, which further contributed to nutritional deficiencies. I had an overgrowth of bad bacteria which were crowding out the beneficial bacteria and reducing needed digestive enzyme production.
5. Finally, my hormones were deficient. Having the optimal hormones during recovery is critical and as I will discuss more later, it was the biggest game-changer for me.

## ***Nutrition***

The most straightforward place to start is with nutrition. That doesn't mean it will be easy, just straight forward. Simply put, **eat what God makes and not what man makes**. Stay away from processed food, junk food, fast food, and anything else that is not healthy. We all know what good foods are. Stick with lean natural meats, a colorful palette of vegetables, nuts, seeds, and fruits.

I don't want to turn this into a nutrition book because there are plenty of resources on how to eat healthily. I recommend checking out resources from Dr. Mark Hyman and Dr. William

Li. It's a good place to start when it comes to healing through nutrition.

If you have the means, I recommend working with a nutritionist. My nutritionist was part of the medical practice of my Functional Medicine doctor. The plan she put me on is called the Mito Food Plan (as in mitochondria) from the Institute of Functional Medicine. I am providing links to resources that were given to me by my nutritionist below. So even if you don't have the resources to work with a nutritionist, you'll have a guide to follow.

### **Mito Food Plan Resources**

- [Mito Food Plan](#)
- [Mito Food Planner and Recipes](#)
- [Mito Food Quick Reference](#)

If you are unable to prepare meals, then there are some healthy microwavable options, but they are harder to find, and **make sure and read the labels**. If it has ingredients that aren't food, then don't buy it. This includes the sneaky phrase "natural flavors." Another option is healthy meal delivery companies like Freshly or Green Chef but it's expensive. The

bottom line on nutrition is that you need to eliminate the unhealthy and eat ONLY the healthy. That does not mean you need to get rid of every indulgence for the rest of your life but at least for the near term, I recommend staying strictly with a nutritionally dense diet and a wide variety of plant and animal food sources. If you are like me, once you start seeing the results, you will not want to eat junk food anymore. The thought of letting lifestyle and dietary choices damage my health and ending back where I was is inconceivable.

### ***Inflammation***

Addressing inflammation can be tricky but it is necessary. Inflammation is a primary driver of many illnesses including cancer and autoimmune disease. Even low levels of chronic inflammation can be very detrimental to health and healing. Inflammation refers to your body's process of fighting against things that harm it, such as infections, injuries, and toxins, in an attempt to heal itself. When something damages your cells, your body releases chemicals that trigger a response from your immune system. However, when it becomes dysregulated it can end up causing a lot of damage.

Many things can cause inflammation, and some may be surprising such as certain foods and even stress and anxiety. When I started focusing on my wellness and nutrition, I made it a point to eliminate every type of inflammatory food that I could. The usual suspects are gluten, dairy, and sugar. Even if you are not gluten or lactose intolerant, these foods can cause inflammation. There are also other foods that are less known such as cheap vegetable oils and seed oils, alcohol, refined carbohydrates such as white rice, and processed meats such as cured bacon, beef jerky, lunch meats, and smoked meats. These are packed full of advanced glycation end products (AGEs), which are known to cause inflammation.

I know some of these foods are hard to give up but it's not something that you have to do forever. Just until you heal, you need to **give your body the best possible chance** and calming systemic inflammation can go a long way. Like I said before, when you see the benefits of not indulging in these foods, you may not want to eat them again.

A perfect example for me is gluten. I had headaches at least twice a week for as long as I could remember. I always thought they were sinus headaches because they hit right over my

eyebrow. But both my neurologist and the ENT told me that based on my description, they were migraines. I do not have celiac disease and not digestively sensitive to gluten in any way, but I did discover that when I gave up gluten, my migraines completely disappeared.

There are other things you can do to drive down chronic inflammation and I recommend researching this subject further but eliminating inflammatory foods is a good start.

### ***Supplements***

Supplementation is another key factor. I've tried every possible supplement and, in the end, only a few supplements seemed to help. If you follow a good nutrition plan then you will not need much in terms of supplementation. Here are the supplements I found most useful.

First and foremost is a high-quality food-based multivitamin. After all my research, which is a ton, I found Garden of Life Vitamin Code Multivitamin to be the best. Do your own research but this is the one I chose for myself and still take today. It provides a broad spectrum of nutrients, comes strictly from food sources, and does not overload you with any particular nutrient, which is a problem with many

supplements. Even if your diet is perfect, taking a multivitamin is a good idea because you need more nutrients to heal than to just maintain health.

Secondly and equally important is a Vitamin D3 supplement. There is a high likelihood you are deficient in this critical vitamin. Of course, you want to get your blood test to confirm this, but most people are deficient. I won't go into all the research and benefits but just know that this vitamin (which is actually a hormone) is critical in so many aspects of good physical and mental health. When deciding on dosage, aim for **optimal blood levels** as opposed to just trying to get above deficient. For most people that will be between 40 to 50 mg/dl. For me, a daily dose of 4000IU keeps me at around 45 mg/dl on my blood test. I also pair my D3 with vitamin K2. Experts recommend K2 to help transport calcium into the bones so it does not end up in joints and muscle tissue, where it does not belong.

You'll want to be sure you are getting enough protein either in your diet or through supplementation. In choosing a protein supplement, make sure that it has a full spectrum of Essential Amino Acids. This usually means the protein source is from



animals, not plants. Also, if you have any connective tissue problems, then collagen peptides are a good protein source to add to your regimen. Once your muscles start responding to increased activity, you'll want to aim for .75 – 1 gram of protein per pound of bodyweight combined from food sources and supplements. If you eat a good amount of meat, then you may not need much supplemental protein.

Creatine will also be an important supplement in your recovery. It's a common supplement among athletes and bodybuilders but plays a role if you are trying to recover from conditions like Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. I will mention this supplement a few times in later sections because it has other benefits. It's one of the most studied supplements and one that you will need on your road to recovery. If you eat meat at every meal, then you may not need as much creatine but as your muscles and mitochondria grow and recover, creatine will help in transporting vital nutrients to your muscle tissue and cells throughout your body including the brain.

You will also want to make sure you are getting vital nutrients to support mitochondria and the Krebs cycle. Google the term Krebs Cycle to learn more but basically, it's your

body's process to generate energy and it is done in the mitochondria. This is why mitochondria are so important. They are literally the "batteries" you run on. It's unlikely to happen but if your mitochondria completely shut down all at once, you would die within minutes. Most of the nutrients you can get from food and also the multivitamin mentioned before, but if you were like me and had a hard time consuming and digesting enough nutrients you'll need to supplement for a while. If this is the case, then you can supplement certain compounds that will help. These include N-Acetyl-L-Cysteine (NAC), CoQ10 specifically Ubiquinol form, acetyl-L-carnitine, and alpha lipoic acid (ALA). I took Pure Encapsulations Mitochondria-ATP at the early stages of my journey; however, it does contain some other vitamins that you will get from your multivitamin so just be aware of that. It is not likely enough to harm you, but it is numbers you will want to watch in your bloodwork.

One particular supplement that I want to draw attention to is CoQ10. You may have seen commercials on TV saying that if you're taking a statin, you should take CoQ10. The reason is that CoQ10 is protective of mitochondria and helps in the production of ATP, which is the fuel your body runs on. One particular product I like because it has CoQ10 and PQQ, which

is also protective of mitochondria, is Jarrow Formula's QH-absorb® + PQQ™. This is not a supplement you want to overload so take a half dose if you are also taking other supplements with CoQ10.

Finally, you will want to look into any supplement that will cover you for any specific deficiencies. For me personally, that meant taking additional iodine because my thyroid was underactive. This may be a result of eliminating excess table salt from my diet, which is fortified with iodine (iodized table salt). Also, I take additional zinc and DHEA to support my hormone balance and production. Talk to your nutritionist and Functional Medicine doctor to uncover any deficiencies or metabolic problems you have and address those.

Please be aware when choosing supplements over and above what is recommended that you are not doubling up on any nutrients. Most supplement companies put everything and the kitchen sink in their formulas. Also, be aware that it takes months and consistency for supplements to work. For me, it took 2 months for the iodine to change the numbers in my bloodwork for my thyroid, but it did work and I didn't even have to take medication to correct my hypothyroidism. A

regular doctor would have just given me some prescription synthetic thyroid hormone and sent me on my way.

I've spent many thousands of dollars trying various supplements and many didn't really help much. I always recommend doing your own research and make decisions based on the preponderance of evidence and not on the marketing materials that these supplement companies put out. I found Examine.com and PubMed useful resources.

### ***Methylation***

Methylation is not a problem for most people, and I believe a lot of literature on this subject is over complicated. If you are found to be a poor methylator or have the homozygous MTHFR gene mutation, then I recommend taking a look at what Chris Masterjohn, PhD. says on the subject. He has several YouTube videos that speak to MTHFR specifically. However, if you follow the nutrition mentioned previously and eliminate as many toxins from your diet and environment as possible, then your methylation will be well supported. I found creatine to be particularly useful in supporting methylation because it provides the methyl donors you need.

If you are not homozygous for MTHFR mutation then basic nutrition will probably be sufficient but either way, if you are trying to recover muscle strength and energy then, creatine will be a good supplement to add to your regimen.

Also critical, whether you are a poor methylator or not, is to get as many toxins out of your food and environment as possible. Your body works hard to eliminate toxins and for the most part, does a good job but if you are chronically ill, then your body has limited resources to spare for this and other bodily processes. You can help it by eating a whole foods diet and switching to some non-toxic personal care products like deodorant, shampoo, and lotions. Also cooking with non-toxic cookware and parchment paper instead of aluminum foil.

### ***Mitochondria***

You've heard me mention mitochondria several times. Mitochondria are critical and without them, we would not exist. You have mitochondria in every cell of your body, and it **powers every single bodily process you have**. Simply put, mitochondria are what provide you energy to not only move your muscles but to think, digest food, breath, heal, and everything else your body does. **It is that important.**

Mitochondria is most dense in your brain, eyes, heart, and skeletal muscle and this is a key piece of information. Think about it for a moment. If your mitochondria start going wrong, then **everything** starts going wrong. See if some of these symptoms sound familiar. Fatigue, weakness, brain fog, irregular heartbeat, blurry vision, problems breathing, dizziness, nausea, poor blood pressure regulation, and so many more symptoms.

It is worth repeating. If your mitochondria are weak or under-performing, then you will face a wide range of issues.

Here is what it meant for me personally. The statin that my original doctor put me on is well known to cause muscle damage to varying degrees, but it's not really muscle damage. It's mitochondrial damage that underlies this. It's been well studied and documented that statins cause mitochondrial damage and for me, it was the straw that broke the camel's back. If my lifestyle and diet weren't so poor, I might have been able to tolerate the statin better. Of course, if my diet was good, I wouldn't have needed the statin, to begin with, because it is easy to manage cholesterol without medication.

Here is what it could mean for you. Mitochondrial damage is still relevant, even if you didn't take a statin because many things cause mitochondrial damage. Poor diet, environmental toxins, unhealthy lifestyle choices such as drinking, drugs, and smoking. Lack of activity and exercise can also cause mitochondria to degrade. Even the personal care products you use and the processed foods you eat are an assault on your mitochondria. It takes mitochondria to eliminate the toxins we consume every day in the food we eat, the products we put in and, on our bodies, and even the air we breathe. Multiply these factors over the years and decades and we are chronic illnesses just waiting to happen.

### **It's Mitochondria, Not Hypochondria.**

I borrowed this phrase from a book by Dr. Sarah Myhill called, "Diagnosis and Treatment of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Myalgic Encephalitis: Its Mitochondria, Not Hypochondria" It is a fascinating read that allows you to dive deeper into the role of mitochondria in chronic illness, but I have to warn you. It's not the end-all, be-all. There are many other things you will need to do on your journey to health. So read the book, gather the information, and put it into your toolbox.

In my opinion, mitochondrial health is the most important factor in recovery. Here is the problem though. It's not easy to generate new mitochondria (called mitogenesis). There are really no supplements that will help in any significant way to generate new mitochondria, although some supplements aid in the health and function of mitochondria. You can help support mitogenesis with good nutrition, good sleep, and even using things like intermittent fasting and hot sauna (discussed more later) but the single most efficient way to build new mitochondria is through exercise. I know what you are thinking right now. How the hell am I supposed to exercise when I can hardly get out of bed and I crash every time exert myself. I have a solution and I will discuss it in later sections but first, let's talk about hormones.

## ***Hormones***

I had my hormones checked and found that I was severely deficient in testosterone and somewhat low in DHEA and progesterone and as mentioned before, my thyroid was underperforming. At the age of 46 and being chronically ill for a couple of years, this was really not a surprise. So, I started on testosterone therapy, and let me tell you it has been the single biggest game-changer in my recovery. After about 4 months, I



was able to start building muscle, which means building mitochondria, which means more energy, which means the ability to do more exercise, build more muscle, and more mitochondria. Instead of a vicious cycle, it became a “virtuous cycle,” or you can call it a positive feedback loop.

Whether you are male or female, it does not matter. Get your hormones checked and work with your doctor to optimize them. I can’t really recommend testosterone therapy for women but even women have small amounts of it in their system and when low on testosterone, they can experience lethargy and muscle weakness. There are also other hormones that are **anabolic** in nature (meaning muscle growth) and those are estrogen, human growth hormone, insulin-like growth factor-1, and insulin. If you’re fortunate, you may not even need hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and might be able to support it using diet and supplements alone. However, if you are reading this, I imagine that you need a boost and HRT might be the answer. You don’t need to stay on them forever. Just long enough to build momentum in the recovery process.

In contrast, there are also hormones that are **catabolic** (meaning muscle deterioration) and you’ll need to be aware

and address those as well. These hormones include adrenaline, cortisol, cytokines, and glucagon. Most of these hormones are driven by stress and addressing the items in the “Fixing My Mind” section will go a long way in correcting these but also nutrition plays a role.

One other area that hormones impact in a major way is emotional and mental health. It is well documented that estrogen dominance, in relation to progesterone, can cause severe anxiety and even rise to the level of triggering panic attacks. Another example is after childbirth, the sudden drop in progesterone levels is linked to postpartum depression. Men with low testosterone can suffer from depression and anxiety. Either gender with low progesterone can suffer from insomnia. Likewise, low DHEA levels are associated with adrenal dysfunction, which can also disrupt sleep and exacerbate mental health challenges.

I do want to emphasize that it was not only the testosterone that helped me recover. It was a combination of everything that I did that helped my recovery. Also, HRT is not without its risks, and some of those risks are significant. For me, the risk/reward was worth it because I needed to build new muscle and

mitochondria and I could not exercise otherwise. Work with a hormone specialist to find out what is right for you.

## ***Hormesis***

Even though it sounds similar, hormesis has nothing to do with hormones but you can't talk about recovery from a chronic illness without talking about hormesis. This is a word that is foreign to most people but once the concept is explained, it is so easy to understand and how it applies to good health.

I am sure you've heard the saying "what doesn't kill you will make you stronger." Well, this phrase has lots of truth and is supported by decades of scientific research. The idea behind this well-known saying is hormesis, and the simplified definition is any stressor that is applied to your body that will ultimately make it stronger and more resilient. The most commonly known form of hormesis is exercise. We push our muscles slightly beyond what they are capable of and when they repair, they are bigger and stronger.

When exercise is impossible, there are many other forms of hormetic stressors that we can take advantage of to improve our health and resiliency. I recommend using several during

your recovery, but you may find that they are so beneficial, that you make them a part of your lifestyle. Here are a few practices that I've tried and several that I still use.

**Intermittent Fasting:** If you are recovering from illness, your body will need plenty of good nutrients so fasting is something you want to be careful to not overdo. That being said, fasting has been scientifically shown to be one of the best ways to improve health and resiliency. We didn't always have access to 3 meals a day and throughout human evolution, our bodies have evolved to go into "repair mode" when we face times without food. This repair mode ultimately makes us stronger. The science behind this is absolutely fascinating and particularly around the idea of autophagy, which is basically how your body gets rid of bad cells such as cancerous cells and **poor performing mitochondria** (specifically called mitophagy). Getting rid of poor performing mitochondria helps trigger mitogenesis. I recommend checking out the work of Valter Longo, an Italian-American Biogerontologist. Also, Siim Land, who has a great YouTube Channel, and finally an absolutely fascinating book called "Lifespan: Why We Age – and Why We Don't Have To" by Dr. David Sinclair who is a professor of genetics at Harvard Medical School.

Personally, I prefer doing a long-term fast (2-3 days) once a month, however for a while I did time-restricted feeding by skipping breakfast and eating my last meal at 5 pm, giving me a daily fast of about 19 hours. It helped but at some point, I needed more calories because my muscles started growing. It's about finding a balance. So do your own research on this subject and implement what you feel comfortable with.

**Hot Sauna:** Not all forms of hormesis need to seem like a punishment. This particular form of hormetic stress is actually quite enjoyable. There is a lot of research about the benefits of daily hot sauna usage so I won't repeat it here, but I will say that it triggers a biochemical cascade that helps protect skin cells, nerve cells, brain cells, cardiovascular health, and more. On top of this, it is very relaxing and causes a significant release of dopamine, and beta-endorphin, a neuropeptide hormone. It really does feel awesome once you get used to it and even get a bit of a natural high. Imagine a runner's high without having to run a long distance. I recommend listening to Dr. Rhonda Patrick on the subject of sauna usage as she goes into great detail about the benefits and she is easy to understand and a pleasure to listen to. Siim Land also offers interesting details on sauna usage.

**Sun Exposure:** Like most of us, you are likely vitamin D deficient, and taking a vitamin D3 supplement is strongly recommended. However, to get the most out of supplementation, you need at least 10 minutes of direct sun exposure every day to activate it. Aside from this, sun exposure is a hormetic stressor. Too much sun can obviously cause damage and skin cancer, but a small daily dose can actually help prevent cancer by making your defenses stronger, which is the whole idea of hormesis.

**Phytochemicals:** Eating “stressed” plants can have a tremendous benefit. This is discussed in detail in Dr. David Sinclair’s book “Lifespan” mentioned earlier but the general idea is that plants that are under a small amount of stress produce chemicals, that when eaten in small doses by humans, trigger a beneficial hormetic response. Plants produce a variety of chemicals to defend themselves. And when humans ingest these compounds, it protects us not only from the plant chemicals but also the environmental stressors to which we are exposed daily, such as air pollution or overexposure to UV radiation. These plant-based compounds activate cellular protective mechanisms in humans, which is a phenomenon known as xenohormesis. The most well-known example of this

is resveratrol found in red wine but there are many more. This is worth researching but a quick list of phytochemicals to include in your diet are ECGC from drinking green tea, sulforaphane from cruciferous vegetables, catechins from dark chocolate (thank me later for this one), curcumin from turmeric, and chlorogenic acid from black coffee. See, eating healthy is not all bad. In addition to compounds that trigger hermetic responses, plants have powerful antioxidants that can help rid the body of damage from oxidative stress. So the stress/repair cycle is further aided by these antioxidants found abundantly in fruits and vegetables. A fascinating book that covers a wide range of foods and their medical benefits is the book “Eat to Beat Disease” by Dr. William Li.

**Exercise:** The best form of hormesis is exercise. However, if you are as sick as I was, the idea of exercise is inconceivable **but stick with me as I explain.** Before you can even consider exercise, you need to build a strong nutritional foundation and that will take at least a couple of months (maybe longer) of consistently eating well and proper supplementation. Even then, to wrap our head around the idea of exercise we need to redefine it. Exercise doesn’t need to mean training for a marathon or destroying your biceps for hours at the gym. It

actually means something different for everyone depending on where you are in your journey. Before you bail, please just hear me out.

### ***The Dreaded “E-word”***

In order to recover, you need to build new mitochondria. In order to build mitochondria, you need to build new muscle. In order to build new muscle, you NEED to exercise. But exercise does not need to mean what you think it means. In fact, I would rather refer to it as “activity” because when you face the threat of a crash or post-exertional malaise you have to scale way back how you “exercise.”

At my lowest point, I weighed a paltry 135lbs and was completely bedridden. I wished I had some pictures as a before and after but trust me, I looked horribly frail. Every time I did try to move around or exert myself even slightly, I would experience a horrible crash. It felt like death was looming over me at all times ready to strike me down. I thought, how could I ever possibly exercise like this?

Given all that I have pointed out with regards to mitochondria, nutrition, and chronic inflammation, it’s no surprise that we crash when we try to exercise. Without



healthy and well-functioning mitochondria, exercise is near impossible. Without a solid nutritional foundation, then growing healthy mitochondria is near impossible.

Ask anyone with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome about the PACE Trial and you'll likely face the wrath of a thousand suns. PACE Trial is an experiment to treat CFS using Graded Exercise Therapy (GET) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as its primary focus of treatment. I believe this experiment failed for three main reasons. (1) What the scientists defined as exercise and how they structured it, (2) the duration of the experiment, which like most clinical trials, is relatively short and not individualized to each person, and (3) they ran the trial without consideration of one of the most important elements to health and recovery ... nutrition. You have to prepare the body for a stressor like exercise. If you build a house on a weak foundation, that house will come crashing down. You have to ensure **a proper nutritional foundation before you can build.**

If you have CFS or any number of other poorly defined chronic illnesses that include severe fatigue, post-exertional malaise, and exercise intolerance as symptoms, then you need to redefine what it means to exercise and properly manage

your expectation for progress. For someone who is bedridden and cannot even get up without experiencing horrible symptoms, then your definition of exercise is vastly different than someone who can at least take a shower and cook a meal before crashing.

For someone who is completely bedridden, “exercise” might very well mean simply **imagining** you’re going for a walk on a beach or in the woods or running a marathon. Yes, you read that correctly. Imagining you are exercising. In 2014, scientists performed a [research study](#) and discovered **just IMAGINING exercising can make you stronger**, tone your muscles, and delay or stop muscle atrophy. These are real objective endpoints that they can physically measure. Stimulating muscle growth means new mitochondria. The results of this study suggest that just thinking of exercising can have similar effects as actually hitting the gym, although to a much smaller degree. Even being limited in its effect, it showed enough promise that it was published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Neurophysiology. Often the more primitive parts of your mind (the subconscious and the parts that control the autonomic nervous system) cannot tell the difference between what’s real and what you imagine. Remember when we talked about

visualizations as part of your recovery. This is where that skill set can pay dividends. Here is a link to an [interesting article that discusses this in more detail](#).

Now combine this cool exercise biohack and the other hormetic stressors discussed earlier along with the nutritional foundation you've built and it could be just the spark you need to recover. That is exactly what I did when I was bedridden and started my road to recovery. And then from there, I took baby steps to do more and more, over the weeks and months to come. When I say baby steps, I mean it. Progress was very slow, but it was progress, nonetheless.

A key idea that you need to get used to is this... what your mind thinks is often manifested in reality. If you think about illness, you will get illness. If you think about health, you will get health. If you think about exercise, you will get some of the benefits. This plays into the central idea of **stop focusing on illness and start focusing on wellness**. The mind-body connection is powerful and very real. I recommend researching the mind-body connection in relation to health and illness. What you will find is fascinating.

As crazy as it sounds, I started by imagining my exercises, hiking, and going on walks. I even bought a cheap VR headset that was compatible with my smartphone and watched 360 hiking videos on YouTube. My favorite came from [Treadmill TV's channel](#). Eventually, I was able to get out of bed and walk around the bedroom. I would literally walk 5 or 6 circles around my bedroom and then lay back down. When I could manage that without experiencing a crash, then I would do a few more. I then moved on to doing stretches and later I took up a meditative martial art practice called Qigong, which is similar to Tai Chi but easier.

From there I started walking laps outside in the back yard. Then I started doing some yoga and then some bodyweight exercises like burpees, sit-ups, and one or two pushups. I even bought a bicycle and started going on rides. Eventually, I was able to start lifting weights and exercising on an elliptical machine.

Sounds easy right? Well, it wasn't. The previous few paragraphs actually took well over a year. It was slow and often painful. Remember when I said the PACE Trial failed for three reasons, the second being the duration? When you are

recovering from illness, it takes time and a tenacious spirit that will not quit. Even with that, you will face many setbacks along the way.

Throughout my journey, I experienced many crashes and many setbacks, but I accepted those are part of the process. I accepted it because I knew that the crash was temporary, and it wasn't going to kill me. I've survived hundreds of crashes but I also had successes and saw overall progress. I made it a point to enthusiastically celebrate these small victories and to look past the setbacks and view them for what they were. Minor bumps in the road.

So here is the main idea. **Do as much as you can each day and do at least as much as you did yesterday but try to do a little more to keep your momentum moving forward.** It's about setting an individual pace for progress and using all of the tools you can to ensure that progress moves forward. When you combine "exercise" with all of the other things I talk about in this book such as mind-body work, good nutrition, and other hormetic stressors, then **this is where the magic happens.** However, like I said many times, you will face crashes

and setbacks. How you respond to those can make or break your success.

### ***Avoid the Mental Pitfalls***

Here is an example of one of my worst setbacks and one that almost completely derailed me and sent me back to square one. I tell you this story as a warning to be careful of what you read and be mindful of your thoughts even when you are improving.

About 3 months after I started seeing a Functional Medicine doctor, my muscles started to respond to the increased activity but not exactly how I was expecting. I started getting horrible muscle twitches all over my body. At this stage in my exercise, I was doing some light Qigong (which I still do) and some yoga stretches. I initially thought it was a vitamin or mineral deficiency and I needed to find out what type of deficiency it was, so **I turned to Dr. Google** (mistake #1). My Google search came back pointing to ALS (also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease). It is a horrible and 100% fatal neurodegenerative disease, and I read that some people think it can be triggered by statins. **I became convinced** that this is what I had all along (mistake #2). The panic attacks came back and many of the

anxiety-driven symptoms came back with a vengeance. It was a horrible couple of months. Crying every single day at **the thought of my kids seeing me waste away to nothing and then dying** (mistake #3). I was even planning on going back to the neurologist to **confirm a diagnosis** of ALS (almost mistake #4).

Instead of going down the same old destructive path, I started challenging my own thoughts about this and **started considering other possibilities**. ALS is not the only thing that can cause muscle twitches. It also happens when recovering from muscle atrophy. It can also be caused by anxiety and many in the CFS community report all over muscle twitches. Eventually, I was able to calm myself and just keep moving forward holding on to the possibility that it was one of the alternative explanations and not ALS.

I literally debated myself using rational arguments and alternative explanations. Challenging your own beliefs is a core tenant of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Giving yourself something else to consider and not catastrophizing about every twitch, every tingle, or every bit of pain. Some of these symptoms are caused by things like mitochondrial damage or

nutritional deficiencies, but others are caused by anxiety and a dysregulated autonomic nervous system. Sometimes symptoms can even be triggered by the process of improving like the pain associated with muscle growth. **Accept this as truth** and you will start to see a change in your body. CBT is not about “brainwashing” yourself into pretending the symptoms are not happening. It is about opening yourself up to other possibilities, to help clear the “fog of war,” and avoiding the fear often associated with these symptoms.

I kept moving forward, determined to beat this damn illness. Slowly the muscle twitches started to improve, which was further evidence that it is not ALS. Because I kept moving forward, my strength started improving, which also doesn’t happen with ALS. The point is, I started with alternative explanations, and eventually, I got real evidence that I could truly believe in.

## **Fixing My Spirit**

I’ve debated whether to include this section in the book because I understand that religion and spirituality can be a controversial subject and I do not want to alienate anyone. In the end, I’ve decided to include it because I have to tell you



about my personal journey and that journey includes my faith. I will say at the outset that I am a Christian and I believe in God and Jesus, but I don't want to necessarily make this section about any one specific religion over another because if you dig into various spiritual beliefs, you'll find they have more in common than not. I also do want to offer a scientific view of the power of belief and how it applies to health and healing.

While I was sick and spent a lot of time in bed, and I read a lot. Mostly about health and nutrition but every night before I went to sleep, I read the Bible and prayed. It took me almost a year, but I read the Bible cover to cover. From Genesis to Revelation. Through that, I regained a belief system that was lost as I grew up.

### ***Our Innate Ability to Heal***

Put simply, I believe that we all have the **innate ability to heal** and there is solid science backing this up, which I will get into. However, from a spiritual standpoint, I believe we are **all** created in God's image and Jesus was a physical manifestation of God and he had healing power like no other because he was perfection incarnate. The thing is I believe we have the potential for that healing power also. Not on the level of Jesus

perhaps because we are flawed as humans but as Jesus himself said, “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to your mountain, ‘MOVE!’ and it WILL move... and **NOTHING will be impossible for you!**” - Matthew 17:20. If you have a tough time with the idea of “laying hands and healing,” consider the possibility for a moment that instead of Jesus having the healing power in his hands, he was able to **unleash the body’s innate healing power** through belief alone. Something I found quite intriguing, almost every time Jesus healed someone, he would say something to the effect of “your faith has healed you.” He never said “I healed you” or even “God has healed you.” It’s **your faith**. Your belief is where the miracles happen.

God, or by whatever name you refer to Him, gave our bodies an amazing ability to repair and heal themselves. Think about a cut and how it heals and regenerates tissue. Think about how amazingly powerful our immune system is in its ability to fight off illnesses of all kinds, including cancer. So you might ask why then can’t everyone not beat diseases like cancer? Honestly, no one knows. Possibly the disease is just too much for a weakened immune system to overcome but it might

come down to **faith and belief**, or the opposite, which is the physiological response that your body has to **fear and disbelief**.

Scientifically they call it the placebo effect or some researchers call it spontaneous remission. I believe there is nothing “spontaneous” about it because if you read the stories of people that have miraculously recovered from a terminal illness, most of them had a deeply held belief that they could and would beat their disease.

### ***The Story of Mr. Wright***

To illustrate this point, I will tell you the true story of Mr. Wright. It’s a well-documented case study that many doctors and medical researchers are familiar with, but I have to warn you this story does not have a happy ending. I tell it to illustrate the point that both **belief and disbelief** can have an impact on your ability to heal. Mr. Wright was found to have advanced cancer called lymphosarcoma and in 1957 was given only days to live. Hospitalized in Long Beach, CA, riddled with tumors the size of oranges, he heard that scientists had discovered a new treatment, Krebiozen, that appeared to be effective against cancer. All other treatments had failed, and time was running out. Mr. Wright’s neck, chest, abdomen,

armpits, and groin were filled with tumors, his spleen and liver were enlarged, and his cancer was causing his chest to fill up with two quarts of fluid every day, which had to be drained in order for him to breathe. Desperate, he begged his doctor to receive this new miracle drug.

After much hesitation, his physician Dr. Philip West, finally agreed and gave Mr. Wright an injection on a Friday afternoon. The following Monday, the astonished doctor found his patient out of his bed and joking with the nurses. The tumors, the doctor wrote later, "had melted like snowballs on a hot stove." Ten days after the first dose of Krebiozen, Mr. Wright left the hospital, apparently cancer-free.

Two months later, Mr. Wright read medical reports that the medication was completely ineffective at treating cancer. He suffered an immediate relapse. Astonished by the initial response to the medication and the quick relapse, Dr. Phillips wanted to try again and save his patient's life, so he did something sneaky. He told Mr. Wright that some of the initial supplies of the drug had deteriorated during shipping, making them less effective, but that he scored a new batch of highly concentrated, ultra-pure Krebiozen, which he could give him.

What he actually injected him with was distilled water. Again, to the doctor's astonishment, the tumors melted away, and the fluid in his chest disappeared.

Mr. Wright was "the picture of health" for another two months – until the American Medical Association blew it by announcing that a nationwide study of Krebiozen proved that the drug was utterly worthless in fighting cancer. Mr. Wright lost his faith in the treatment for good this time and unfortunately died just days later.

Many scientists believe that this miraculous response has something to do with how the immune system responds to belief in a treatment. It is a prime example of the placebo effect. In a blind clinical trial, pharmaceutical companies have a group that receives a test drug and an equal number getting a placebo (a fake drug). It is actually quite common for the placebo group to see 40-75% of people improving on a fake drug because they believe they're getting the real thing. The pharma companies absolutely hate this, but it happens all of the time.

### ***Belief Itself Shifts Your Biology***

You have to ask yourself, is it the fake drug that's causing the body to heal, or is it your innate immune system? Your immune system is controlled by the same part of your primitive brain and nervous system that controls the fear response. If the placebo effect is the result of belief, then what do you think the result of disbelief will be?

Belief is a powerful tool for both religious and secular practices alike. You may have heard of the “new age” practices of Manifesting what you desire. Well, Jesus taught this long before Deepak Chopra talked about it. While I was reading the Bible, a couple of scriptures of Jesus’ teachings stuck with me because they really spoke to this idea of belief.

Matthew 21:22 “**If you believe**, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

Mark 11:24 “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, **believe that you have received it**, and it will be yours.

Jesus is basically telling us that getting what we ask for comes down to belief and more specifically, believing that we have already received it or acting as if we are already healed. **Acting as if...** This type of belief evokes very specific emotions, and these emotions are what you need to tap into whether you

are praying, meditating, or doing visualizations. How do we do it? Answering these questions very specifically might help but when you answer them, try to deeply feel and experience the answers.

- If you were healed today, what emotions would you feel?
- If you were healed today, how would you feel physically?
- If you were healed today, what would you do?

There are many scientific studies showing the power of prayer, the power of meditation, and the power of the placebo effect. I recommend taking both a scientific and spiritual approach to researching self-healing. Read the book “The Biology of Belief” by Dr. Bruce Lipton. There is a documentary on Netflix called “Heal” that explores these ideas in great detail. If you are Christian or even just curious, download the Bible app read the four Gospels: Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John (the NIV version is easier to read than the KJV version). These are the stories of Jesus’ life. Also, search out stories about spontaneous remissions, and the pharmaceutical industry’s worst enemy, the placebo effect. I think you will be shocked by

the amount of evidence out there and like me, come to believe in the body's **innate ability to heal**.

Whatever course you take in your spiritual journey, the end goal is to understand and believe that there is more to us than just high-functioning mammals inhabiting a planet. There are higher powers either inside us or in the universe that we don't understand. There is an intelligent design to the miracle that is our body. I don't pretend to fully understand it myself but there is something there and something worth exploring.

In practice, what this looked like for me was daily prayer and meditation on scriptures and things I learned about spirituality. I was using healing stories found online to build my own faith. I looked at other religious practices, self-help gurus, and scientific research and found commonalities and supporting data. I listened to TedTalks and sought out testimonials of so-called faith healers. Mind you I didn't believe everything I saw or read, but I did keep an open mind to it all.

The bottom line is this. Whether or not you take a spiritual approach is up to you but there is one thing I am absolutely certain of. **If you do not believe you will ever recover, then you will probably not recover.** However, if you are able to



build an unshakable belief that you will get better and nothing will stop you, then this reality will also come to pass.

## **Putting it All Together**

Once you start putting all of these puzzle pieces together, it is easy to see how they are all connected. From the belief that you can recover, to the amazing healing power of the human body. From the knowledge to give your body the nutrition it needs to heal, to the devastating effects that stress has on that healing process. **It is all connected.**

Your journey from illness to wellness may not look like my journey but I believe that given the right information, the right attitude, and an unstoppable determination, you will recover. You have to believe that despite any setback you will undoubtedly face, you will get better. But it will not happen without putting in the work on your mind, body, and spirit.

**Mind:** Calm your mind and your body will follow. Bring in happiness and get rid of all fear and doubt. Create new neuropathways and let the old ones die.

**Body:** Heal any underlying infections, deficiencies, or imbalances and give your body an absolute pristine diet. Create a strong foundation that you can build on.

**Spirit:** Build a relationship with a higher power. Call Him whatever you want. I have to believe that God gave us the ability to heal our own bodies. This miracle of healing starts with your own belief that it will happen.

### ***Daily Affirmation Ritual Exercise (DARE)***

There are other programs out there that use an approach based on the science of neuroplasticity and rooted in CBT. I think the problem with some of those, similar to the PACE Trial, is that they don't address the full scope of health and healing. Daily use of affirmations is a powerful tool for self-improvement used by pretty much every motivational speaker, self-improvement program, psychologist, and religion known to man. Equally effective and important are the rituals we perform alongside these affirmations. As mentioned previously, rituals help us cope with grief, celebrate milestones, overcome fear, and feel in control when control is lost. Most importantly, rituals open our minds to a higher state of

consciousness and **kick the door wide open to lasting neuroplastic changes.**

I call it a ritual because it really is like a ritualistic practice. Something you do the exact same way every day to affirm your health and your progress. It may seem ridiculous and kind of cheesy, but it helped me break the cycle of trauma because it takes advantage of the science of the mind-body connection and neuroplasticity. It is completed in steps that you do and affirmations you recite to yourself. You can use my steps as is or change them to fit your symptoms and experience.

Find a secluded and quiet space where you will not be disturbed and can fully express your emotions without fear of judgment. Being able to fully express whatever emotion comes up is very important. There would be points in my ritual where I would literally break out into tears of joy with a smile ear-to-ear. This is the type of intense emotion we want to immerse ourselves in during this ritual. When you engage your emotions (positive or negative), it is easier for the brain to remember neuroplastic changes and emotions strengthen new neuropathways and connections. This can either work against us like the intense emotions in panic attacks, or we can make it

work for us by experiencing the emotions of joy, comfort, and feeling safe. It's also best to get your entire body involved if you are able. Like emotions, physical movement also helps solidify neuroplastic changes.

Also, set the mood. Not only should your space be quiet and secluded, but it should also be one that is conducive to mental and physical wellness. Turn down the lights, put on some soft meditation music, and turn on your essential oil diffuser with your favorite scent. If you have a private space in your home you can call your own, turn it into a “zen den.”

During the DARE steps, you will be talking out loud directly to yourself trying to elicit as much emotion as possible. You need to be committed and practice it at least once a day if not more. Training your brain and creating new neuropathways takes time, effort, and especially consistency. **Discipline, above all else, is required to rewire your brain.**

Start off by standing with **your back against a wall** and a **clear path in front of you**. Do you see the symbolism in this? In between each step of the ritual, you will take a **literal step forward**. These steps are an affirmation to your mind and body

of your forward progress. If you are unable to physically do this in the beginning, then imagine the movements.

I have created a [PDF document that you can download](#) and use as a guide. You can print these out and line them up on the floor in order and step forward to each one as you recite these words.

- **INTERUPT: Stop**, ruminating about my symptoms! **Stop**, giving in to the fear. **Stop**, letting this illness control my actions and feelings.
  - (Take One Step Forward)
- **REALIZATION:** I was stuck in a cycle of fear and anxiety but now I am breaking free. I realize that the health and wellness that I seek is dependent on **choices that I am in control of**.
  - (Take One Step Forward)
- **EVIDENCE:** Although my illness was triggered by (say your trigger event), **I accept the truth** that many of my symptoms were caused or made worse by chronic anxiety, nutritional deficiencies, and mitochondrial

damage. These are all things that **I can control**. (pause and think about all the evidence you've gathered.)

- (Take One Step Forward)

- **CHOICE:** My symptoms were driven by choices that I have made **in the past** but now I am **choosing a different path**. I am choosing to no longer focus on my illness and only focus on my wellness.

- (Take One Step Forward)

- **NEW PATH:** From this day forward, I will **only do things that improve my health and wellbeing**. I will turn away from **all things** that are hurting my health and wellbeing. I am in control of my thoughts, feelings, and actions.

- (Take One Step Forward)

- **PRAISE:** I am **so proud of myself** for taking these steps and staying on this new path despite all the obstacles and setbacks I face. I have made so much progress and I will continue to improve.

- (Take One Step Forward)

- **RECALL:** (visualization) Recall out loud a happy and health affirming memory in as much detail as possible, step by step leading up to the pinnacle moment of emotion. Include people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings.
  - (Take One Step Forward)
- **LOOK FORWARD:** (visualization) Detail out loud a goal in as much detail as possible, step by step leading up to the pinnacle moment, and do so in the present tense like you are currently there. Include people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings.
  - (Take One Step Forward)
- **GRATITUDE:** I am thankful for this opportunity to **restore my health** because I know that without sadness, I would not know joy and without pain, I would not experience growth. I appreciate all that I have been blessed with and send love to all who are less fortunate. I clearly see all there is to be grateful for in life and I receive it with gratitude.
  - (Be still and soak in the emotions)

The Recall and Look Forward visualizations can be difficult in the beginning so here you can download some recordings of me doing [my visualizations](#). Use these as a guide to creating your own. I encourage you to create several different visualizations and you can change them up from time to time.

Once you get this down, you will want to practice it **at least once a day** as a dedicated ritual. Make time and set it aside specifically for this and turn it into a ritual by putting effort into the process and your environment (music, lighting, essential oils, ambiance). Beyond the daily ritual, you should use these steps quietly in your mind any time you feel anxious or recognize that you are getting back into unhealthy thought patterns. If you start worrying or ruminating, **tell yourself to STOP! STOP! STOP!**

### ***My Daily Routine***

To give you an idea of how to practically implement many of these tactics, I will take you through “a day in the life” if all things went perfectly. You will need to figure out your own routine and it will change over time depending on what your needs are and where you are in your journey. However, if I could put together an ideal day, it would look like this.



## ***Waking Up***

I begin my day at around 6 am but I don't immediately get out of bed. I may sit up or just lay there for a while and practice a gratitude meditation and prayer. I start by clearing my mind completely and doing some deep breathing. I then think about things that I am thankful for and ask God to bless this day. I leave my bed with the specific intention to make this day as good as possible but understand that it will not be perfect.

## ***Breakfast***

Every meal is an opportunity for healing because FOOD IS MEDICINE. My breakfast usually consists of black coffee with no added creamer or sugar. If you can't stomach black coffee, go for some black tea, chai tea, or green tea. If you must sweeten it use honey, monk fruit sweetener, or stevia. Depending on the day, I will either have Bob's Red Mill Gluten Free Oatmeal mixed with a ground chia and flaxseed mixture that I get from Whole Foods. I've created several of my own recipes that are relatively easy to make. Blueberries and Pecans. Banana and Walnuts. Cinnamon, Dried Apples, Dried Cranberries, and Pecans. Alternatively, I will have avocado toast

and eggs scrambled with spinach sautéed in olive oil and black pepper. Whatever you eat for breakfast, make it as healthy and nutrient-dense as possible.

### ***Morning Exercise***

I then take my morning vitamin regimen, which has changed over time and will be different for you. A quality multivitamin and vitamin D3 is a good start but work with your nutritionist or FM doctor. I also mix up a pre-workout drink of BCAA's and creatine and then get to my morning exercises. Like the vitamins, exercise will be different for everyone depending on where you are in your journey. Early on in my journey, this was basically moving my body around, like a few minutes of Qigong and stretches but now I spend over an hour on heavy weightlifting.

### ***Morning Meditation***

Immediately after my exercise, I spend a few minutes in silent meditation. I believe this is important because you just exposed your body to a stressor, and you need to calm your nervous system down immediately. **Let your body know that everything is ok.** You can also do some breathing exercises and

positive self-talk or repeat your mantra over and over if you have a hard time with silent meditation.

That's it for my morning routine but I do maintain awareness of my thoughts and actions (mindfulness) throughout the day. I shut down or redirect any negative thoughts. I pause and breathe whenever I feel tension or do a quick stretch or five-minute meditation. Meditation doesn't have to be an hour-long event. Even taking a few minutes throughout the day to just pause and be still in your mind will help. Just always be mindful of your thoughts and tension in your body and find ways to alleviate it when it comes up.

## ***Lunch***

For me, lunch is the most important meal because it's my biggest meal. It usually consists of lean healthy meat, like wild-caught salmon, grass-fed beef or bison, or other healthy meat options. I pair that with a couple of vegetables of different colors and sometimes a salad made of dark leafy greens. Salad dressing is one area I give myself some leeway, but I still try to choose the healthiest options. It's also not always just about what you cook but how you cook it. Always use Olive Oil for dressing and low temp cooking and avocado oil for higher heat

cooking. Stay away from extremely high-temperature cooking and cheap oils like corn, soybean, canola, sunflower, or other seed oils. Especially stay away from any partially hydrogenated oils. Season your food with natural spices to your heart's content. Natural unprocessed spices are a gift from God and most of them are very healthy but some (like salt) you can overdo.

### ***Afternoon Self Care***

Mid-afternoon is another time I set aside for self-care and self-improvement. Because I am healthy enough now, I will do a second rigorous exercise but this time aerobic. Usually, a bike ride or if the weather is bad, 30 minutes on the elliptical. Early in my recovery I sometimes did more Qigong or just walked a few laps around the living room. Like the morning exercise, I follow this immediately with more mediation, visualizations, breathing, and other relaxations. When I can, I add in a hot sauna to give me that extra bit of hormesis. After every stressor, I make it a point to spend time in deep relaxation signaling to my nervous system, that everything is okay. The sauna gives the benefit of being both relaxing and a hormetic stressor.

I continue my day always being mindful of my negative thoughts, redirecting when I need to, and pausing for moments when I feel stress. Unlike meditation, being mindful is not something you do a couple of times a day. It's a state of being that you try to achieve at all times.

### ***Dinner and Evening***

Dinner looks a lot like lunch but for me, it's a slightly smaller meal. However, the principles of using it as an opportunity to improve your health by giving your body the REAL medicine it needs, still hold true. The importance of eating healthy and staying away from junk cannot be overstated.

From 6 pm on, it's all about winding down. Chances are you deal with some level, if not severe, insomnia and your battle against insomnia begins several hours before bedtime. Early on in your journey, when your nervous system is out of control, you will want to avoid stressors of any type as much as possible. This includes consuming media that activates your nervous system or stresses you out. Anything from watching the news (most often bad news), or any action/horror flicks, or even the stress of getting on social media looking at everyone and their perfect lives of harmony, adventure, and travel. Shut

all of that garbage out and spend your evening time taking care of yourself. If you do watch any electronics, invest in some good amber lens glasses that you wear in the evenings, preferably once the sun goes down.

### ***Bedtime***

About an hour before bed, I recommend shutting all unnecessary electronics off. This is a time to spend reflecting on the day in a journal (or journaling app), in deep meditation, reading the Bible, and to cap it off with a relaxing guided visualization. One of my favorites is “The Healing Spring” from The Honest Guys, which you can find on YouTube and Spotify. If you have a bathtub, climb in and take a hot bath. Raising your body temperature before bed will actually help cool it off while sleeping. By doing these things, I went from taking 1-2 hours to fall asleep for the past 10 years, to literally taking 10-20 minutes to fall asleep.

I repeat this daily routine in slight variations every day of the week except for Sunday. This is the sabbath day and a good opportunity to let your body rest. If you need more than one day to rest, then that’s okay. Give yourself permission to rest when you need to. However, besides your rest days, always try

to do at least as much as you did the day before and possibly a little more.

I think one of the most important things we can do during our recovery is to create a daily/hourly routine. Use your phone or computer calendar to create a schedule of recurring daily tasks. Set reminders so that if you skip something, you are doing it with intention and not because you forgot. Routine is critically important for people that experience emotional trauma of any sort. Routines mean stability and stability is something we need in our lives during turbulent times. Also, a routine can help you track progress as your routine changes. Don't beat yourself up if you miss a day because as the quote from Mary Anne Radmacher reminds us ... "I'll try again tomorrow."



For a printable version of this image, [click here](#).

## Conclusion

If you have read other stories of people who have recovered from chronic fatigue syndrome or similar chronic illnesses, you will see that they have recovered in many different ways. But if you look closely, you will also see that they followed a journey similar to what is in this book, even if they didn't realize it. Their transformation often started by changing how they viewed their illness and shifted their thinking and their focus



went from their illness to focusing on their wellness. This shift in thinking was the beginning of the end of their suffering.

I believe mitochondrial damage underlies many of the symptoms. You have mitochondria in every cell of your body and the areas where mitochondria are most dense are the brain, heart, eyes, and lastly skeletal muscle. Many things can damage mitochondria including environmental toxins, medications, poor diet, sedentary lifestyle, and even aging causes the mitochondrial function to decline. If your mitochondria are failing or under-performing, then you will have significant and widespread symptoms and have difficulty recovering from any stressor or illness. Think about all the symptoms you have and how mitochondria might play a role. Now think about how your illness itself has contributed to further mitochondrial damage from inactivity, muscle atrophy, lack of nutrients from malabsorption, or inability to efficiently eliminate toxins.

This is not to say that mitochondria dysfunction is the only issue but it's a primary driver in my opinion. Also at play is the negative impact that constant stress and anxiety has on your ability to heal. It's well known that even low levels of chronic

stress can contribute to serious illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, and autoimmune diseases. Stress triggers a cascade of hormones and biochemicals meant to help us during short-term stress, but on a chronic basis can cause a lot of damage. If low levels of stress can do this, imagine what chronic fear and anxiety can do. Anyone who faces down serious illness will experience fear, anxiety, and trauma. It happens to the strongest of us, even if we are able to put on a brave face in public. My father was one of the strongest and most steadfast men I ever knew. In my eyes, he was the absolute model of what a man should be. However, when he was diagnosed with leukemia, I saw a fear in him that I had never seen before. I didn't recognize it at the time as fear because it manifested as sadness, anger, bitterness and he began acting irrationally. But having now faced illness myself, I understand that it was fear that drove his emotional downward spiral and likely made his illness worse. I wish I would have known then, what I know now. Perhaps with the right nutritional and mind-body interventions, his life could have been extended beyond his 64 years. My point is that even the strongest among us would struggle when faced with their own mortality. It's perfectly

normal and nothing to be ashamed of but it is something we need to keep in control and get help with.

The challenge is, how we cope with this normal fear response to severe illness. I've outlined many different tools and strategies and some of which delve into our spirituality. Even if you don't practice a specific religion, it's important to believe in something bigger than ourselves. Even the most prominent scientific minds realize that there is more to our existence than simple biology. Albert Einstein wrote, "Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that some spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe, one that is vastly superior to that of man." Louis Pasteur, the father of microbiology and immunology once said, "A little science estranges men from God, but much science leads them back to Him." It's important to open yourself up to the belief of the body's miraculous ability to heal itself whether it be biological or spiritual. Whatever form that discovery takes is ultimately up to you but in the absence of a scientific explanation of spontaneous remissions and the placebo effect, we have Devine power and intelligent design.

Even outside of religion and science, it's important to adopt habits, routines, and rituals that are health affirming like the DARE steps that I outlined earlier in this book. Like everything else in this book, DARE will not likely be successful without doing all of the other things discussed. Your success lies in the broader idea that is repeated throughout this book and that is to **stop focusing on illness and start focusing on wellness.**

If I could leave you with one piece of advice it would be this. Once you stop focusing on your illness and start focusing on your wellness, you will begin a journey. It will be a long and sometimes very difficult journey and one with many obstacles and bad days. But you must stay the course and don't give up. To remind you of this truth, I give you this one final thought.

**Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds you plant, because the day you plant the seed is not the day you eat the fruit.**

Thank you and may God bless you on your journey to good health.

## Recommended Content

### ***Books***

Food: What the Heck Should I Eat?  
by Mark Hyman M.D.

Eat to Beat Disease: The New Science of How Your Body Can  
Heal Itself  
by William W. Li

Sleep Smarter: 21 Essential Strategies to Sleep Your Way to a  
Better Body, Better Health, and Bigger Success  
by Shawn Stevenson

Eat Smarter: Use the Power of Food to Reboot Your  
Metabolism, Upgrade Your Brain, and Transform Your Life  
by Shawn Stevenson

Lifespan  
by Dr. David Sinclair

Headstrong  
by Dave Asprey

The Brain that Changes Itself  
by Norman Doidge

Diagnosis and Treatment of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and  
Myalgic Encephalitis: It's Mitochondria, Not Hypochondria  
by Sarah Myhill

The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness,  
Matter & Miracles  
by Bruce Lipton

### ***YouTube Channels***

The Honest Guys: Meditations and Relaxation  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/  
UC4jWo5kiyOCt4PnvF4jbaLg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC4jWo5kiyOCt4PnvF4jbaLg)

Mark Hyman, MD: Health and Nutrition  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/  
UC5luDMmKWSsBFB0iKky6aEQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5luDMmKWSsBFB0iKky6aEQ)

Chris Masterjohn, Ph.D.: Health and Nutrition  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSJJM-  
c27d\\_DiuaqcZAOMUg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSJJM-c27d_DiuaqcZAOMUg)

The Anxiety Guy: Mental Health  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/  
UCh6HDKcLwJioBBSprqfezA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCh6HDKcLwJioBBSprqfezA)

George Thompson: Meditation and Relaxation  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/  
UCAGTpcuP8o9\\_sWzvDGfZYKA](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAGTpcuP8o9_sWzvDGfZYKA)

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche: Meditation and Relaxation  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/MingyurRinpoche>

Shawn Stevenson: Health and Nutrition  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtFV6nJ5zZ0\\_SXBkikfLlg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtFV6nJ5zZ0_SXBkikfLlg)

Dr. Rhonda Patrick: Health and Nutrition

<https://www.youtube.com/user/FoundMyFitness>

Kati Morton: Mental Health

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzBYOHyEEzlkRdDOSobbpvw>

## ***Research Topics***

This is a collection of research topics that I encourage you to explore. One of my favorite resources is of course books but also YouTube. You don't have to believe everything you encounter but do keep an open mind.

- Neuroplasticity and Rewiring the Brain
- Science of Placebo and Belief
- Healing Power of God
- Meditation and Visualization Techniques
- Various Breathing Techniques
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Neurolinguistics Programming (NLP)
- Nutrition and Food as Medicine
- Inflammation related to foods and toxin

- Mitochondrial health and mitogenesis
- Hormesis
- Qigong
- Other Recovery Stories