



A PLAIN-ENGLISH GUIDE

Well by Nature

*A Plain-English Guide to Feeling Strong, Steady
and Well*

Well by Nature

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Five Simple Recipes

A Note Before You Begin

This is a book about the ordinary things that make a big difference: what you drink, how you move, how you sleep, what goes on your plate, and one small green leaf that deserves more attention than it gets. None of it is complicated. Most of it your grandmother would recognize.

It was written for anyone who would like the years ahead to feel as good as possible. Not for athletes. Not for people who want to overhaul their lives by Monday. For people who want a clear, honest explanation of what helps, and a few habits that fit into a real week.

You will notice that this book does not promise to cure anything. That is on purpose. Your body is remarkably good at looking after itself when it is given what it needs, and the point of these pages is to help you give it those things, steadily, for a long time. If you take one habit from each chapter and keep it, you will have done more for yourself than most people ever do.

How to use this book

Read it in order or dip into the chapter you need. Each one ends with a short **Try this week** box: one or two things you can start right away without buying anything or changing your whole routine. The last chapter puts it all together into a simple week you can print and keep on the refrigerator.

A word about your doctor

Nothing in this book replaces the advice of a physician who knows you. If you take medication, have a medical condition, or are unsure whether a habit here is right for you, please ask. Bring the book along if you like. Good doctors welcome patients who want to take care of themselves.

Your Body Wants to Be Well

The five daily basics that do most of the work

Here is something that gets lost in all the noise about health: your body is on your side. Every day, without being asked, it repairs tissue, fights off germs, balances fluids, rebuilds bone, and clears out what it doesn't need. It has been doing this since before you were born. It is very good at it.

What changes as we get older is not that the body stops trying. It is that the margins get thinner. When you were thirty, you could skip water all day, sleep five hours, eat whatever was quickest, and still feel fine by lunchtime. Now the bill comes due faster. A poor night shows up in your knees. A week of sandwiches and coffee shows up in your energy, your digestion, your mood.

The encouraging part is that the reverse is also true. Give the body a little more of what it needs, consistently, and it responds more quickly than most people expect. Not overnight, but within weeks. People notice they are sleeping through the night, that the afternoon slump is milder, that they got up from the garden without thinking about it.

The five basics

If you stripped away every diet book, every supplement aisle and every wellness trend, five things would be left standing. They are not glamorous, and that is exactly why they work.

1. **Water.** Enough of it, spread through the day. The single most neglected habit of all, and the easiest to fix.
2. **Movement.** Walking most days, something for strength twice a week, and a little balance work. Not a gym membership. A routine you will actually keep.

3. **Sleep.** Seven to eight hours, most nights, in a dark, cool room. Everything else in this book works better when this one is in place.
4. **Real food.** Protein at every meal, vegetables at two of them, and far fewer things that come in a crinkly package.
5. **Nutrient density.** Making sure that what you eat actually carries vitamins and minerals, not just calories. This is where dark leafy greens, and the moringa leaf in particular, earn their place.

Each of these gets its own chapter. But it helps to see them together first, because they lean on each other. Sleep is easier when you have walked. Walking is easier when you have eaten properly. Eating properly is easier when you are not dehydrated and mistaking thirst for hunger. Get two of the five right and the other three get easier on their own.

The eighty percent rule

You do not need to be perfect. You need to be consistent. A useful way to think about it: aim to get these basics right about eighty percent of the time. That leaves room for a birthday cake, a late night with the grandchildren, a lazy Sunday. The body is forgiving of the occasional lapse. What it struggles with is the pattern.

This also means you can stop feeling guilty. Guilt is not a health habit. If you missed a walk, you missed a walk. Take one tomorrow.

The body is forgiving of the occasional lapse. What it struggles with is the pattern.

What to expect, and when

People sometimes give up on a good habit because they expected fireworks in three days. Here is a more honest timeline, based on what most people report:

- **The first week:** better hydration shows up first. Fewer headaches, clearer thinking in the afternoon, sometimes more trips to the bathroom while your body adjusts.

- **Two to three weeks:** sleep begins to settle. Daily walks start to feel like part of the day rather than a chore. Digestion often becomes more regular.
- **One to two months:** energy is steadier across the day. Clothes may fit a little differently. Stairs feel easier. This is usually when friends start asking what you have been doing.
- **Three months and beyond:** the habits are simply how you live now. This is the goal.

Start where you are

You may already be doing three of the five basics well. Good. Then this book will help you with the other two. You may be doing none of them, and feel tired just reading the list. That is fine too. Pick one. Water is a good first choice, because it costs nothing and you will feel the difference within days.

There is no starting line you have to reach first. There is only tomorrow morning, and a glass of water on the nightstand.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Put a full glass of water on your nightstand tonight. Drink it before your feet touch the floor in the morning.
- Read the list of five basics once more and circle the one you already do well. Then circle the one that would be easiest to add. Start there.

Water

The simplest habit with the biggest return

If you take one thing from this book, take this: many of us are mildly dehydrated most of the time, and they don't know it. The reason is simple and a little unfair. As we age, the body's thirst signal gets quieter. You can be running low on water and feel nothing at all, or feel it as something else entirely: a headache, a tired afternoon, a foggy hour after lunch, a craving for something sweet.

Water is involved in nearly everything the body does. It carries nutrients into cells and waste out of them. It keeps blood at the right thickness, cushions joints, regulates temperature, and helps the bowels move. When there is not quite enough of it, all of those jobs get done a little worse.

How much is enough?

The old advice of eight glasses a day is a reasonable starting point for most adults, and it is easier to remember than a formula. Around six to eight cups of plain water, plus whatever comes from tea, soup and fruit, suits most adults. You need more on hot days, on days you walk further, and if you are recovering from a cold.

The simplest check is the one you already know: pale yellow is good, dark yellow means drink more. If you take vitamins, the color may be brighter than usual for a few hours; that is the vitamins, not dehydration.

If your doctor has asked you to limit fluids for a heart or kidney condition, follow that advice rather than this chapter. The rest of the book still applies.

Why timing matters more than quantity

Drinking a quart of water at nine at night is not the same as drinking it through the day. It will mostly wake you up at two in the morning. Spread it out instead. A pattern many people find easy to keep:

- **On waking:** a full glass, before coffee. You have gone seven or eight hours without a drop.
- **Mid-morning:** a glass, ideally with a short walk or a stretch.
- **Before lunch and before dinner:** a glass twenty to thirty minutes ahead of the meal. If you take moringa capsules, this is also the best moment for them.
- **Mid-afternoon:** a glass, right when the slump usually hits. Half the time, the slump is thirst.
- **Evening:** a smaller glass with dinner, then taper off two hours before bed.

Making it easy

Habits stick when they are convenient. Keep a glass or a bottle where you spend your time: by the chair, on the kitchen counter, in the car. A marked bottle that shows how much you have had takes the counting out of it. Some people fill a two-quart jug in the morning and simply aim to finish it by dinner.

If plain water bores you, that is a real obstacle, not a character flaw. Add a slice of lemon or cucumber, a few mint leaves, or a splash of unsweetened cranberry juice. Herbal teas count. Sparkling water counts. Coffee and tea count too, in moderation, although they are best thought of as a bonus rather than the main supply.

What does not count

Sodas, sweetened iced teas, energy drinks and most bottled “waters” with flavoring add sugar or sweeteners you do not need. Alcohol pulls water out of the body rather than putting it in. Neither belongs on the tally.

Half the time, the afternoon slump is thirst.

Water and the moringa leaf

There is a practical reason the two belong together. Moringa leaf is rich in minerals, including potassium and magnesium, that the body uses to hold and balance fluid properly. Taking the capsules with a full glass of water, before a meal, gives them the best chance of doing their work and gives you a reliable reminder to drink. Two habits for the price of one.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Choose one bottle or glass and make it your water bottle. Fill it first thing. Refill it at lunch. Finish it by dinner.
- For three days, when the afternoon slump arrives, drink a glass of water before you reach for anything else. See what happens.

Movement You'll Actually Do

Walking, strength and balance, without a gym

The single best predictor of how well someone gets around at eighty is how much they moved at sixty. Not how hard. How much, and how regularly. This chapter is not about exercise programs. It is about building a body that carries you comfortably through the years ahead, using movement you will still be doing in a decade.

Walking is the foundation

Walking is the most underrated activity in the world. It is free, it is gentle on the joints, it works the heart and lungs, it steadies blood sugar after meals, it lifts the mood, and it improves sleep. Almost everyone can do some of it.

The target that shows up again and again in the research is around thirty minutes a day, most days. But you do not have to do it all at once. Three ten-minute walks work just as well, and for many people they are easier to fit in: one after breakfast, one after lunch, one after dinner. The after-meal walks are particularly valuable; a short stroll within an hour of eating helps the body handle the meal.

Start with whatever you can do comfortably, even if that is five minutes to the corner and back. Add a minute or two each week. Comfort is the guide. You should be able to hold a conversation; if you cannot, slow down.

Strength twice a week

With age, the body loses muscle unless it is given a reason to keep it. Muscle is what gets you out of a low chair, carries the groceries, catches you when you stumble. Keeping it does not require weights or a gym. Twice a week, ten to fifteen minutes, is enough to make a real difference. Here is a routine that needs nothing but a sturdy chair:

- **Sit-to-stand.** Sit on the front of a chair, feet flat. Stand up without using your hands, then sit back down slowly. Eight to twelve times. This one exercise does more for independence than any other.
- **Wall push-ups.** Stand an arm's length from a wall, hands flat on it at shoulder height. Bend your elbows to bring your chest toward the wall, then push back. Ten to fifteen times.
- **Heel raises.** Holding the back of the chair, rise onto the balls of your feet and lower slowly. Twelve to fifteen times. Good for calves and balance.
- **Standing march.** Holding the chair if needed, lift one knee toward your hip, then the other, for thirty seconds.
- **Grocery-bag curls.** Fill two bags with a few cans each. Curl them toward your shoulders, ten times. Add a can when it gets easy.

Do the whole set once, rest a minute, and do it again if you feel good. That is your strength session.

Balance, the forgotten third

Falls are the thing most of us fear as we age, and balance is trainable. Stand behind a kitchen chair while the kettle boils and practice standing on one foot for ten seconds, then the other. Walk heel-to-toe along a line in the hallway. Stand up from your chair and sit down without looking at it. A minute a day is enough.

Comfort is the guide. You should be able to hold a conversation.

Making it stick

Attach movement to something you already do. Walk after breakfast because you always have breakfast. Do heel raises while the coffee brews. Do the chair routine during the evening news. Habits attached to existing routines survive; habits that need a decision every day usually do not.

Find company if you can. A walking partner, a neighbor, a dog. People who walk with someone walk more often and enjoy it more.

When to be careful

Sharp pain is a stop sign. Mild stiffness that eases as you move is normal and usually improves with regular activity. If you have a heart condition, joint replacements or a history of falls, ask your doctor which of these are right for you before starting. Most will say “all of them, gently.”

TRY THIS WEEK

- Take a ten-minute walk after one meal a day. Same meal every day, so it becomes automatic.
- Do the sit-to-stand exercise once, eight times, while the kettle boils. Notice how it feels. Do it again in three days.

Sleep Like You Used To

Getting the seven hours that make everything else work

Ask people what they miss most, and sleep comes up more often than you would think. Falling asleep takes longer. Staying asleep is harder. Three in the morning becomes a familiar hour. Some of this is normal aging; sleep does get lighter with the years. But a great deal of it is habit, and habits can be changed.

Sleep is when the body does its repair work. Muscles rebuild, the brain files the day away, the immune system restocks. Skimp on it and everything in this book gets harder: you crave sugar, you skip the walk, you feel thirsty but reach for coffee. Fix it and the other habits fall into place with far less effort.

The morning sets up the night

Good sleep starts at breakfast. The body runs on a roughly twenty-four-hour clock, and that clock is set mostly by light. Get ten or fifteen minutes of daylight within an hour of waking, ideally outside, and your body will start preparing for sleep at the right time that evening. A walk after breakfast does this job perfectly. On dark winter mornings, sit by the brightest window you have.

Keep your waking time steady, weekends included. It is more important than a steady bedtime. The body can cope with a late night if it knows when morning is.

Caffeine has a long tail

Caffeine takes five to six hours to clear half of itself from the body, and longer as we age. A cup at three in the afternoon is still working at nine at night. If sleep is a struggle, move the last coffee or black tea to before noon and see what a week does. Many people are surprised.

The last two hours

Treat the two hours before bed as a runway. Dim the lights. Turn the television and phone down or off; their screens tell the brain it is daytime. Have a warm drink without caffeine, chamomile tea or warm milk if you like it. Read something on paper. Keep the same small routine each night so the body learns the signal.

A large meal late in the evening keeps the digestive system busy when it should be resting. Finish dinner three hours before bed when you can. A light snack, a banana or a few crackers, is fine if you are hungry.

The bedroom

Cool, dark and quiet. Most people sleep best around 65 degrees. Blackout curtains or a simple eye mask make a surprising difference, especially in summer. If a partner snores or the street is noisy, earplugs or a fan for steady background sound are worth trying.

Use the bed for sleep. Not for worrying, not for the news. If you have been lying awake for twenty minutes, get up, sit in a chair in low light, and read something dull until you feel sleepy. Then go back. It feels counterintuitive, but it works, and it stops the bed from becoming a place you associate with frustration.

The body can cope with a late night if it knows when morning is.

About that three o'clock waking

Waking briefly in the night is normal and always has been. The problem is what happens next. If you check the clock, start calculating how many hours are left, and begin worrying, you are awake for good. Keep the clock turned away. Tell yourself that resting quietly is still rest. Breathe slowly: in for four counts, out for six. Most people drift back off within minutes once they stop fighting it.

Two practical causes are worth ruling out: too much fluid late in the evening, which the last chapter covered, and a room that has warmed up overnight. Both are easily fixed.

Naps

A short nap after lunch, twenty minutes or less, is fine and can be restorative. Longer naps, or naps after four in the afternoon, borrow from the night. If night sleep is the problem, skip the nap for two weeks and see if the nights improve.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Pick a waking time and keep it every day for seven days, weekends included. Get outside, or to a bright window, within the first hour.
- Move your last caffeinated drink to before noon. Just for a week. Judge by how you feel on day seven.

The Kitchen Table Plate

Real food, without a diet

You do not need a diet. You need a plate you can build without thinking, from foods you can buy at any grocery store, that leaves you satisfied and keeps you well. That is what this chapter is about. No counting, no forbidden foods, no special products. Just a pattern.

The half-quarter-quarter plate

Picture a dinner plate. Fill half of it with vegetables, cooked or raw, in as many colors as you can manage. Fill one quarter with protein: chicken, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, a piece of beef or pork, cottage cheese. Fill the last quarter with a starchy food: potatoes, rice, whole-grain bread, oats, corn, beans again. Add a little fat for flavor and fullness: olive oil, butter, avocado, a handful of nuts.

That is the whole method. It works for breakfast (eggs, spinach, toast), for lunch (a big salad with tuna and a roll), for dinner (roast chicken, two vegetables, a potato). It works in a restaurant. It works at Thanksgiving, more or less.

Protein at every meal

This is the part most people get wrong, and it matters more with every year. The body becomes less efficient at using protein to maintain muscle as we age, so it needs a bit more, spread across the day, rather than one big serving at dinner. Aim for a palm-sized portion at each meal: a couple of eggs, a piece of fish the size of your hand, a cup of beans or lentils, a chicken thigh, a bowl of Greek yogurt.

Breakfast is where protein usually goes missing. Cereal and toast are mostly starch. Swap in eggs a few days a week, or stir Greek yogurt into your oats, or have last night's leftovers. You will notice you are not hungry again by ten.

Fiber keeps things moving

Vegetables, fruit, beans, oats, whole grains, nuts and seeds all carry fiber, and fiber does quiet, important work: it feeds the good bacteria in the gut, keeps the bowels regular, slows the release of sugar from a meal, and keeps you full. Most Americans get about half the fiber they need. The half-plate of vegetables fixes most of that on its own. A piece of fruit as a snack and beans a few times a week take care of the rest.

Add fiber gradually if you are not used to it, and drink water alongside. The two work together.

Fewer crinkly packages

There is no need to be a purist. But the foods that do the most quiet damage are the ones engineered to be eaten past the point of fullness: chips, cookies, sweetened cereals, pastries, sodas, most things at the checkout. They are high in sugar, refined starch and salt, low in everything the body actually needs, and very easy to overdo. The simplest rule of thumb: if it has more than five ingredients and you cannot picture most of them, it is an occasional food, not a daily one.

*Half the plate vegetables, a quarter protein, a quarter starch.
That is the whole method.*

Fat is not the enemy

For decades we were told to fear fat. The better advice is to choose it well. Olive oil, avocados, nuts, seeds, oily fish like salmon and sardines, and modest amounts of butter and cheese are all fine and make food worth eating. What to limit is the fat in fried fast food and packaged snacks. A drizzle of olive oil over vegetables makes them taste better and helps you absorb the vitamins in them. It is a habit worth keeping.

A shopping list that builds the plate

Protein

- Eggs

Vegetables & fruit

- Frozen mixed vegetables

- Chicken thighs or breasts
- Canned tuna, salmon, sardines
- Frozen fish fillets
- Greek yogurt, cottage cheese
- Canned beans, lentils

Starch

- Potatoes, sweet potatoes
- Oats
- Brown rice
- Whole-grain bread

- Bagged spinach or kale
- Carrots, onions, cabbage
- Tomatoes, peppers
- Apples, bananas, berries
- Anything in season

Fats & flavor

- Olive oil
- Nuts and seeds
- Butter
- Garlic, herbs, lemon

Frozen vegetables and canned fish deserve a special mention. They are cheap, they keep for months, and nutritionally they are every bit as good as fresh. A freezer with vegetables and a cupboard with beans and tuna means there is always a good plate ten minutes away.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Build the half-quarter-quarter plate at dinner every night for a week. Do not change anything else.
- Add a palm of protein to breakfast three mornings this week. Notice whether you are hungry before lunch.

Steady Energy All Day

How meals, movement and sleep keep the afternoon slump away

Most people describe their energy the same way: fine in the morning, a dip after lunch, a second wind around dinner, then wide awake at eleven. That pattern is not age. It is mostly the result of what we eat and when, how much we move, and the sleep from the night before. All three can be adjusted, and the afternoon slump is usually the first thing to improve.

Where energy comes from

Every meal is turned into sugar in the blood, which the body then moves into cells to use as fuel. When a meal is mostly refined starch or sugar, that sugar arrives in a rush, the body works hard to bring it down, and an hour or two later you feel the dip: tired, foggy, hungry again, reaching for a cookie. When the same meal includes protein, fiber and some fat, the sugar arrives slowly and steadily, and the energy lasts until the next meal.

This is the same half-quarter-quarter plate from the last chapter, seen from a different angle. It is not only about health years from now. It is about how you feel at three this afternoon.

Three habits that flatten the slump

1. **Pair every carbohydrate with protein or fiber.** Toast with eggs, not toast alone. An apple with a few almonds. Rice with chicken and vegetables rather than rice with sauce. Fruit after a meal rather than on an empty stomach.
2. **Walk after lunch.** Even ten minutes. Working muscles pull sugar from the blood without any help, which smooths the peak and the dip that follows. It also gets you into daylight, which helps tonight's sleep.

3. **Do not skip breakfast to “save up.”** A morning without food often ends in a large, fast lunch and a hard slump. A modest breakfast with protein sets up the whole day.

Breakfasts that hold you until lunch

- Two eggs, any style, with a slice of whole-grain toast and a piece of fruit.
- Greek yogurt with berries, a spoon of oats and a few walnuts.
- Overnight oats: oats soaked in milk with a spoonful of peanut butter and a sliced banana.
- Cottage cheese with tomatoes and cracked pepper on toast.
- Last night's leftovers. There is no rule that breakfast has to be breakfast food.

The role of minerals

Energy also depends on minerals that quietly run the machinery: iron carries oxygen in the blood, magnesium is involved in hundreds of reactions that turn food into fuel, and the B vitamins help release energy from what you eat. With age, absorbing these becomes a little less efficient, which is one reason nutrient-dense foods matter more with each year. Dark leafy greens are among the best sources, and the moringa leaf is unusually rich in iron, magnesium and B vitamins for a plant, which is why people who add it often say the first thing they notice is steadier energy.

It is not only about health years from now. It is about how you feel at three this afternoon.

Coffee, honestly

Coffee is not the problem most people fear. One or two cups in the morning is fine for most adults and comes with a few benefits of its own. The trouble starts when coffee replaces breakfast, or when it becomes the fix for every dip after noon. Use it as a pleasure in the morning, not as fuel through the day, and keep the afternoon for water and a walk.

A note on the “second wind”

Feeling wide awake at eleven at night is often the flip side of a poorly fed, poorly moved day. When the daytime pattern settles, the evening one usually does too. If it does not, look again at the sleep chapter, especially the sections on light and caffeine.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Add protein to every carbohydrate for seven days: eggs with the toast, nuts with the apple, beans with the rice. Nothing else changes.
- Take a ten-minute walk after lunch on at least four days. Keep a simple note of how the afternoon felt on those days compared with the others.

Digestion in Good Working Order

Comfort, regularity and the quiet work of the gut

Nobody likes to talk about digestion, and most of us think about it more than we used to. Meals sit heavier. Regularity becomes less regular. Foods that never caused trouble suddenly do. The good news is that the digestive system responds to simple, consistent care faster than almost any other part of the body.

What the gut needs

Four things, in order of importance: fiber, water, movement and time. Fiber gives the bowel something to work with and feeds the beneficial bacteria that live there. Water keeps everything soft and moving. Movement, especially walking, stimulates the natural rhythm of the gut. And time, meaning regular meal times and unhurried eating, lets the system do its job in order.

Fiber, without the discomfort

The vegetables, fruit, beans and whole grains from the food chapter are the foundation. If your diet has been low in fiber, add it gradually over two or three weeks rather than all at once, and increase water at the same time. A sudden jump in fiber without water can cause the very bloating people are trying to avoid.

A few foods are particularly helpful: oats in the morning, a serving of beans or lentils most days, a pear or an apple with the skin on, ground flaxseed or chia stirred into yogurt, and a daily portion of cooked leafy greens. Prunes, of course, have earned their reputation honestly.

Chew, and slow down

Digestion begins in the mouth. Food that is chewed well is easier on the stomach and is absorbed more completely. Eating slowly also gives the body time to register fullness, which usually arrives about twenty minutes after you start. Put the fork down between bites. Sit down to eat. Do not eat standing at the counter or in the car if you can help it.

Meal timing

The gut likes rhythm. Eating at roughly the same times each day, and leaving three or four hours between meals, allows one meal to be dealt with before the next arrives. Late, heavy dinners are the most common cause of night-time discomfort; move dinner earlier or make it lighter, and keep the two hours before bed for a small snack at most.

Fiber, water, movement and time. In that order.

Friendly bacteria

The gut is home to trillions of bacteria that help break down food, make certain vitamins, and support the immune system. They thrive on fiber and are helped along by fermented foods: plain yogurt with live cultures, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, real pickles. A serving most days is plenty. You do not need expensive products; a tub of plain yogurt does the job.

Moringa and the gut

Moringa leaf contains natural fiber and a range of plant compounds that have long been valued in traditional diets for supporting comfortable digestion. Taken before a meal with a glass of water, the capsules fit neatly into the rhythm this chapter describes. Many people find that regularity is the first change they notice, usually within the first two or three weeks.

When to see a doctor

Most digestive complaints respond to the habits above. But some things should always be checked: blood in the stool, unexplained weight loss, pain that wakes you at night, difficulty swallowing, or a change in bowel habit that lasts more than a few weeks. These are not things to manage with fiber. Make the appointment.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Eat oats or a serving of beans every day this week, with an extra glass of water alongside.
- Sit down for every meal, put the fork down between bites, and aim to take fifteen minutes over lunch and twenty over dinner.

Strong Bones, Easy Joints

Keeping the frame that carries you

Bones and joints are where age tends to announce itself first: a stiff morning, a knee that complains on stairs, a hip that reminds you it exists. Some wear is inevitable. A great deal is not, and the habits that protect the frame are the same ones that help everything else: movement, protein, minerals, sunlight and a healthy weight.

Bone is alive

It is easy to think of bone as something fixed, like the frame of a house. It is not. Bone is living tissue that is constantly being broken down and rebuilt, and as we get older the rebuilding side of the ledger needs help to keep up. Three things tell the body to keep building: load, protein and minerals.

- **Load.** Bone strengthens in response to being used. Walking, stair climbing, the chair exercises from chapter three, carrying groceries, gardening: anything that makes the bones bear weight sends the signal to rebuild. Swimming and cycling are wonderful for the heart but do less for bone; if they are your main activity, add some walking or strength work.
- **Protein.** About half of bone by volume is protein. The palm-sized portion at every meal from chapter five is doing double duty here.
- **Minerals.** Calcium is the one everyone knows, but bone also needs magnesium, phosphorus, potassium and vitamin K, and it needs vitamin D to absorb calcium in the first place.

Where the minerals come from

Dairy is the familiar source of calcium, and it is a good one: milk, yogurt and cheese. But calcium also comes from canned sardines and salmon with the bones, from tofu, from almonds, and from dark leafy greens like kale, collards and bok choy. Magnesium and potassium come mostly from plants: greens, beans, nuts, seeds, bananas, potatoes. The moringa leaf is notable here; gram for gram, dried moringa leaf is one of the more concentrated plant sources of calcium, magnesium and potassium there is, which is part of why it has been used in traditional diets for so long.

Vitamin D and daylight

Vitamin D is made in the skin in sunlight, and as we age the skin makes less of it. Fifteen to twenty minutes of midday sun on the arms and face, several times a week, helps in the warmer months. In winter, or for people who spend most days indoors, food alone rarely provides enough, and many doctors recommend a vitamin D supplement as we get older. A simple blood test tells you where you stand; it is worth asking about at your next visit.

Joints want to move

The instinct when a joint is stiff is to rest it. In most cases the opposite helps. Cartilage has no blood supply of its own; it is fed by movement, which pumps nutrients in and out. A stiff knee usually feels better after ten minutes of gentle walking than after an hour in the chair. Start slowly, warm up, and let comfort guide the pace.

Weight matters too. Every extra pound on the body is several extra pounds on the knees with each step. Losing even a modest amount, if you carry more than you would like, is one of the kindest things you can do for your joints. The next book in this set, on eating well, is about exactly that.

Cartilage is fed by movement.

Foods that help the body manage inflammation

A healthy inflammatory response is part of how the body repairs itself; the aim is not to shut it off, but to support the body in keeping it in balance. The pattern that helps is the one already on your plate: colorful vegetables and fruit, oily fish twice a week, olive oil, nuts, herbs and spices, and dark leafy greens, along with fewer packaged foods and sugary drinks. Moringa leaf is rich in antioxidants, including quercetin, that support this natural balance, and many active people, gardeners and walkers especially, say they feel the difference in their mornings.

A short daily routine for the frame

1. Two minutes of gentle movement on waking: shoulder rolls, ankle circles, a slow reach for the ceiling.
2. A walk, with a few minutes outdoors in daylight.
3. Protein at each meal; greens at two of them.
4. The chair strength routine twice a week.
5. A minute of balance practice while the kettle boils.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Add one calcium-rich food each day: a serving of yogurt, a can of sardines, a big handful of cooked greens.
- Ask your doctor about a vitamin D test at your next appointment, or make a note to raise it.

Greens, Herbs and the Moringa Leaf

Why nutrient density matters more with every year

There is a difference between eating enough and being nourished. Plenty of people eat plenty of food and still run low on the vitamins and minerals the body uses to make energy, build bone, keep the immune system ready and the mind clear. The reason is nutrient density: how much goodness a food carries for the space it takes on the plate. This chapter is about the foods that carry the most, and one leaf in particular.

Why this matters more with age

Two things change with age. Appetite often shrinks, so there is less room on the plate for everything the body needs. And absorption becomes less efficient; the stomach produces less acid, and the gut takes up certain nutrients, including vitamin B12, iron, calcium and magnesium, less readily than it once did. The answer to both is the same: make every mouthful count.

The greens rule

Dark leafy greens are the most nutrient-dense foods most people can buy: spinach, kale, collards, chard, arugula, watercress, bok choy, and the leaves of the moringa tree. They carry vitamins A, C and K, folate and other B vitamins, iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium, fiber and a long list of plant compounds that support the body's natural defenses. A simple rule: greens at two meals a day. A handful of spinach in the morning eggs. A big salad or a side of cooked greens at dinner. Frozen spinach and kale make this easy in any season.

The moringa leaf

Moringa is a fast-growing tree native to the foothills of the Himalayas and now grown across the tropics. Its leaves have been eaten for centuries in India, Africa and Southeast Asia, where the tree has a reputation as a reliable source of nourishment in places and seasons when other foods are scarce. That reputation has held up well under modern analysis.

Dried moringa leaf is unusually concentrated. Weight for weight, it is rich in vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, potassium, iron and protein, along with magnesium, zinc and B vitamins. It also carries a range of antioxidants, including quercetin and chlorogenic acid, that help the body manage everyday oxidative stress. Studies in healthy adults have looked at moringa leaf's support for antioxidant levels, healthy blood sugar and cholesterol already in the normal range, and a healthy inflammatory response; the research is still growing, but the direction is consistent with what traditional diets have long suggested.

A word of honesty: no single food does everything, and moringa is not a substitute for the habits in the earlier chapters. Think of it as the most concentrated green you can add to a good routine, not as a replacement for one.

Leaf, powder or capsule?

Fresh moringa leaves are hard to find outside the tropics. The dried powder is widely available and can be stirred into smoothies, soups and oatmeal, but it has a strong, grassy taste that many people never grow to like, and the dose is easy to forget. Capsules of pure dried leaf solve both problems: the same leaf, measured, without the taste. The usual serving is two capsules once a day, twenty to thirty minutes before a meal, with a full glass of water.

Whichever form you choose, look for a product that contains only moringa leaf, with no fillers or additives, made in a facility that follows good manufacturing practices. The ingredient list should have one item on it.

Make every mouthful count.

Herbs and spices, the overlooked greens

Parsley, cilantro, basil, oregano, thyme, rosemary, ginger, turmeric and garlic are all concentrated sources of plant compounds, and they make simple food taste like something. A handful of chopped parsley over a plate of eggs or a bowl of soup is a small habit with a real return. Grow a pot of something on the windowsill if you can; it will change how you cook.

Building the habit

- Keep a bag of frozen spinach or kale in the freezer at all times. Add a handful to eggs, soups, pasta sauce, stews.
- Make one big salad a day, and make it interesting: something crunchy, something sweet, a good dressing, some protein.
- Take your moringa capsules with the mid-morning or pre-lunch glass of water, so the two habits remind each other.
- Try one new green each month. Bok choy in a stir-fry, collards braised with garlic, arugula on a pizza.

TRY THIS WEEK

- Greens at two meals a day, every day, for seven days. Frozen counts.
- If you have moringa capsules, pair them with a fixed glass of water each day and note the time on the fridge.

A Simple Week

Putting it together, and keeping it going

Nine chapters is a lot of advice. This one boils it down to a single week you can print out, stick on the refrigerator, and follow without thinking. It is deliberately modest. A modest plan you keep beats an ambitious one you abandon by Thursday.

A day that works

On waking	A full glass of water. Two minutes of gentle movement. Daylight within the hour.
Breakfast	Protein plus a carbohydrate: eggs and toast, yogurt and oats, cottage cheese and fruit.
Mid-morning	A glass of water. Moringa capsules, if you take them, 20–30 minutes before lunch.
Lunch	Half-quarter-quarter plate, greens included. Sit down. Fifteen minutes.
After lunch	A ten-minute walk. This one matters most.
Mid-afternoon	Water first. Then a snack if you need one: fruit and nuts, yogurt, a boiled egg.
Dinner	Half-quarter-quarter plate, three hours before bed. A short walk afterward if you can.
Evening	Lights down. Screens off an hour before bed. A warm, caffeine-free drink. Same routine each night.

The week

Every day	Six to eight glasses of water · a walk (30 minutes total) · greens at two meals · protein at every meal · same waking time
Twice a week	The chair strength routine (10–15 minutes) · oily fish for dinner
Most days	A minute of balance practice · a fermented food · a serving of beans or oats
Once a week	Shop the list from chapter five · try one new vegetable or green · do something purely for enjoyment with someone you like

Keeping it going

Three things predict whether a habit lasts. First, it is attached to something you already do, so it needs no decision. Second, it is visible: the water bottle on the counter, the walking shoes by the door, the checklist on the fridge. Third, it is forgiving: a missed day is a missed day, not a failure, and tomorrow is simply the next day.

Expect the second and third weeks to be the hardest. The novelty has worn off and the results are only beginning. Push through them with the checklist, and by week four the habits start to carry you rather than the other way round.

A modest plan you keep beats an ambitious one you abandon by Thursday.

A checklist for the refrigerator

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Water on waking | ☐ Daylight in the first hour |
| ☐ Protein at breakfast | ☐ Moringa with water before a meal |
| ☐ Greens at lunch | ☐ Walk after lunch |
| ☐ Water in the afternoon | ☐ Greens at dinner |
| ☐ Dinner three hours before bed | ☐ Screens off an hour before bed |
| ☐ Strength routine (Tue & Fri) | ☐ Balance minute (kettle time) |

Questions for your doctor

Take these to your next appointment. They turn a routine visit into a plan.

- Is my vitamin D level where it should be?
- Are my B12 and iron levels adequate?
- Is there any reason I should limit fluids, protein or any of the foods in this book?
- Which of the exercises here are right for me, and are there any I should avoid?
- Do any of my medications interact with foods or supplements I take, including moringa?

A last word

You have read a whole book about taking care of yourself, which means you are already the kind of person who does. The habits here are not a program to complete. They are a way of living that gets easier the longer you keep it, and that pays you back a little more each year. Start with the glass of water tomorrow morning. The rest follows.

Here's to a good long run of ordinary, well-lived days.

Five Simple Recipes

Each of these builds the half-quarter-quarter plate, takes under thirty minutes, and uses ingredients from the shopping list. Quantities serve two; halve or double as needed.

Green Morning Eggs

Protein and greens before nine o'clock.

- 4 eggs
- 2 big handfuls of spinach (frozen is fine, squeezed dry)
- 1 tablespoon butter or olive oil
- A handful of chopped parsley or chives
- Salt, pepper, 2 slices whole-grain toast

Warm the butter in a pan over medium heat. Add the spinach and stir until wilted, a minute or two. Beat the eggs with salt and pepper, pour them in, and stir gently until just set. Scatter the herbs over. Serve on toast.

Overnight Oats with Banana and Peanut Butter

Made the night before; ready when you are.

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 cup milk (any kind)
- ½ cup plain Greek yogurt
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 1 banana, sliced
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed or chia (optional)

Stir everything except the banana together in a jar or bowl. Cover and refrigerate overnight. In the morning, top with the sliced banana. Keeps for two days.

Sheet-Pan Salmon and Vegetables

One pan, twenty minutes, oily fish done.

- 2 salmon fillets (fresh or thawed)
- 2 cups broccoli florets
- 1 red pepper, sliced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 lemon, garlic, salt, pepper, dried oregano
- 2 small potatoes, cubed

Heat the oven to 425°F. Toss the potatoes with half the oil and roast for 10 minutes. Add the broccoli, pepper and tomatoes, then lay the salmon on top. Drizzle with the rest of the oil, squeeze the lemon over, season and scatter the oregano and a little chopped garlic. Roast 12–15 minutes until the salmon flakes.

Big-Batch Lentil and Vegetable Soup

Fiber, protein and greens in a bowl. Freezes well.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 onion, 2 carrots, 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1½ cups dried brown or green lentils, rinsed
- 1 can diced tomatoes
- 6 cups low-sodium broth
- 1 teaspoon cumin, 1 bay leaf, salt, pepper
- 3 handfuls of chopped kale or spinach
- Lemon juice to finish

Soften the onion, carrot and celery in the oil for 8 minutes. Add the garlic and cumin for a minute more. Add the lentils, tomatoes, broth and bay leaf. Simmer 30–35 minutes until the lentils are tender. Stir in the greens for the last 3 minutes. Season, remove the bay leaf, and finish with a squeeze of lemon.

Herb and Bean Salad with Tuna

No cooking. Lunch in five minutes.

- 1 can white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can tuna in olive oil, drained
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ cucumber, chopped
- A big handful of parsley, chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive oil, juice of half a lemon, salt, pepper
- A bed of arugula or spinach

Toss everything except the leaves together in a bowl. Pile onto the greens. Serve with a slice of whole-grain bread.