



Power Up

**Using the Five-Factor Protocol
to Overcome ME/CFS**

Russ Seigenberg, Ph.D.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to those burdened with the incalculable weight of ME/CFS. It takes great courage to face each day and learn to accept the disappointments and uncertainties of this illness. Having gone through a long, dark time of struggling myself, my fervent wish is that others will find hope and a path to recovery. I want to extend special thanks to my wife, Nancy, for her sacrifices and unwavering support throughout my journey.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>v</i>
1 My Story	1
2 Overview of ME/CFS Treatment	7
3 Diet and Nutrition	13
4 Pacing	15
5 Building Energy	20
6 Developing an Exercise Program	28
7 Mental Health and CFS	38
8 Finding Inner Peace	43
9 Coping Skills (Part A)	48
10 Coping Skills (Part B)	52
11 Guiding the Inner Self	57
12 The Art of Positive Thinking	63
13 Beliefs and the Subconscious	67
14 Universal Worth	78
15 Fantastic Journey	84

Preface

Power Up is a concise book with clear objectives. My intent is to share my personal journey with ME/CFS as well as various principles and skills associated with recovery. As I listened to the stories of others who have recovered, I recognized several commonalities. Thus, I refer to this approach to treatment as the Five-Factor Protocol. The five factors are medical care, diet and nutrition, pacing, mental health, and exercise. In every recovery story I have heard, a combination of these elements led to success. Each person can determine which of those five factors is most applicable to their situation.

Exercise is a controversial subject in the ME/CFS community. I view movement as essential for healing, but I recognize that exercise done incorrectly can be detrimental to this population. Therefore, I explain how exercise can help build energy and provide guidance on how to do it safely.

Good mental health and effective stress management skills are essential to successful healing. As a practicing psychologist who has written several self-help books, I am familiar with what works. Several chapters have been devoted to the goal of mental well-being.

Success in any endeavor comes from learning correct principles and then applying and practicing them. I have provided a series of gradual steps to help people navigate these treacherous waters. I believe you will be very excited to learn skills that work and to see your gradual progress in the battle against ME/CFS. There is no medicine for the human soul so soothing as hope!

Power Up

Chapter 1

My Story

This is not meant to be a comprehensive treatise on curing ME/ME/CFS. I am not a medical professional, and so, admittedly, I do not have the expertise to address the physical complexities of this disorder adequately. I recommend that readers consult books written by physicians and researchers to fully consider the medical science of this disorder. My goal is to address the five elements of treatment that appear to be at play in recovery. I will first share some background so readers can see that I speak from personal experience.

I went from being relatively healthy in my youth to having very severe health challenges. As an example of my former good health, I did not miss any days in high school due to illness. However, my attendance record would not show this, as my mother allowed me to take one sick day every spring to attend the Red Sox opening game. She loved baseball! Like many teenagers, I had a lot of energy. In the fall, I often played tackle football for a couple of hours after school, went home for dinner, and then came back out for two hours of basketball at the local junior high. This did not feel overly tiring, and I loved every minute.

In college, my physical self-care slipped due to people keeping late hours in the dorms, my partying on weekends, and a poor diet of mostly meat and carbs. I did not care for the overcooked vegetables served in the dining halls. I contracted a virus that lasted about a month during my freshman year, and then I had the flu for a week during my sophomore year. Besides those incidents, I had no health problems and played basketball at least 4 times per week. On my off days, I jogged and finished by running up the 17 flights of stairs to my dorm floor. In those days, I could run up all 17 flights without stopping! I once won a bet by running down all those stairs and back up in less than 5 minutes.

Everything changed at the beginning of my junior year at college. I contracted a virus late in the summer. I felt tired most of the time and could not shake it. When I returned to college and had to walk around the campus, things became even more difficult. I had a sore throat, my concentration was off, and I felt very dizzy when I walked up flights of stairs. I finally went to the Student Health Center and described my symptoms to the doctor. He had them take blood, and I was diagnosed with mononucleosis. I was immediately sent to the mono ward. In this special wing of the health center, the protocol was to lie in bed for 5 to 7 days, only getting up to use the toilet. It was very boring. Fortunately, I slept 16 hours or more per day and completed my treatment. Mono really wipes you out!

After my release, I was able to return to classes and function normally. There was, however, one significant problem. It seemed I could no longer exercise safely. Every time I tried, I would get sick for a few days to a week with something akin to a moderate cold. After repeating this cycle of trying to exercise and then feeling ill, I finally gave up on my efforts to get in shape and accepted my strange condition. Over time, I learned I could exercise a little if I were cautious not to overdo it. However, I could not return to playing

basketball with any real stamina or prowess. This bothered me immensely at the time. I had been a real gym rat, but those days seemed to be over.

This period of fragile health continued from 1971 to 1976. My energy levels were generally fair, unless I overexerted myself through excessive exercise or activity. I would still get sick periodically, and never felt entirely well. But I could work and do what I needed to do. I did eventually learn some things. I became a vegetarian, which helped reduce episodes of illness and made me feel healthier. I also learned to exercise more moderately. Unfortunately, some of the things I experimented with backfired. I tried fasting episodically, at least once a week, and sometimes twice a week. The idea was to purify your body. My mind felt clearer, but fasting that much was a bad decision for me. It seemed to significantly lower my overall energy levels and vitality.

I had remained on unemployment compensation for several months, hoping to gain more strength. I purposely did not look very hard for jobs. Finally, that option ran out, and I had to find some work. I did not have a designated career (having majored in English in college), so I drove a taxicab. That was draining, but I was still able to function. As I look back on my health, I would say I had some post-viral condition, probably Epstein-Barr virus lurking in my cells.

It was in June of 1976 that my health totally crashed. This event occurred in a single day, which, given how sudden it was, proved instructive. Being interested in nutrition and diet, I obtained a job at a health spa in southwestern Florida. The owner of the spa had cured himself of lung cancer with a vegetarian raw food diet, and so he was treating people from all over the world at his resort. Everyone ate the recommended diet in the dining hall. Additionally, fasting and sun exposure were encouraged. There were lectures and numerous activities available for the guests. It was a very positive atmosphere, and I met many nice people. As a staff member, I received free room and board in exchange for 6 hours of work daily. I was assigned to the maintenance crew. I mowed lawns and helped with some construction projects. I even taught a class once. I was holding on for a while energy-wise, but the raw food diet proved inadequate for those doing manual labor. A variety of fruits and vegetables were available, but options for carbs and protein sources were limited. Breakfast consisted of only fruit. I complained once, but the staff was expected to adhere to the prescribed diet. We were expected to be good examples for the guests and to be part of the culture.

I decided to quit because of the ongoing strain of working while not getting enough calories and protein. Unfortunately, we were given a very tough work assignment before I had time to make plans to flee. We were asked to dig ditches for a special project. After a few hours of that duty, I had a startling experience. It felt like all my remaining energy just drained out of my body. I felt as weak as a newborn kitten. I could not do anything! I walked out of the job and went to bed. The next day, I felt just the same, not sick, but extremely weak. I told the owner, and he acted like he had seen it before. I was surprised that he believed me. He reassigned me to office duty. I could manage that, but just barely. I had no idea what had happened or what to do about it! However, I did recognize that I was in serious trouble physically.

I eventually went to a doctor, but in the 1970s, knowledge about ME/CFS was limited. I ended up diagnosing myself by going through a medical textbook in the library. I realized I had “neurasthenia,” the old name for ME/CFS. Unfortunately, the medical profession thought my condition was psychosomatic, and they recommended I go to a psychiatrist. I declined as I felt fine emotionally, just wasted physically. I had been practicing meditation and yoga, was into positive thinking, and was buoyed by my growing religious faith. I was not even depressed about my condition because I had some confidence that God had my back and I would get better somehow.

A lot happened in my life over the next 3 years. I moved back to my home state of Massachusetts from Florida, where I was living, and stayed with my parents. Parents will take you in when no one else will! They did not know how to react to me. They seemed to think I was losing it mentally. I did not blame them. Since no one seemed able to understand, I usually chose not to tell people about my condition. There was no Internet in the 70s, so the world was much smaller. I never met or heard of anyone else with ME/CFS. Life was lonely in that way.

I camped at my parents’ home for a few months, hoping to regain my strength. Not wanting a permanent freeloader, they encouraged me to get a job and to find my own place. I was still a wreck, but I decided to try working since I had no direction. Fortunately, I found an easy sit-down job, taking orders by phone for a picture frame company. I kept this job for about four months, but I was eventually laid off. I had moved into an apartment in the Brighton section of Boston, so I stayed home resting while my roommate worked. I was still clueless about my health condition. I had learned that if I avoided doing anything too demanding, I could maintain a relatively stable energy level. I next worked a temporary job verifying payment submissions for Blue Cross/Blue Shield. Even that simple job was challenging in terms of energy, and I was glad when the assignment ended. I remember how disconcerting my life situation was. I was floating along, trying to survive day to day with no plan or strategy.

Life changed when I met my wife-to-be at church. We became good friends and spent a lot of time together. I was comfortable enough with her to share my health situation. She was sympathetic and supportive. Our relationship continued to progress, and we discussed marriage. I was surprised that she did not run away, given my absurd health situation. She knew she would likely be supporting us for a while.

After we got married, my health deteriorated for a time. There were months when I spent much of the day in bed, though I could always get up, eat, and use the restroom. My symptoms at my worst were as follows: I felt weak all the time. My concentration was off. Reading seemed a great effort. Exercising seemed impossible. Going out was scary because just going shopping could precipitate a crash. I could not tolerate standing in one place for very long. However, I do not think that qualifies me for postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS) since I was never tested for it. POTS is a condition in which a change from lying down to standing up causes an abnormally significant increase in heart rate. I also had post-exertional malaise (PEM). If I overdid things, I would be wiped out for 7 to 10 days, not fun at all! I also had periodic pain in the nerves of my legs and arms. Fortunately, my sleep was decent.

Somewhere in our first year of marriage, my wife, the breadwinner, became ill. She was pregnant and had an ovarian cyst. (I know some readers may question my decision-making abilities as a young person. I certainly agree, as they were sorely lacking.) My wife Nancy and I laughed hysterically one night about how pathetic we were, then decided we had better do something to stave off homelessness. Parents were not a good option this time. Nancy's parents lived in a trailer in Florida, and my parents disapproved of my not working. Nancy decided that her cousin Barry was the best option. Barry was married and had a child, but he had an empty attic with two bedrooms. Due to the generosity of Barry and his wife Ginny, the attic became our new home.

Because we felt we couldn't impose on Barry forever, my wife and I eventually obtained employment as live-in nannies. We worked for a man with two young children whose wife had deserted him. We did that for about 9 months, and then the wife moved back to town, and we were out of a job. My wife was healthy now and could work as a surgical technician, so we found an apartment in Weymouth, Massachusetts. I was taking a couple of classes at a college in Boston and taking care of my daughters. A second child had come along by now. I hoped to enter graduate school to get a master's degree in psychology and was taking some required classes. However, my health was so marginal that these scholastic ambitions seemed a big reach.

Somewhat out of the blue, Nancy's cousin Barry called. He had gotten divorced and was very lonely. He begged us to come and live with him to provide some company. He did not even mind that we now had two little children. We felt he had done us a solid when he rescued us from homelessness, so we agreed. There I was, still struggling with ME/CFS but with more responsibility, right back in Barry's attic. Rent was free, though; we just had to help with utilities and keep the place clean.

Not too much had changed health-wise. I was more active, but everything I did seemed fraught with peril. I always felt like I was 5 minutes away from crashing. Four years in, I still had no idea how to regain my strength. One positive aspect of spending so much time in bed was having plenty of time to think. One day, I had a breakthrough while reflecting on my varied attempts at exercise. I recognized that there were occasions when I attempted vigorous exercise and felt a surge of energy. I wondered what caused that.

Having been an athlete in the past, I was prone to crashing from overexertion when I attempted to exercise. However, there were a few times when I felt a little stronger after engaging in small, intense activities, such as running up one flight of stairs. I decided to experiment carefully with aerobic exercise (activities requiring more oxygen).

I planned to walk a couple of blocks, but break it up with jogging. Walking alone had not helped much in the past, as it usually caused some fatigue. I felt like the Wright brothers at Kittyhawk as I embarked on my jogging adventure! Surprisingly, when I performed my experiment of jogging interspersed with long walking breaks, it felt pretty good. I only went a few blocks, but it was a big deal. I was not overly tired after my exercise; the next day, I had no PEM. I actually felt better, even a little stronger. I continued working at walk/jogging and was soon up to about a mile.

I was excited that my exercise experiment was working. There was, however, one significant problem. As soon as I felt I had more energy, I wanted to engage in more

activities. I was in a cycle: rise, then crash and burn. I was getting nowhere, but I knew what I needed to do. I had to keep very firm boundaries! It did not matter what others or I wanted; I had to stick to my limits. I call this a “take no prisoners” mentality.

Well, it worked. I listened to my body, exercised most days, and got plenty of rest. I was fortunate not to have to work outside the home. I refrained from doing extra things that would cause fatigue and said “no” when I had to. Then something amazing happened. One day, about 3 months into my new routine, I overdid things and felt like I had crashed. I was quite frustrated with myself. However, when I woke up the next day, I felt OK, no PEM. This increased my hope and provided another Eureka moment. I hypothesized that I had built up my energy reserves enough to recharge more effectively through sleep. Now whether this change results from the brain allowing more energy release due to healing or from some unknown aspect of energy management, I cannot say.

Armed with my new perspective, I continued to follow the routines that worked. I gradually was able to take on more activity, and three years later, I felt more solid about being on the road to recovery. I had worked full-time for two years, earned a master’s degree in counseling psychology, and was pursuing my doctorate in the same field.

My recovery was not yet complete. I was still sensitive to standing too long. I was prone to colds and had to be careful with my energy expenditure. I thought this sensitivity was due to a latent virus, like the Epstein-Barr virus, but I never had any testing done. I had learned how to manage my condition well. Playing sports still seemed far out of reach, but I was relatively happy, working on my career and far from being home-bound. Life continued; we had another child, and I went on to graduate with my Ph.D. in counseling psychology. Following graduation, I obtained a full-time counseling position, and we moved to Logan, Utah. After that, I worked hard and found the time and energy to write a self-help book. Regarding fitness, I played golf and jogged lightly a few times per week.

I had been invited to play basketball (my favorite sport) a few times over the years, but I always said no. It still seemed too risky from a health perspective. At this point, I was 40 years old. It had been 15 years since my complete crash into ME/CFS. Some guys in my neighborhood who played basketball regularly kept inviting me. I decided to ramp up my jogging and then give basketball a whirl. I had been avoiding intense exercise for many years, but felt ready to try again. My first goal was to run a mile in 10 minutes or less to prove I could handle the rigors of basketball. After a couple of months, the goal was accomplished, and I went to play ball. The first effort, I must admit, was rather scary. I had no idea how my body would react. I had a fear-based fantasy that I might collapse afterward. However, it went OK except for some sore muscles.

I continued to play half-court basketball for about six months before moving up to full-court play. I ended up playing 4 to 5 times per week for the next 20 years till my body gave out at age 60 (too many muscle pulls). In the following years, I hiked and played tennis. My longest hike was 16 miles up and down a mountain with 3,500 feet of elevation gain. The hike took 7 hours from start to finish. Fortunately, my body handled the test well, and I experienced no symptoms of PEM afterward. I write these things not to brag, but to demonstrate there is hope for getting physically fit again after ME/ME/CFS.

I should mention that although I largely recovered from ME/CFS, I did not escape COVID-19 unscathed. As I began writing this book, I was home recovering from COVID. This was my second stretch of COVID lasting over three months. It was a bit of déjà vu, but having gone through ME/CFS, I knew I had the skills to deal with COVID. For me, COVID mainly required patience; I had some confidence that I would recover in a few months. After years of dealing with ME/CFS, I had become quite skilled at pacing my activities. I continued to exercise, but in a different way. I have found that exercising with COVID is far trickier than exercising with ME/CFS. I will share some thoughts about the intricacies of this challenge later in this work. I will begin with an overview of ME/CFS and then share my ideas on the various components of recovery.

Chapter 2

Overview of ME/ME/CFS Treatment

Myalgic encephalomyelitis/ chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/ME/CFS) is a complicated and mysterious illness. It affects approximately 1 percent of the population. The etiology is unclear, although some evidence suggests that viruses such as Epstein-Barr virus may be a precipitating factor. Multiple factors likely contribute to the development of this illness. Current research on ME/CFS focuses on the immune and adrenal systems, genetics, mitochondria, the biopsychosocial model, sleep, and nutrition. Although some standard protocols are followed in treating individuals with ME/CFS, there is no known specific cure. Recovery rates appear to be between 5 and 8 percent.

2015 IOM Diagnostic Criteria for ME/CFS

The diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome requires the presence of the following three symptoms for more than six months, and the intensity of the symptoms should be moderate or severe for at least 50% of the time.

The three main symptoms include:

- Fatigue - A noticeable decrease or impairment in a patient's ability to engage in activities they would have enjoyed before the onset of the illness. This impairment continues for more than six months and is associated with new-onset severe fatigue unrelated to exertion and not relieved by rest.
- Post-exertional malaise - Patients experience worsening symptoms and function after exposure to physical or cognitive stressors, which they previously well tolerated.
- Unrefreshing sleep - patients feel tired after a night's sleep.

Criterion fulfillment for diagnosis requires the three above-stated symptoms plus one of the additional below-mentioned symptoms.

- Cognitive impairment - Problems with thought or executive function worsened by exertion, effort, stress, or time pressure.
- Orthostatic intolerance - Worsening of symptoms upon assuming and maintaining an upright posture. Although not necessarily abolished, symptoms are improved by lying back down or elevating the feet.

Treatments

During my recent recovery from COVID, I read books and watched videos on ME/CFS recovery. I was especially interested in hearing stories from individuals who had fully recovered from ME/CFS. I knew how I recovered, but I recognized others' stories could be different. I noticed that every individual cited some variation of the same five factors as instrumental in their recovery journey. I will share some very brief thoughts about each area. The five broad areas are 1) addressing underlying medical issues, 2) diet and nutrition, 3) pacing, 4) reducing psychological stress, and 5) movement.

Medical

Many disorders can cause weakness. It makes sense to have a total medical workup rather than assuming you have ME/CFS. If there is an underlying medical problem, it needs to be addressed. Your doctor must play detective, and ME/CFS is the diagnosis provided after all other conditions have been ruled out. Of course, there are specific symptoms of ME/CFS, such as post-exertional malaise (PEM) and postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), that help your provider make a more definitive diagnosis.

During their evaluation for ME/CFS, physicians typically conduct a series of tests to look for other potential causes of weakness and fatigue. There are numerous possibilities, such as bacterial infections, Lyme disease, mold, lupus, liver disease, Addison's disease, hypothyroidism, kidney disease, HIV, COVID, pneumonia, heart disease, emphysema, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, myasthenia gravis, rheumatoid arthritis, cancer, kidney disease, yeast infections, vitamin deficiencies, and parasites. Clearly, it makes sense to have a total medical workup.

You notice some similarities in illness development as you hear people's stories. Most ME/CFS sufferers report some combination of overwork, severe stress or challenging life events, and a physical illness or condition. Overwork refers to "burning the candle at both ends" at work or school, going well beyond what is reasonable. As noted previously, ME/CFS folks do not seem to be lazy people. Stress could be related to such things as past trauma or a relationship breakup. It can also be associated with personality traits such as perfectionism or mental health issues such as OCD. The physical aspect could involve any of a multitude of medical concerns. The most common physical precipitant seems to be a virus. This was my situation when I contracted mononucleosis.

It is beneficial to have a physician on your treatment team. He may know of competent providers of ME/CFS treatment and be able to help with difficult symptoms such as pain or insomnia. Additionally, just because one has ME/CFS does not mean that other illnesses cannot occur concurrently, and your physician can treat these. Unfortunately, most doctors have little knowledge about directly treating ME/CFS. They receive little or no training for it in medical school, and there are no scientifically proven treatments to which they can refer.

Diet and Nutrition

Many people with ME/CFS do change their diet. A straightforward hypothesis is that digestion is more difficult since the body has less energy. The second thought is more complex. Specific diets may be more conducive to helping the body heal. For example, many believe that diets that lack sufficient fruits and vegetables are too acidic and can be detrimental to overall health. Diets too rich in processed carbohydrates and sugar can trigger the release of inflammatory messengers, known as cytokines. Accordingly, some people with ME/CFS reduce their intake of sugar, alcohol, and fatty meats and opt for healthier, less-refined foods. Vitamin deficiencies are also an issue to consider.

Since the bid to become healthy becomes all-consuming, no stone is left unturned. Supplements seem like an easy thing to do, and so people experiment. Blood tests performed by your physician may reveal deficiencies in vitamins or minerals that require

attention. There have been legitimate research studies done with supplements. Here is a list of supplements that may have some effectiveness in reducing fatigue in people with ME/CFS: Rhodiola rose, vitamin D-3, vitamin B-12, coenzyme Q10, magnesium, l-carnitine, probiotics, ashwagandha, roburin-rich French oakwood extract, and nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD).

I know I take an antioxidant called astaxanthin, as well as krill oil, fish oil, and vitamin and mineral supplements. To boost my immune system, I have taken turmeric, noni juice, and echinacea. I like to think all these supplements are helpful, but who knows? One bit of advice: Whenever possible, deal only with reputable companies that do third-party testing. There are many unscrupulous purveyors of supplements who put low-quality products in their pills. This has been verified, so buyer beware!

I will say this. Almost everyone changes something about their diet and nutrition, so these must be significant variables to consider. Each person should conduct their own research and consult with their healthcare provider to make informed decisions. Everyone's body is different, so determine what works for you. Try not to overdo things or spend too much money. I have not heard of anyone who said they were cured of ME/CFS by using supplements alone.

Pacing

Pacing refers to the proper balance of activity and rest. It means limiting the duration and type of activities you engage in. Not rushing and listening to your body are also emphasized. The goal is to avoid overexertion and post-exercise malaise (PEM), a hallmark of ME/CFS. Pacing is inherently individual and situational. It is an essential part of everyone's treatment plan.

Psychological

Being a psychologist with 40 years of experience, I do have some insight into the mental aspects of treatment. Clearly, stress or depression can play a role in weakening our system, so we are more susceptible to illness. I had some depression before I first contracted mono, but during the 10 years I struggled with post-viral symptoms and ME/CFS, I was not significantly depressed or anxious. My spirituality and the hope that I would recover seemed to keep me going. I realize now how fortunate that was. One of the reasons I am writing this short book is to encourage people to develop hope and a recovery plan. Getting lost in the ME/CFS wilderness is a terrible fate!

Struggling with anxiety or depression while symptomatic with ME/CFS can be overwhelming and make recovery extremely difficult. Negative emotions can weaken the immune system, drain your energy, and compromise your motivation. Overreacting to symptoms and becoming fearful about increasing activity levels can also be problematic. Seeking professional help seems to be the right choice. Finding a competent therapist with experience helping people with ME/CFS would be ideal. On the other hand, trying to learn coping skills and sort through trauma all on your own is a perilous journey. Psychology is a complex field, so be prepared to learn new things. Additionally, if a person becomes so anxious about crashing that they begin avoiding most activity and movement, they doom

themselves to failure. No one gets over ME/CFS by resting it away. Careful exercise will be part of everyone's recovery plan.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been prescribed as a treatment for ME/CFS for several years. The theory is that individuals with ME/CFS avoid activity, get deconditioned, and focus too much on symptoms. Treatment involves helping patients stabilize their patterns of activity, rest, and sleep. Any social or emotional issues that block a return to activity are also addressed. Vink and Vink-Niese conducted a review of treatments for ME/CFS that utilized CBT or graded exercise therapy (GET). They only included studies that randomized subject selection and had at least 150 participants. There was a combined total of 3,721 patients from the ten studies selected. They primarily considered the variable of returning to work, but satisfaction with treatment was also reported. They found that after 6 to 12 months of treatment with CBT, people were less likely to be working, and most did not find treatment with CBT to be helpful.¹

Many people in the ME/CFS recovery world advocate "brain retraining." This theory suggests that the nervous system becomes overloaded due to stress, illness, or poor self-care. After the initial crisis, the amygdala overreacts by incorrectly interpreting further symptoms as threats. Much of this occurs on a subconscious basis and keeps the body operating in the "fight or flight" mode.

There is limited research supporting the efficacy of brain retraining. A study published in 2012 employed Ashok Gupta's approach to mind-body work in treating various patient groups.² Although the results were positive, the ME/CFS group consisted of only three subjects, thereby limiting any interpretation of this study. Gupta performed a clinical audit of 27 clients with ME/CFS who received treatment with his program for six months.³ Although there were no standard experimental controls, two-thirds of the subjects reported regaining 80 percent or more of their pre-illness functioning. Thirteen of the subjects began working full-time while in the study. Gupta also noted that "many" indicated they were doing moderate workouts in the gym. These results do seem noteworthy. It does not appear likely that people as ill as the ME/CFS population would respond so well to placebo treatment or exaggerate results to this degree.

Alexandra Bratty conducted a survey of individuals participating in Gupta's program, which was published in 2024.⁴ The analysis divided the patients into 16 groups based on their presenting illness. The ME/CFS group was the largest, comprising 139 individuals. A simple health and functioning scale was used. Participants rated their current health on a scale from 0 (worst) to 100 (best). They were told that a score of 10 would indicate poor health and low functioning, and a score of 80 to 90 would indicate great health and high functioning. The average score before treatment was 28.20, and the average score after treatment of 3 months or more was 47.80. The percentage of change was 70 percent. Although these outcomes could be considered fairly positive, the average score was still significantly below 80, or the threshold for full recovery. Additionally, the subjects were active participants in the program, and their responses may have been biased toward a more favorable report. Overall, this study seems to be another indication that the Gupta mind-body approach is helpful. There are other brain retraining programs, such as DNRS by Annie Hopper, ANS Rewire by Dan Neuffer, and Re-Origins by Ben

Ahrens. However, to the best of my knowledge, research has not been conducted using these approaches.

Brain retraining treatment involves telling yourself that you are safe, that you can accomplish things, and that you can improve, and/or visualizing positive scenarios to that effect. Breathing exercises or meditation are often recommended to help calm the nervous system. Theoretically, as people relax and become more active in a new, more moderate fashion, the subconscious mind decides it is safe to be active in this new lifestyle. One possible concern with brain retraining is that if people view their condition as having a strong psychological component, they can fail to pace themselves properly as they become more active. Regardless of which theory we favor, finding some hope amid the chaos of ME/CFS is highly advisable.

Movement

Exercise with ME/CFS is perplexing. To alter a line from the famous novel by Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, “It is the best of things to do, it is the worst of things to do.” The problem most people run into with ME/CFS and related disorders is that when you first try to exercise, it ends up being disastrous. Exercise can make you feel worse than ever! I know this firsthand. As I tried to get back in shape in the early years of my illness, I became discouraged and gave up on exercise several times.

The GET program (Graded Exercise Treatment) failed to demonstrate scientifically that exercise could help people recover. The GET method advocates walking or another form of exercise, then increasing the time or distance by a certain percentage each week. Since these treatment providers conceptualized ME/CFS as a fear of activity and a result of physical deconditioning, they advised people to disregard their feelings and adhere to the exercise plan. However, several patient surveys conducted by an organization called Action for ME found that GET was harmful in more than 50 percent of cases. An extensive study conducted by researchers at Oxford Brookes University surveyed 2,274 patients and found that 81 percent reported worsening symptoms after GET treatment.⁵ As a result of these investigations, the British National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) updated its care guidelines for ME/ME/CFS in 2021, concluding that graded exercise therapy (GET) is harmful and should not be used. The obvious flaw in GET is that it does not always consider how people feel energy-wise.

In books and videos about ME/CFS, I have noticed that people devote more space to other topics than exercise. Typically, exercise is noted to be beneficial, appropriate cautions are issued, and general types of exercise are recommended. However, from my perspective, much is left out! I believe that exercise, when done correctly, is an essential component of recovery. However, I would call proper exercise “educated movement.” The way most people exercise is unsuitable for ME/CFS.

I have been thinking about energy management and effective exercise for chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) for over 40 years. Yes, I am that old! I believe I have a responsibility to share what I have learned, as no one else appears to be providing sufficient detail. If you are trying to recover, you do not want to get exercise wrong. I will elaborate on my thoughts on using exercise to boost energy later in this book.

Notes

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Chapter 3 Diet and Nutrition

With a compromised immune system and reduced energy, diet is a recovery factor that should be considered. Approximately 10 percent of the energy we produce daily is used for digestion. Individuals with ME/CFS may struggle to eat as they used to. Overeating or eating the wrong foods overloads the system and takes energy needed for healing and recovery. Do not eat until you are completely full. Leave the table just a little hungry. The sensation of hunger will subside within 30 minutes. *Hara hachi bu* is a Japanese term meaning “Eat until you're 80% full.” It originated in Okinawa, where people use this advice to help control their eating habits. Interestingly, they have a longer life expectancy and one of the lowest rates of illness from heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Eat light meals three to five times per day. It is important to maintain stable blood sugar levels. Being active without eating can be an energy drain. If you're not hungry in the morning, consider having a snack or eating some fruit to get your day started. However, have another meal within an hour or two to prevent your blood sugar levels from dropping too low. Try to eat as little as possible after 7 p.m., as the body shifts energy to rebuilding cells while you sleep. Accordingly, the body digests food at a slower pace while you sleep. If food lingers in the stomach for too long, bacteria may overgrow and cause fermentation. This causes gas, bloating, and possibly pain. Eating late at night can also lead to acid reflux and negatively affect blood sugar management, blood pressure, and weight. Some of this is because people often eat for recreational purposes in the evening and make poor food choices.

Fats are the food component that requires the most energy to digest, approximately 5 times the energy required to digest carbohydrates. Protein requires three times the energy of carbohydrates to digest. Thus, meats such as steak or hamburgers can put a strain on the system. Smaller amounts of chicken, turkey, eggs, fish, and protein-rich plant foods, such as beans, can ensure adequate protein intake. Overall, a balanced diet is the key. We should eat to live and not live to eat.

Avoid junk foods. They contain little nutrition and can impair your digestion. If you must have some, eat *tiny* snacks only once or twice daily. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Since digestion is generally impaired, big salads may be challenging to handle. Therefore, a juicer can be a nice addition to your kitchen equipment.

Every person with ME/CFS has the opportunity to experiment with diet. I became a vegetarian, ate whole grains, and bought a juicer. I must say that it seemed to help quite a bit with my post-viral condition, though fasting was very detrimental for me. However, everyone is different; much information is available about diet, and we all have the freedom to choose our course of action.

Many people who recover from ME/CFS tend to adopt a more whole-food, plant-based diet. There is some legitimate science behind this inclination. Refined carbohydrates, red meat, sugary drinks, fried foods, and margarine can contribute to inflammation in the body. Inflammation is the body's response to an injury or other problem. It's a normal, critical reaction that signals the immune system that something is wrong, allowing it to

fight off infections or heal injuries. These signals are transmitted via proteins called cytokines. Cytokines can signal the body to fight viruses, produce more white blood cells, combat tumors, or defend against bacterial infections. These processes are essential to good health. However, chronic inflammation can damage healthy cells, tissues, and organs. Over time, this can lead to diseases like diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart disease. Non-food issues that can contribute to inflammation are chronic stress, obesity, an imbalance of healthy and unhealthy microbes in the gut, poor sleep, tobacco, alcohol, and exposure to toxins.

Stopping your body's inflammatory response is important. Too much inflammation can cause unpleasant symptoms, lead to long-term diseases, and can even be life-threatening without treatment. With autoimmune diseases, your body's immune cells mistakenly attack healthy cells. Metabolic disorders involve problems with the processes that enable your body to convert food into energy and eliminate waste.

It is not necessary to thoroughly investigate all the scientific concepts regarding diet. Listen to what your body is telling you! Healthy habits help us feel better! People with ME/CFS are so miserable that they are generally highly motivated and willing to experiment and change. Exercise, maintaining a normal weight, avoiding highly processed foods, limiting alcohol consumption, refraining from tobacco use, and minimizing exposure to pollution and toxins are effective ways to begin combating inflammation. Although altering diet can seem overwhelming, the power of habit will soon be on your side. If you can get through the first month of a goal, it becomes far easier to continue, as positive lifestyle changes are self-reinforcing.

Recovery Assignment

Make a written list of a few areas where you feel it would be beneficial for you to begin to make some changes in diet and nutrition. Please recognize that it's okay to take one step at a time. The first month is always the hardest, but once we've passed that adjustment period, we often begin to appreciate the benefits of the change.

Chapter 4

Pacing

Pacing is a term you have likely heard. Pacing refers to monitoring and regulating your activities to avoid wearing out during the day. The exercises you learned in the previous chapter will help you build energy. We do not want you to squander that precious vitality. The goal is to add energy daily to rebuild your reserves. Crashes hinder progress and should be avoided. The greater the energy reserves, the greater your resilience will be. I noticed a definite change in my ability to bounce back after three months of very measured living.

Activities can be divided into two categories: energy-draining and energy-building. Since almost everything we do is energy-draining, we must stay within our limits. Rest intervals are our best friend. Taking breaks is essential to success. This can be difficult as ME/CFS folks typically have a lot of drive.

The rule of thumb is not to do things to the point of fatigue. Therefore, one must determine the safe limits for engaging in an activity. For example, cleaning your home often feels tiring. Perhaps 5 or 10 minutes is your maximum for your safety zone. Then you may need to stop and rest for 30 minutes. Bruce Campbell refers to this as living within your “energy envelope.” I recommend his book, *Managing Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia*.¹ He spends many pages explaining pacing. My short book certainly does not cover everything you need to know, so it is important to utilize other resources.

Here is one way to consider the big picture. Aerobic activities, where you work and breathe more deeply, can be energy-building if done correctly. Everything that is more anaerobic (without oxygen) drains energy to a degree. This list could include activities such as reading, talking, standing, cleaning, cooking, working at a computer, shopping, or caring for children. We still must perform these activities because they are the stuff of life, but they will not make us stronger. As noted, the best way to avoid overdoing light activities is by taking frequent breaks. This can be slightly maddening for those who like to get things done, but it is part of the journey. We became ill in part from overdoing things and not listening to our bodies. We get well by pacing ourselves and listening to our bodies. Do not focus on how hard you were able to work in the past. Focus on what you must do to be wise in your recovery today. Also, allowing more time to complete activities is helpful. Rushing around or placing pressure on ourselves is stressful. A moderate pace conserves energy. Attitudes related to statements like “give it your all” or “no pain, no gain” should be set aside. The new motto is “Be wise.”

Going outside for activities can be daunting. People in your social circle (friends and family) will want you to do things with them. However, these fun activities may seem threatening to you because, if you overdo them, you could end up crashing. Many years ago, I occasionally watched a television show called *Sea Hunt*, starring Lloyd Bridges. In one episode, after a cave-in, he and some other divers had to navigate an underwater cave system to rescue someone. The problem was that they only had enough oxygen for an hour. If they did not get back in time, they would all die. It was quite exciting as their air supply began to run out. When I had acute ME/CFS, I had similar feelings. I knew my energy

might run dry when I was out and about. It is helpful to plan how much time you have before your energy starts to run low. Then you can feel some peace and assurance that you will be OK if you stay within those parameters. Knowing when and where to rest, if needed, is also essential.

This very real challenge of avoiding energy blowouts is familiar to those with ME/CFS. It's scary to go out, so many people stay home most of the time. In a sense, building up your energy reserves is like having a larger oxygen tank. You begin to feel more confident that you can venture further and longer. Some of this outside activity still requires planning. How long will this excursion take? Can I sit down if I need to? Can I leave if I want to? Have I brought along water, snacks, and the proper clothing? Part of this planning requires being assertive. You might want to take your car if your friends want to go to the park or the zoo. Then you can leave if you need to. If you stay with relatives, you can inform them that you must lie down and take periodic rests. People will accommodate you if you are clear and firm in your approach. It will not be easy. We like to be agreeable, and being open about your condition may feel embarrassing. Please realize that setting boundaries is not optional; it is essential. Tell yourself that you must be firm if you wish to get well!

People recovering from ME/CFS have limited energy for activities and will naturally experience significant downtime. It is optimal to find meaningful things to do within those limitations. ME/CFS taxes people psychologically. It is normal to feel sad, anxious, and overwhelmed. To help combat negative emotions, it is constructive to engage in positive activities each day that require minimal energy. Examples might include driving to a beautiful area and sitting outside to enjoy nature, or listening to audiobooks. Passive activities, such as watching television or using a computer, are suitable for entertainment but should not be considered rest. The best rest besides sleeping is lying flat in a dark place (or with eye shades or a cloth over your eyes). This practice does rejuvenate the body to a degree as it mimics sleep. These rest periods should probably be done at least twice per day. They may need to be limited to 30 minutes or less to avoid interfering with sleep. People seem to get drowsier in the early afternoon and early evening. Listening to music or podcasts while resting is OK, as boredom can be intolerable. Also, stick to a regular sleep schedule as much as possible.

Obtaining deep, restful sleep can be problematic for many with ME/CFS. Here are some general rules for good sleep hygiene. The ME/CFS lifestyle makes some of these ideas more challenging, so do your best.

1. Keep a regular sleep schedule. Go to sleep at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, even on the weekends.
2. Avoid napping after 3 p.m. and limit naps to 20 minutes or less.
3. Avoid caffeine and alcohol late in the day.
4. Engage in regular exercise, but avoid it within 2-3 hours of bedtime.
5. Don't eat a heavy meal late in the day. If you need a snack before bedtime, make it a very light one.
6. Make your bedroom comfortable, dark, quiet, and cool. Researchers consider 65 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit to be the optimal temperature for sleeping.

7. Follow a routine to help you relax before sleep (for example, reading, listening to music, or a warm bath). Turn off electronic screens an hour before bedtime.
8. Do not lie in bed awake. If you can't fall asleep after 20 minutes, get up, sit in a chair, and read or listen to soft music until you feel tired.
9. If you feel tense during the day, schedule a problem-solving period before going to bed. Then, resolve to let the unsolved problems go till the next day.
10. Try natural sleep aids such as melatonin, valerian, chamomile, glycine, lavender, lemon balm, and valerian root. Prescription drugs such as the benzodiazepine group are risky to use long-term, as you can build up a tolerance and become dependent.

Assessing Resilience

The body has its own wisdom. When we are sick with a virus, we feel weak, not because we have no energy, but because the body diverts a significant amount of energy toward fighting the illness. When the crisis ends, the body again provides extra energy for activities. ME/CFS creates a dilemma for the body. As core energy supplies become dangerously low, the body focuses on survival. We require a certain amount of energy for internal processes, such as those of the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, as well as hundreds of other functions that we generally do not consider. Consequently, when energy reserves are low, the body allocates less energy for extra activities. This is why someone with ME/CFS might feel quite fatigued after 15 minutes of housework or shopping. As we build core energy and get out of crisis mode, the body begins to disperse more energy for daily activities. It decides on the energy window, not our conscious mind. Our job is to listen to our bodies and behave accordingly. One of the trickiest aspects of overcoming ME/CFS is to avoid mistakenly viewing extra energy as permission to act like we did before becoming ill.

It will be helpful to figure out your baseline for activity. How much work, recreation, and exercise are you capable of doing without becoming overly fatigued? I suggest that you review your usual activities and assign points to each based on the energy and time they require. Determining the energy requirements of each activity is not an exact science, but it does increase your awareness, which is vital to the goal of conserving energy. For example, reading might be 1 point per 15 minutes, washing dishes might be 3 points per 15 minutes, and walking $\frac{1}{4}$ mile might be 10 points. There is a list at the end of this chapter to help you complete this task. The purpose of developing an energy management system is to empower us to make logical decisions about daily activities. Having ME/CFS is so limiting and frustrating that it is easy to ignore reason and impulsively break our energy boundaries. Not only can this reckless behavior result in painful crashes, but it is counterproductive to the recovery goal of building up energy reserves.

Special Circumstances

I recognize that many readers of this book would love to follow the program perfectly, but are limited to some degree by their life circumstances. This number may include individuals with small children or those who need to work to support themselves. I am sympathetic and have dealt with both those situations myself. My advice would be to stay

hopeful and strive to be flexible and creative. Coping with complex life circumstances does impact recovery. Tough decisions may have to be made that require sacrifice and inconvenience. You may have to ask others for help. All of this will seem more manageable if you develop hope in your capacity to recover. Short-term solutions are simpler to implement. Friends and family will be excited to support your recovery efforts as they see progress and your commitment to the program.

Recovery Assignment

Consider the list of activities below. Assign hypothetical points based on your present energy levels. Each point represents one-hundredth of your total energy for a given day. The purpose of this exercise is to increase your awareness of how you spend your energy and how carefully you should approach each activity.

- 1. Grooming- face, teeth, hair _____
- 2. Showering _____
- 3. Watching television for 30 minutes _____
- 4. House cleaning 15 minutes _____
- 5. Cooking 15 minutes _____
- 6. Talking on the phone 15 minutes _____
- 7. Walking two blocks (approximately ¼ mile) _____
- 8. Reading a book 15 minutes _____
- 9. Listening to a podcast _____
- 10. Shopping per 15 minutes _____
- 11. Being on the computer for 30 minutes _____
- 12. Working 2 hours (if employed) _____
- 13. Socializing with friends or family for 30 minutes _____
- 14. Paying bills 30 minutes _____
- 15. Playing cards or a board game _____
- 16. Driving a car for 30 minutes _____
- 17. Taking a bus 1 hour _____
- 18. Standing in a line for 15 minutes _____
- 19. Doctor’s visit 1 hour _____
- 20. Attending church 1 hour _____
- 21. Attending a school class 1 hour _____
- 22. Lifting weights at the gym 30 minutes _____
- 23. Hobby 30 minutes _____
- 24. Yoga or stretching 15 minutes _____
- 25. Laundry 30 minutes _____
- 26. Other _____
- 27. Other _____
- 28. Other _____

Notes

1. Campbell, B. *Managing Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia* (CSH Press: Palo Alto, CA. 2014)

Chapter 5

Energy Management

I want to discuss some principles I learned during my recovery. I realize that these ideas may not apply to everyone, and each person's situation is unique. I hope writing this book will help some of those who suffer. ME/CFS is an overwhelming and demoralizing illness. You would not wish ME/CFS on your worst enemy!

I will begin by explaining some key principles of energy management. Then, I will share a couple of new ideas. I expect any reader to be cautious, but staying open-minded may prove worthwhile. By experimenting with these concepts, you have everything to gain and little to lose. You do not have to believe me. You will be able to feel it yourself and prove it. The methods I will advocate are quite safe. The main principles I believe in are exercising without incurring fatigue and always listening to your body.

Energy Production

Science tells us the energy we use is produced by food metabolism. The body breaks down food and converts glucose and fatty acids into energy through mitochondrial oxidation via the Krebs cycle. This energy is stored and transported as ATP or GTP. GTP is primarily used in cellular processes. ATP is the “energy currency” of the cells and enables the muscles to do their work. ATP is stored in tiny amounts and is used up within 5-10 seconds. ATP stores take about 3 minutes to be replenished. Beyond stored ATP, phosphocreatine supplies can power the cells for another 10 seconds. When the body runs out of these quick-energy supplies, it begins to use glycogen for energy.

For moderate-intensity activities, the body initially relies on anaerobic glycolysis, which breaks down glycogen without oxygen. Anaerobic glycolysis is fast but inefficient. It produces only 2 ATP molecules, whereas glycolysis with oxygen produces up to 38 ATP per glucose molecule. Anaerobic glycolysis can fuel activity for only 2 minutes or less.

For more sustained physical activities, the body uses a combination of glucose and fatty acids for fuel. Glycogen is a form of glucose comprised of thousands of connected glucose molecules. It is stored in the liver and muscles for use when needed. Conditioned athletes with larger muscles have greater glycogen stores in their muscles. The liver also helps maintain blood glucose levels, which provides the body, especially the brain, with fuel. Sixty percent of the blood glucose is directed to the brain.

Triglycerides are the most common form of fat in the bloodstream. They consist of three fatty acid chains linked by a molecule called glycerol. After digestion, they are cleared from the bloodstream and stored in adipose tissue for future use as fuel. Hormones release them when fuel is needed. This process, in which triglycerides are broken down by oxidation into free fatty acids that can fuel muscle, is called lipolysis. Fat and glucose are used for fuel simultaneously, but their ratios shift with energy needs. The ratio is about 70 percent fat and 30 percent carbohydrates during low-level daily activities. With greater physical activity, such as walking or light jogging, the fat-to-glucose ratio will be closer to 50/50. None of these percentages is fixed, as they can vary based on individual body

makeup, strength, and fitness levels. The body can also break down muscle protein for energy as a last resort during starvation.

Carbohydrates are more suitable for producing energy than proteins and fats because the breakdown of proteins and fats requires more energy than does carbohydrate breakdown. Carbohydrates also release more energy than proteins and fats when broken down. One liter of oxygen used to burn fat provides 8 to 15 percent less ATP than when used to burn sugar.

Glucose also produces ATP two to four times faster than fatty acids. When intense physical activity, such as sprinting, is required, fat oxidation for fuel cannot keep up with the energy demands. Therefore, the body switches to using more stored glycogen for quick energy. During high levels of physical exertion, when the person is operating near maximum oxygen demand, the percentage of glycogen used relative to fat will be 90 percent or higher.

Catch 22

A "catch-22" is a paradoxical situation where a rule or policy creates a no-win situation, as the very act of trying to fulfill the requirement disqualifies one. It's a situation where you're stuck between two undesirable options, with no way out. The phrase comes from Joseph Heller's novel, *Catch-22*, published in 1961.

Recommending exercise for those with ME/CFS seems like the ultimate catch-22. If you do not activate yourself at all, improvement is minimal. If you try to exercise, you can fall into a post-exertional malaise (PEM) state, where you are weaker and more miserable than before. It is your private hell that few can understand. One of the goals of this book is to shed some light on this quandary.

Limitations of the Human Energy System

Exercise is an essential component of the Power Up Program. That said, we must recognize that exercise is a slippery slope for those with ME/CFS. Virtually everyone diagnosed with ME/CFS has tried to be more active and then suffered dreaded PEM. As noted earlier in this book, the British National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) concluded that graded exercise therapy (GET) is harmful. The GET program prescribes a systematic increase in exercise intensity.

Given the inherent dangers of exercise for those with ME/CFS, it seems paradoxical to prescribe this modality as a treatment component. Indeed, this endeavor must be undertaken with great care. This is why the limitations of the human energy system must be well understood.

The human machine requires several ingredients to work effectively over an extended time. It needs muscles, fuel, oxygen, focus, and time to recuperate. Fortunately, extensive research has been done by those in the field of exercise science. We know that when cells do not receive enough oxygen to perform their functions, there is an increase in lactate, pi, hydrogen ions, reactive oxygen species (ROS), creatine, and phosphate. Increased pi affects myofibrillar performance, affects calcium release, and limits

performance. ROS affects muscle fatigue by oxidizing cellular proteins. Of course, most of us know from experience how muscle output is affected when we are out of breath.

As a fuel, glucose is a more efficient energy source than fat. Exercises that stimulate deep breathing will utilize a higher percentage of glucose than fat to accomplish the task. For this reason, slower walking without breathing hard may be more tiring than expected for those with ME/CFS. Of course, when we are out of shape in terms of muscle strength and cardiovascular conditioning, almost any activity will feel draining. We need good machinery for the body to operate at high capacity. To get a clear picture of this, think of what it feels like to run up a hill when you haven't been exercising regularly. Therefore, the challenge is to improve physical conditioning without jeopardizing one's health and energy levels.

A healthy diet and regular meals are also important for maintaining energy levels. Blood glucose levels play a crucial role in fueling the body during exercise. Skipping meals or eating irregularly can affect the amount of sugar the body and brain receive. Protein is essential for building muscle, and overall health depends upon receiving the necessary vitamins, minerals, and nutrients.

Good focus is an additional element to consider. We must be alert and motivated to send the necessary nerve impulses to activate the body's machinery. Think of the brain as having a dimmer switch that adjusts the amount of energy sent out. Feeling depressed or tired can limit our motivation for exercise. Although the brain weighs just 3 pounds and accounts for approximately 2 percent of body mass, it consumes about 20 percent of the available energy. ATP is used in the brain during waking activities and is metabolized to adenosine. As adenosine builds up in the bloodstream, it binds to specific receptors, inhibiting neural activity and causing drowsiness. The popular substance caffeine blocks adenosine. While you sleep, the brain converts adenosine back into ATP, reducing your sleep drive and replenishing glycogen stores. Additionally, during the low-power sleep mode, available energy is directed toward regenerating the body. During this time, your liver detoxifies your blood, damaged muscle tissue is repaired, and depleted hormones are synthesized and stored.

Recuperation time is essential to effective energy management. Athletics is geared towards speed, performance, and winning, rather than conserving energy. So, people have a mindset that pushes them to perform at higher levels. Practices have evolved that are not very healthy. For example, many people believe you should not stop and rest when running. They think that if you persist, your conditioning will eventually improve, allowing you to perform at a higher level. However, when people approach their maximum oxygen capacity, exercise requires more energy due to inhibitory cellular metabolites. A "do or die" mentality produces greater post-exercise fatigue. Healthy people can get away with pushing their bodies; those with ME/CFS will pay a huge price.

The body is constantly re-synthesizing fuel stores and clearing cell metabolites. Without proper rest intervals, we cannot perform effectively and will be more fatigued afterward. Unfortunately, most adults have been conditioned to ignore fatigue and not listen to their bodies. Interval training demonstrates the value of recuperation periods. For runners, interval training involves alternating bursts of speed with rest or a slower pace,

rather than jogging at a steady pace. Interval training has been around since the late 1930s, and considerable research has demonstrated its benefits. Interval training has been shown to enhance cardiovascular health, improve metabolism, increase performance, and improve endurance and muscle strength.¹

Present Theories on Energy and ME/ME/CFS

There is one thing about body energy that everyone with ME/CFS can agree on. Those with ME/CFS have fewer “spoons” than healthy people. As those in this exclusive club know, *spoons* represent the limited amount of energy available for the day’s activities. It is worth noting that people with ME/CFS can perform most activities. What they lack is stamina! They could walk a mile or do housework for an hour, but this level of activity would exhaust most and could lead to PEM. The machinery still works, but there are power limitations. To use an analogy, those with ME/CFS are like a cell phone whose battery drains very quickly. They also don't charge up adequately overnight.

Here is an important point to consider. The straightforward explanation that people obtain their daily energy from glycogen, fat, and limited ATP stores does not account for the variation in vital energy among individuals. After all, some people can run marathons or work two jobs, while others with ME/CFS, eating a similar diet, may not be able to go to the store without experiencing excessive fatigue. Something else must be going on!

In most people, nocturnal processes are sufficient to help people recover their vital energy. However, in ME/CFS, this process appears to be deficient. Unrefreshing sleep is necessary for the diagnosis of ME/CFS. Lack of stamina for physical activities and post-exertional malaise (PEM) if activities are overdone are also major indicators of this disorder. What causes this? One prominent hypothesis is that something must be going wrong in the mitochondria, the cell's powerhouse. A 2020 review of 19 studies published in the *Journal of Translational Medicine* failed to establish a role for mitochondrial dysfunction in ME/CFS pathology.² However, more recent studies have found lower mitochondrial metabolism and lower mitochondrial ATP synthesis rates, as well as increased oxidative stress.³ Also, many individuals with ME/CFS have a dysregulated immune system. However, there are questions about these findings. Are these body markers the cause of ME/CFS, or merely a result of having ME/CFS? Whatever the supposition, we then must explain how that same mechanism could cause PEM. Remember that PEM usually develops 12 to 48 hours after over-exertion and then takes a week or two to resolve. Additionally, since there is no known effective treatment to restore optimal mitochondrial function, how can we explain why some people improve? Obviously, there are many unanswered questions.

The hypothesis suggested by those who endorse brain retraining is that the nervous system becomes *dysregulated* from such things as stress, overwork, perfectionism, and past trauma. Exposure to viruses, infections, mold, or Lyme disease are other factors that can compromise the nervous system. Fatigue, pain, and somatic symptoms are subconscious warning signals the brain creates to protect itself from further stress. Brain retraining theory holds that symptoms are overreactions by a hypersensitive nervous system.⁴ The individual does not feel safe on a subconscious level, and the fatigue is not

reflective of any real physical problems. This suggests a significant psychological component to ME/CFS. Recovery occurs through the creation of new neural pathways and the desensitization of the nervous system. Some standard techniques are breathing exercises, interrupting negative thought patterns, reframing physical or emotional responses, and visualizing positive activities or outcomes.

Theoretical questions remain as to whether nervous system dysregulation is the root cause of ME/CFS. In my career as a practicing psychologist, I treated hundreds of people with severe anxiety issues, and only one had any symptoms resembling chronic fatigue. Additionally, when subconscious conflicts are resolved, behavioral changes typically occur more quickly than what brain retraining practitioners report. For example, exposure therapy is one of the standard treatments for phobias and OCD. If the patient is willing to face the feared stimulus in a graduated manner, he generally improves within a couple of months.

Theoretically, a person with ME/CFS who exercises is facing their fear, which should be beneficial. However, we know that it does not work that way. Over-exercising is the quickest way to develop PEM. Additionally, it does not make psychological sense for a person to be fine after walking one mile but to suffer a setback after walking two miles. If there are no real physical issues, one would not expect this result. Also, to view ME/CFS as chiefly a nervous system issue, we must ignore new evidence that shows differences in the mitochondria and immune systems of those with ME/CFS. Finally, brain retraining does not work for everyone. This disorder may be more complex than brain retraining theory allows, or not all ME/CFS subtypes respond to brain retraining.

A New Theory

There is a concept that incorporates the two previously discussed theories, mitochondrial issues and brain retraining. Consider the possibility that fatigue may be a protective mechanism in response to genuine, not imagined, physical threats. We see a similar mechanism when people become weak when ill with a virus. When we are ill, the body diverts energy that could go to physical activity to healing. This hypothesis aligns better with recent research showing clear physical issues in the bodies of those with ME/CFS. The idea is that the autonomic nervous system is purposely restricting energy in response to perceived physical difficulties. Which specific physical concerns may be affecting the health of those with ME/CFS is not firmly established. We remain far more aware of symptoms than causes.

We could call our general sense of energy “core energy.” Core energy cannot be measured or observed. It is something that is felt. Core energy is a construct and not a physiological term. Nevertheless, it is a phenomenon everyone experiences. The number of spoons we have available each day for activities is a strong indicator of our core energy strength. There is no scientific explanation for why we have this sense of perceived core energy. The body does seem to be tracking something, as the process shows notable consistency. The law of gravity presents a similar situation. We know gravity is a real force, but there is no quantum-level explanation for why it works.

Core energy can be best likened to a battery. This internal battery supplements the energy supplied by food. Obviously, this is not a real battery, but the stronger the *charge*, the more energy (spoons) that the autonomic nervous system makes available for daily activities. The charge, or total energy, seems to increase when people pursue their daily activities within the range of their capabilities. We can stay aware of our core energy levels, daily energy allotment, and work limits by listening to our body. Aerobic exercise seems particularly helpful, provided the individual can avoid fatigue. There is no current scientific explanation for this phenomenon. It just works!

The fact that a percentage of people with ME/CFS improve suggests that whatever the physical problem in the body, it is affected by lifestyle. Therefore, until a cure is discovered, a holistic approach to recovery may be the only option. A holistic approach would include such items as pacing, nutrition, mental health, and movement.

Exercise and Energy

It takes great skill to condition your body for exercise without getting tired. Those people who believe the research shows that exercise is not helpful for ME/CFS have not done their homework, nor thought the issue through properly. They are relying on information others shared with them and have been blinded by false assumptions. Mainly, they have heard that GET can be dangerous.

It is unreasonable to generalize from the GET studies and to declare all exercise inappropriate for those with ME/CFS. This would be like saying that if one medication is harmful, all medications should be avoided. The majority of people who participated in GET chose walking for their exercise. There are probably fifty ways to exercise, and it is illogical to assume all exercises would have the exact same effect. Even walking can be performed in several different ways.

During the well-known Pace Trials conducted in England, 62 of the 160 GET participants reported positive changes from treatment, 80 reported minimal change, and 10 reported negative changes.⁵ However, when the ME Association conducted a survey of people in their organization who had received GET as treatment from various sources (1428 respondents), 74 percent said GET made their condition worse. In a review by Geraghty of 11 studies that used some form of GET, 54% of participants reported their health had worsened.⁶

Now, clearly, it is unethical to use a treatment that may harm 54 percent. This is why, in 2021, NICE changed its recommendations to state that GET was not an acceptable treatment option. Unfortunately, many take this suggestion to mean you should not consider any type of exercise as treatment, and that all exercise is dangerous for those with ME/ME/CFS. It is worth noting that despite recent findings of biological issues with this population, there is still no standard treatment for ME/ME/CFS, so potentially helpful therapies should not be ignored. Exercise is not universally dangerous; according to Geraghty's research, 46% of people who used GET across the 11 studies reported no serious complaints.⁷

Exercise is actually the only treatment that has been empirically validated to help in the treatment of ME/ME/CFS. A meta-analysis of the literature on exercise treatment

for ME/ME/CFS was conducted by De Vera Martin and Diaz Salazar in 2025.⁸ They found 44 eligible studies and chose 11 for quantitative review. Their conclusions were as follows: “The recommendation for exercise-based interventions remains weak, but favorable, supporting exercise as a viable approach for improving physical function and fatigue in ME/CFS patients.”

The assumption from this research is that exercise may aid recovery from ME/CFS, but it must be done very carefully, as it can be harmful if performed incorrectly. Similarly, the effectiveness of medication is closely tied to dosage. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research comparing different types of exercise, procedural approaches, and methods for assessing patient readiness.

Educated Movement

We are aware of the ebb and flow of our energy levels. We can feel it, but cannot see it or measure it. Unfortunately, as people become adults, they learn to ignore how they feel because of work demands and social and recreational pursuits. They push until something breaks, and only then do they reassess their lifestyle. We tend to take our energy levels for granted. However, once we see our energy level as a limited and precious resource, we will take much more care to preserve it. Most of us take great care to manage our finances. Perhaps we need to focus on building our energy reserves just as much as we do on building our personal fortune. I know I was very reckless with my energy when I was young and didn't see what I was doing wrong until it was too late.

Those with ME/CFS need to maintain a vision of change. Their metaphorical battery levels are low but can be replenished. Most importantly, their body energy system is still functional and works like the great machine that it is. This is why medical exams usually cannot detect significant problems in people with ME/CFS. That is a good thing! If nothing in the body is seriously damaged, recovery is very possible. If you put in the work, you can experience greater strength and vitality for yourself, the best proof of all.

Of course, while working on building energy, other factors need to be kept under control. Pacing, nutrition, medical needs, educated movement, and mental health are all part of the formula for change. I recognize that individuals with ME/CFS report numerous symptoms besides fatigue. If you belong to an online Facebook or Reddit group for people with this disorder, it seems that there are countless sensations and symptoms that people report on and ask questions about. I am not a physician, so I have a limited understanding of most of these things. The ideas presented in this book provide general guidelines for enhancing health. The theory is that by decreasing stress, instilling hope, and building energy reserves, many of these extra symptoms will dissipate over time. Any physical symptoms that do not respond to this approach need to be evaluated by medical professionals. The next chapter will provide specific instructions on incorporating movement into your recovery approach.

Notes

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Chapter 6

Developing an Exercise Program

Baby Steps

I recognize that if you have ME/CFS, the invitation to exercise probably makes you nervous. Having been in your shoes, I get it. The main caution I want to put forward is this: **AVOID CRASHES AT ALL COSTS!** Crashes are painful, discouraging, and counterproductive. I made no serious headway in my recovery till I figured out how to avoid these.

Now, it may seem paradoxical that I am suggesting some of the weakest people on earth engage in exercise. It seems more natural that rest would be the answer. Except, it clearly is not. When you hear the stories of those who have recovered, almost all report participating in some form of movement. The challenge for each individual lies in exercising in the right ways and to the correct degree.

Exercise and Conditioning

Anyone can improve their conditioning. A landmark research study, published in 1994 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, demonstrated that even the elderly can increase their muscle strength. One-hundred nursing home residents with an average age of 87 were placed in a resistance training program for 10 weeks. These geriatric patients significantly increased their muscle strength.¹

The first step in beginning an exercise program is to ensure you are medically cleared by your physician. Also, you do not want to be suffering from an active viral infection or any other condition with acute symptoms. Examples of symptoms to be concerned about might include a sore throat, chills, fever, or headache. One important rule of thumb is that regardless of the level of exercise you choose, you should feel good afterward, ideally with no fatigue or pain. A second caution is to avoid working out the way you did when you were healthy. Effective movement for individuals with ME/CFS prioritizes safety over rapid progression in conditioning.

ME/CFS Exercise Protocol

Exercising efficiently without creating fatigue depends upon the following factors:

1. Muscle strength
2. Heart and lung capacity
3. Intensity of exercise
4. Duration of exercise
5. Oxygen demands for exercise
6. Ratio of rest or slowdowns to activity periods. Interval training is always more energy efficient than continuous exercise.
7. Blood sugar levels
8. Sufficient sleep the previous night
9. Rested- have not done too much mental or physical work prior to exercising

10. Feeling healthy – not influenced by a virus or infection, etc.

11. An individual sense of extra energy (spoons) available for the day's activities. *The rule is the fewer the spoons, the lighter and briefer the exercise.*

General Guidelines for Exercise

1. Structure your exercise so that you are not fatigued afterward. Start with tiny exercises.
2. Slow down if you begin to feel out of breath.
3. Stop exercising if your muscles begin to feel overly tired.
4. Always use interval training with rests or slowdowns versus continuous exercise.
5. The goal is to slowly become more conditioned, that is, build muscle strength and heart and lung capacity. (A well-conditioned body performs more efficiently and takes less energy to do the same work. This will be beneficial regardless of the rate of recovery achieved.)
6. More energy is created as we work or exercise at higher rates of oxygen intake. Also, glycogen is a superior fuel source, and the glycogen-to-fatty acid ratio increases with activity rate. These principles only apply if people work within their conditioning and energy limitations.
7. We have an internal energy meter that dictates how much energy (spoons) the body will allot to external activities. If those with ME/ME/CFS exceed their daily energy allowance, they run the risk of developing post-exertional malaise (PEM). The number of spoons available on a given day is a factor in assessing resilience and the ability to recover from exercise. Especially in the early stages of recovery, it is necessary to exercise in a way that leaves no feelings of fatigue.
8. Spoons are representative of perceived core energy. The higher the core energy supply, the more spoons the body allots to activities each day. Theoretically, if we listen to our body and work within our limits, we can build up this core energy base day by day.
9. Proper pacing of daily activities and a relaxed, positive mental state must accompany effective exercise to achieve the goal of strengthening core energy.
10. It is best to rest after exercising. Please recognize that after exercise, the body may feel stimulated, making it easy to overdo other activities. Listen to your body and proceed cautiously.

Getting Started with Movement

The first step is to assess your physical readiness. Ideally, you have consulted your physician and obtained his permission to proceed. Some may be fortunate to be working with a licensed physical therapist. I certainly recommend this, but I will provide a word of caution. A physical therapist will know many exercises and techniques and have extensive knowledge of human anatomy. However, I would guess that few have both the training and the experience of working with ME/CFS folks. Since they are used to working with more normal people, they may suggest exercises that are too tiring for you. Make sure to speak up and share your concerns, so you can work as a team. You may have to do some education about ME/CFS and fatigue.

Those who are mostly bedridden and struggle with stairs or getting around the house need to start slowly. Stretching exercises or gentle yoga are a good place to begin

experimenting with movement. In the beginning, your exercise duration will be measured in seconds, not minutes. There is no need to include tips on stretching or yoga in this work. There are numerous videos on YouTube that provide excellent instruction. You might plan to focus on gentle stretching for a couple of weeks or more.

Isometric Exercises

If stretching went well and your confidence has increased, the suggested next level of exercise is isometric exercise. Isometric exercises involve muscle contraction without joint movement. They work by creating tension in a fixed position. This makes them joint-friendly, time-efficient, and easy to do anywhere. A simple example is pushing your palms together. There is an important caution. If you are working with a physical therapist and they recommend isometric exercises, they may make a significant error. They may tell you to contract your muscles for 10 to 20 seconds or more while performing the exercises. Though this may be standard advice, I believe it is wrong for people with ME/CFS. *ME/CFS individuals should contract their muscles for only 2 seconds.* Anything more will create fatigue. You should also avoid more demanding isometric exercises such as planks. You can certainly experiment and learn these things for yourself. I just do not wish to see anyone get discouraged about exercising because of errors in technique.

Muscle tension during isometrics for people with ME/CFS should be limited to a two-count. Then rest 3 to 10 seconds. Stop if you begin to feel tired. Here are some simple beginning exercises. Please remember that with isometrics the goal is only to create tension. You do not actually complete the movement.

1. Lie in bed on your back and push the palms of your hands into the bed.
2. Hold arms out with elbows bent. Press palms together
3. Put one hand on the palm-side wrist of the other and pull your arm up. Then switch to the other arm.
4. Lie on your belly and push up
5. Sit in a chair, hold the sides of the chair, and push up with your legs
6. Stand up 2 or 3 feet from a wall. Place your hands on the wall and push out.

The Charging Exercise

Those who can amble around the house adequately are probably ready for the next exercise. This one, though very simple to do, can be valuable because it helps build energy and teaches some essential principles. I call this the “charging exercise.” The exercise works in this way. Lightly hold onto something with one hand for balance and perform knee bobs (go only a quarter-way down to make them less energy-demanding), one after the other, until you are breathing deeply while doing them. Start with three to five repetitions. Then switch to the “Indian dance.” Lightly bounce in place on one foot twice, and then switch to the other foot. Continue for 10 to 20 seconds. Next, practice “walking in place.” In this valuable exercise, one walks in place slowly, while bringing one's knees high and lifting one's hands high over one's head. This exaggerated movement has the very

useful effect of causing you to breathe deeply. Stop when you feel your oxygen levels are fully restored. Next, take a break until you feel rested and ready to perform another set of these exercises.

After resting, do another set or more, as long as you don't feel tired. The goal is to start exercising gently to build muscle without causing fatigue. One limiting factor will be your leg strength. If your leg muscles begin to feel tired, exercising becomes less efficient, and you may want to stop for several hours or for the day. During rest periods, you will be best able to assess if any fatigue in the energy system is setting in. Always listen to your body! The key to this method of educated movement is exercising without inducing fatigue. If you work your muscles hard one day, have a lighter workout the next day. As these exercises may not seem exciting once you become accustomed to them, you may enjoy the experience more if you listen to music or a podcast, or watch television while doing them.

I once had a client at a mental health center who came in for help because she was upset that her doctor told her she only had 8 months to live. She had only one functional lung, but even that one was weak, and she was on oxygen 24 hours a day. I asked her if she wanted to talk about accepting death. She said, "No, I want to live." I told her that practicing medicine was not in my job description, but that I would happily support her in whatever she and her doctor decided to do. She was OK with this. Her physical therapist suggested that she do knee bends regularly. Being quite anxious about dying, she very dutifully performed her workout several times per day. To my great surprise, she started to get better. She increased the capacity of her one good lung and eventually no longer needed oxygen during the day. She became more active and looked forward to living for many more years. I was shocked to see all this happen, but it did convince me that almost anyone can improve their physical conditioning.

The charging exercise is simple to do and safe to try out because you are entirely in charge of the duration. This practice also helps you learn to listen to your body. There is one special thing that can also happen. As you do more repetitions, you may notice that you feel a little more energy. This suggests that these principles may be working. These experiences can plant seeds of hope and lead to confidence that you have a viable recovery plan. At the very least, you should learn that you can exercise without triggering PEM. That shows that it is possible to avoid deconditioning. Deconditioning is a serious problem as it seems to lead to the situation of being bed-bound, a horrible prison indeed!

Advanced Charging

Once you get used to doing the charging exercise, you can progress to something new and exciting. You can add a new step to the charging exercise by jogging in place for 5 to 10 seconds. Then do knee bobs followed by the Indian dance and walking in place as explained earlier. I refer to this method as "advanced charging." Then repeat... Perform this sequence of exercises for 1 to 2 minutes (or less if you feel tired), then rest for a minute or more. Do several sets if you feel up to it. Listen to your body.

Running, even for a few seconds, will seem daring. However, it can be more effective for gaining energy. It seems counterintuitive, but I believe it is related to the fact that during brief, intense exercise, we primarily use stored ATP, the body's most efficient fuel.

Also, you are breathing harder, and more oxygen means more energy is produced. Remember that everything is experimental, and progression is limited by how you feel. If you feel fatigued after trying this exercise, please return to the basic charging exercise for a while. These exercise prescriptions are general guidelines. Please do not feel that you need to follow them rigidly. You can do more or fewer repetitions than suggested. Listen to your body and create a program that works for you!

You cannot see or measure energy. But you can feel it! As you continue to live by the principles outlined in this book, you will feel your strength grow. For those who may find these exercises too easy, do not fret. We will help you progress to more challenging yet safe routines.

Exercise Machines

If you feel that these easy exercises you've started with are helping, and you're careful with the rest of your daily activities, you're probably ready to up your game. Please remember that interval training is always recommended. As explained previously, interval training is a type of training exercise that involves a series of higher-intensity workouts interspersed with slow-downs or rest periods. Given the limitations associated with ME/CFS, I advise only moderate intensity for shorter periods.

Many people have exercise machines in their homes. However, the use of exercise machines is optional. Cost or space may be an issue, or you may not have access to a gym. If you do not have access to exercise machines, you could try some outdoor exercise. Nonetheless, there are several advantages to exercise machines. It is easy to regulate your energy while using them. You can stop whenever you like, and since they are indoors, weather is not a factor. Many are seated machines, which makes them far more suitable for those who struggle with POTS. Popular types are recumbent bikes, stationary bikes, elliptical machines, and treadmills.

The key to exercising with ME/CFS is never to allow yourself to become too fatigued or too out of breath. Getting in shape, therefore, must be a very gradual process. Instead of focusing on results such as muscle strength, weight loss, exercise duration, or speed, the primary focus must be on energy efficiency. You will gradually get conditioned, but it requires time and patience.

If you have a stationary bicycle, you could set it to a moderate setting and ride for a minute or two, then rest. Sometimes, people think that exercise machines should be set to the lowest resistance, but this is a mistake. If there is little resistance, there is little gain in muscle strength. Find the middle ground. If you feel that a couple of minutes is too easy, feel free to adjust it to a longer time. If a minute seems too challenging, try reducing it to 30 seconds. You are in charge. Break it up into intervals that fit your energy level and physical conditioning. Exercise is not to be feared. It is your friend. It is only your enemy when you overdo things.

Weightlifting

Weightlifting can be added to the aerobic exercises you are already doing. Strength training physically transforms your body and improves long-term health. Key benefits

include increased muscle mass, stronger bones, improved metabolism, enhanced joint protection, and better balance. On top of these advantages, it seems to be better tolerated by individuals with ME/CFS than many other workouts. In my view, this can be explained by the rest periods that are naturally built into strength training.

Please start small. Resist the temptation to work out like you did before you were ill. Use a weight you can easily lift 20 or 30 times. Each movement is called a repetition. If you lift a 10-pound weight 20 times, that will be 20 “repetitions.” If you take a rest period and then do 20 repetitions again, you will have performed two “sets” of that exercise. Take a sufficient rest period after each set. Here is a caution. When you are doing your “reps,” stop before you reach your max. The main goal is always to exercise within your energy envelope. I recommend a very patient and gentle approach to expanding your capabilities.

Now, some people are very familiar with strength training, and others have limited experience. If you lack knowledge, you could have a friend join you at the gym and show you the basics. Alternatively, you could go alone and test the equipment with light weights to see how each machine works. In my opinion, machines are much safer than free weights and require less technique. It does make a lot of sense to hire a coach if you go to a gym. Many gyms offer free introductory sessions, rates are generally reasonable, and the coaches are friendly and knowledgeable. The only problem is that they are likely to overestimate your capacity. My advice, if you go this route, is to let them know you have to be fully in charge of the pace because of your ME/CFS. They can show you how the machines work and recommend various exercises, but you have to determine how hard you work.

It is best not to rush your workout; allow sufficient rest between sets to ensure good energy management. Additionally, after working a specific muscle group, rest that group for a day before working it again. We break down muscles with a workout, and then need a day of rest for them to replenish and grow.

Weightlifting offers several important advantages. First of all, it is, by its nature, interval training. As such, it tends to build energy and not cause fatigue. Secondly, it is desirable to build muscle and maintain a healthy physique. Having more muscle helps people lose weight because muscle requires more calories to sustain itself. Additionally, building muscle increases glycogen stores. Skeletal muscles house about 80% of the body's total glycogen, serving as a localized, on-demand energy source during physical activity. If we exercise after using up our muscle glycogen stores, activity becomes far less energy-efficient.

Exercising Outdoors

OK, I assume you have progressed to this point in your conditioning. You have learned how to exercise indoors in moderation and are seeing positive changes in energy levels. Hopefully, you are also pacing yourself in your other daily activities to avoid going backward. This is wonderful! This next step will be exciting, but it also presents some challenges. It is easier to overdo things outside. For example, one important consideration is that, however far you go, you must get back! You also have the elements to consider. People with ME/CFS often struggle to handle cold, wet conditions or low blood sugar, so

be prepared. Also, stay hydrated. Sometimes, I have taken extra clothes and supplies in a backpack when walking.

Before running marathons, consider starting with some less strenuous outdoor exercises. Throwing a Frisbee around is relatively safe. It involves brief, periodic running that you can do at your own pace. Hitting a tennis ball around with a friend can be good, too. However, if you start playing regular games, there is much less control over energy expenditures. Pickleball is another option. Since the court is much smaller, there is less cardio and muscle demand.

Now, I would like to share something that may seem somewhat controversial. Walking is not always the best exercise. A scientific review of the literature has demonstrated that brisk walking improved cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular strength, and body composition among the elderly.² There is little intensity with slow walking, and because you do not use as much oxygen, it is less efficient for building energy. However, this limitation can be overcome by walking at a fast pace with periodic breaks or walking on hilly terrain. It can be helpful to sit on benches when needed for a rest. For those who are older or have physical challenges, a walker with a seat can be an excellent option. You can sit and rest whenever you need to! If the idea of walking with a faster pace seems scary, start out with shorter distances.

Bicycling can be a good form of exercise because it offers a lot of control over how hard you ride and when you relax and glide. The new e-bikes add an extra dimension of safety as you can adjust how much assist you use, or throttle all the way home if you are fatigued.

Regardless of the exercise you choose, incorporate interval training to maximize your results. As explained previously, interval training refers to any run or workout in which you alternate short periods of faster, high-intensity work with periods of active recovery. Studies comparing interval training and moderate-intensity training consistently show improvements in cardiorespiratory fitness and energy metabolic capacity.³ Most importantly, remember that the main goal for your exercise is not to be fatigued afterward.

Walk-Jogging

Now we can discuss the last option, which I used to restore my vitality. This option is walk/jogging. I assume that any readers ready to take this on have already built themselves up by completing many of the other exercises listed previously. You have a great deal of control when you perform this exercise. You can adjust the distance you jog, the duration of your walk, and the distance you cover. I believe I started by going up the street and back, maybe a quarter of a mile. The idea is to run 10 or 20 feet, then walk 100 feet or more, and then repeat. Figure out what formula and total distance work for you. It is probably best to begin with a 90/10 ratio, walking 90% of the distance and jogging 10%.

The distance and the walking-to-running ratio may change, but there should always be some walking involved. You do not want to get too out of breath or run when your legs are tired. Remember, the goal is not to win track races, but to build energy and be comfortable while doing so. If you haven't exercised much in the past, you'll likely come to appreciate the benefits of exercise in your life. It feels great to get in shape, and it's

especially empowering to have a system for restoring your energy and health that you genuinely believe in.

The overall goal is to exercise with the greatest efficiency possible. Additionally, it is important to bear in mind that muscles need time to repair. As you do vigorous exercises that tear down muscle tissue, you will need rest days. We do not want to push our muscles beyond their limits. Exercising when muscles are tired requires an excessive output of energy.

The idea of rest days with weight training only partially applies to cardio workouts. Leg muscles do not require a full day off, likely because they are used so frequently. With aerobic exercise like walking, jogging, or biking, do only 50% or 75% of your full workout on the second day. You can accomplish this by reducing both distance and intensity. Of course, the most important principle is to listen to your body. Your body will tell you when you are tired and need to reduce your workout.

One final thought: all this careful exercise is in vain if we do not pace ourselves properly during the rest of the day's activities. Pacing is the most essential skill of all. If it is not in place, all else fails. Pacing is complex because life has so many demands to balance. Nevertheless, we must determine how many "spoons" of energy we can devote to other activities so that we do not become overly fatigued.

Exercising with Long COVID

I have a few thoughts about long COVID, though I am definitely not an expert. The most important determination is whether or not your body is still fighting the initial virus. I had three different bouts of COVID, each lasting 3 to 4 months. The experience was exasperating. There is a sense of having no control over the disease, as it is difficult to notice improvement on a day-to-day basis. It is easy to slip into negative thinking. While my bouts of illness technically lasted long enough to slip into the category of long COVID, I doubt that I actually had it. It seemed to me that my body just took a long time to get over the infectious period. Since I likely never had long COVID, I cannot say too much about overcoming it.

I would suggest that there are some crucial differences between ME/CFS and COVID. COVID is a physical illness, and the body is actively fighting a virus. The associated fatigue is due to the body directing its energy toward healing. There is little variation in energy levels throughout the day. You constantly feel tired and sick. To me, having COVID seemed like having a bad cold that lasted twenty times longer than usual. Activities must be carefully monitored during COVID. When I tried to prematurely increase my activity levels during COVID bouts, I found that the virus came back full force and I re-experienced the common viral symptoms of headache, sore throat, weakness, brain fog, cough, and nausea. Therefore, exactness with pacing is essential. Even when you feel better and think you're over it, be extremely cautious with your activities for a couple of weeks. If you have lingering COVID, your immune system is likely overwhelmed, and you will need to wait for it to regain strength. This requires more patience than most of us have. I believe those suffering from it should be considered temporarily disabled. Accordingly, strong measures need to be implemented. If you have a job, taking medical leave is likely necessary, or at

the very least, reducing your hours. If you are a homemaker with children, help with meals, cleaning, and childcare is probably necessary. I am not a physician, and so please do not consider this medical advice. However, I wanted to share my observations as a COVID veteran and hope these thoughts prove helpful.

The sign that your body has been successful in its disease-fighting activities is that your energy begins to return. This is especially noticeable during exercise. I did exercise while I had COVID. My reasons were 1) to avoid deconditioning, and 2) I believe some movement is necessary to help with healing. I waited a few weeks till the acute phase was over. Then I proceeded very carefully. I noticed that, to avoid fatigue, I needed to limit myself to 20% of what I was used to doing with decreased intensity. I also required many more breaks. Stretching exercises or the charging exercise are probably safe ways for those with COVID to experiment with movement. Fatigue must be avoided at all costs with COVID, or you can relapse.

It appears that long COVID may morph into ME/CFS. One important distinction of ME/CFS is that individuals can feel energetic at times during the day. It is true that the energy lasts only briefly, but it is there. You do not see this in the more acute phases of COVID. When you have ME/CFS and overdo things, you get PEM and experience debilitating weakness, but usually not classic viral symptoms. This may be a useful diagnostic tool as you try to figure out where you are with your illness.

If you determine that you are over the infectious period of COVID and that you now have symptoms that more resemble ME/CFS, then the advice in this book about exercise should prove helpful. Otherwise, remain very careful with your activity levels until you heal.

Final Thoughts on Exercise

In summary, prioritize your well-being by addressing your diet, mental health, medical issues, and pacing. With all those in place, you can gradually build your overall energy levels by performing the exercises in this manual. Be patient, as significant improvement may take 3 to 12 months. As difficult as this journey may seem, you will learn valuable life lessons and achieve great personal growth by overcoming such adversity. I know how incredibly challenging, scary, and demoralizing ME/CFS can be! I hope every reader will try out these concepts and provide the opportunity for recovery he or she deserves.

As you experiment with performing these exercises, you may gain several valuable insights. Most importantly, you will discover that you can exercise without incurring significant fatigue. It is possible that engaging in regular, measured exercise will increase your energy. This would be a wonderful result, but not all ME/ME/CFS subtypes can be expected to respond this way. However, further deconditioning can be halted, and hopefully, gains can be made in strength and aerobic capacity. Successfully tackling the deconditioning issue is recommended by most medical practitioners. Physiological science would tell us that with greater conditioning, less energy is required for the same task. Therefore, the range of activities could increase even though the individual would still need to pace carefully during the day.

Recovery Assignment

Now is an excellent time for you to begin experimenting with educated movement. If you are largely bed-bound, please start with gentle stretching or yoga. For those who can walk around the house freely, the charging exercise could be the first step. If you are in good enough shape to take regular walks, you could try the advanced charging exercise, which adds running in place to the sequence. The initial purpose is to learn through experience that you can perform movement and exercise without creating significant fatigue. Next, as you build up muscle, aerobic capacity, and stamina, you can gradually increase the amount of exercise or progress to more challenging exercises. The main rule is to avoid fatigue. Please study the exercise principles provided in this chapter and listen to your body. It is always good to rest for a while after exercising, as the stimulation can give a false sense of energy.

If you are patient as you expand your exercise routine and pace yourself effectively in your daily activities, you will begin to notice an increase in your core energy levels. Recognizing that the program works will do wonders for your sense of hope and direction. Best wishes for success!

Notes

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Chapter 7

Mental Health and ME/CFS

Stress and negative emotions appear to play a role in the puzzle that is ME/CFS. ME/CFS is a serious illness that resists treatment and robs people of much of what makes life worthwhile. The experience of coping with ME/CFS is traumatic. Most are told there is no cure. There is the constant threat of PEM, financial difficulties, loneliness, and a deep sense of having no control over one's life. Whether stress causes ME/CFS or is just one factor out of many, negative emotions can weaken the immune system, sap energy, and compromise motivation. The emotional strain of living with ME/CFS likely generates many of the varied symptoms that people report.

Struggling with ME/CFS puts the individual in an impossible bind. Your life becomes untenable as you lack the essential energy to manage your responsibilities. If you try to ignore how you feel and push on, the result is a debilitating weakness that takes a week or more to recover from. It reminds you that you have no control over your life. The whole experience is surreal. I imagine that everyone with ME/CFS asks, "What in the world is wrong with me?"

The Power Up model offers structure to recovery efforts. It tells you that your body is accurately reporting that your core energy is low. The feelings of weakness are real and not the creation of a dysregulated nervous system. Through effective pacing and energy-building exercise, energy supplies can be rebuilt. Having a set plan provides a needed sense of control and helps reduce anxiety. The good news is that your body is not permanently damaged, and you can recover! The best way to conceptualize the recovery process is to imagine recharging an internal body battery. The basic rule is to generate more energy than you consume each day. This viewpoint assumes that any possible medical or health issues are adequately managed.

Make no mistake about it, tension is an enemy. No one is going to recover if they persistently remain in a state of panic about their situation. Buddhist philosophy tells us that tension comes from being attached to things we desire. To have peace, one needs to let go and accept the present reality. I had to change my perspective when I was struggling to recover from ME/CFS. It was easy to see how I had wasted energy throughout my life by foolish practices. Staying up late, overdoing work or exercise, drinking alcohol to excess, illness, fasting too much – all had weakened my system. What I then had to accept was that I possessed a limited amount of energy to use each day, and that would be my life until I figured out how to increase my energy. I knew I needed to practice the Buddhist principle of detachment. To use detachment means fully accepting your present circumstances, letting go of unrealistic desires, and enjoying the positives. Well, my unrealistic desire was clear. I wished to escape this predicament and not have such extreme energy limitations. Unfortunately, I did not know how to increase my energy levels. My job was to accept that presently I needed to navigate through life with this handicap, whether I liked it or not. I hoped I would eventually find some answers. After four years of struggling, I finally had the eureka moment that I already mentioned in the autobiographical chapter. I had noticed surges of energy a few times when doing very brief,

intense exercises. After considering my hypothesis, I began experimenting with walk/jogging. It was quite remarkable to me at the time that it worked. I learned that I had an energy reservoir that I could slowly build up. I had to exercise very carefully and pace myself in other daily activities. I now had a formula, what a blessing! The plan continued to work, and within three months my energy levels had improved significantly. However, I felt better psychologically on the first day I tried my new exercise plan. I went from merely hoping I might improve to being optimistic that I had found a solution.

I sincerely hope that you will benefit from the Power Up method and not have the pressure of needing to create your own recovery process. Remember, the plan is to work on all five factors of recovery—medical, diet and nutrition, pacing, exercise, and mental health. By necessity, some items will require more attention and work than others.

I want to emphasize that this is a general approach to a complex disorder. I am not a medical provider and cannot prescribe solutions for specific symptoms. People with ME/CFS often report a variety of symptoms, some of which may be related to stress caused by emotional reactions to this disorder. If performing some of the anxiety-reducing methods in this book reduces some symptoms, that is wonderful. Nevertheless, please continue to stay in touch with your physician about your symptoms and overall health. There is always the possibility that something may require specific medical attention.

Managing Stress

Anxiety is likely the predominant negative emotion associated with ME/CFS. Emotions are generated by our perceptions of given situations. In the case of ME/CFS, there are ample reasons to feel anxious. Negative thoughts might go something like this: “Oh, no! I am feeling really weak. I think I did too much today, and I will have to deal with PEM again. I will be totally miserable for the next week. I have got to find a way to get over this illness!. I can’t stand it anymore! Who can live like this?”

I should mention that Power Up theory differs from brain retraining in some significant ways. In the brain retraining model, the belief is that stress causes ME/CFS by dysregulating the nervous system. In the Power Up model, stress is viewed as a factor that can perpetuate the condition. The root cause is overtaxing the body’s energy reserves. Low energy is viewed as a real problem, not a misperception. In both models, overreacting to symptoms is seen as a significant issue to resolve.

When managing negative emotions, we can employ either a top-down or a bottom-up approach. Top-down approaches are cognitive methods involving conscious thought processes. Bottom-up approaches are methods that calm the body and, in turn, indirectly quiet the mind. The first method I would like to share is a top-down approach. This method involves reminding oneself that there is a plan and that things are under control. The prescription is to read this positive statement, or one you create, five times per day, preferably in the morning.

Although I have been weak for some time, there is nothing physically wrong with my body. My core energy is low, but it can be built up. I can recover by staying calm, pacing myself, and doing my exercises each day. It will take time, but I will get there. If I overdo things and crash, I will survive. I have gotten through it before. I can learn

from the experience and do better in the future. Recovery is a process. At least now there is a plan, and I have some hope.

The second top-down method involves using visual imagery. Visual imagery tends to affect us emotionally more deeply. Visualize yourself managing each day successfully. Picture yourself performing these cognitive exercises, setting appropriate limits on activities, and doing your physical exercises. Then, see yourself becoming progressively stronger, engaging in more activities you love, and eventually achieving the lifestyle you truly desire. Spend five minutes per day visualizing these scenarios.

Calming the Body

Now we will consider ways to calm the mind and body without directly addressing the issues connected to stress. As noted, these are referred to as bottom-up methods. Meditation is an ancient Eastern practice. It seems to tap into the brain's affinity for patterns and rhythm. Meditation helps people in two powerful ways. First, it trains our ability to focus and be in the moment. Secondly, it helps us to relax. A meta-analysis of research conducted in 2014 revealed small to moderate reductions in multiple negative dimensions of psychological stress for participants.¹ The researchers examined 47 studies involving a total of 3,151 participants. The researchers noted that these outcomes were similar to those in experiments involving exercise or antidepressants. Of course, regular vigorous exercise would be beyond the capability of most people with ME/CFS.

Centering Exercises

Centering techniques are beneficial, as they help us begin working toward greater inner peace. One of the first steps toward being centered is to become more aware of your breathing. Here is an easy method. Sit down with your hand placed on your abdomen. Then take a deep, slow breath from your abdomen and slowly release it. Notice how the extra oxygen makes your body tingle and feel more alive. Hold your breath after exhaling for as long as you comfortably can. Become aware of your surroundings and surrender to the moment. Performing this exercise in any setting for just a few minutes can help you slow things down and feel more relaxed.

Meditation can be practiced effectively by focusing on a small object for 10 to 15 minutes or more twice per day. This is a type of Zen meditation, and I believe it requires more concentration than many other methods. In my estimation, this practice also produces the best results. However, people are different, and this method will not be for everyone. Meditation is typically practiced while sitting cross-legged on a thin cushion or a yoga mat. If sitting in this position is uncomfortable due to a physical condition, it is acceptable to sit in a chair instead. There is a correct placement of your hands for balanced energy flow. Make a circle by touching your pointing finger on each hand to your thumb. Then rest your hands on your leg just above the knees. If thoughts intrude while you are focusing on the object, merely refocus without making any judgment about your ability. Take deep, slow breaths through your nose while meditating. The longer the time between breaths, the better the relaxation response. Be patient. If you practice consistently, you

will gradually improve. It is worth the effort! You will feel more relaxed throughout the day, and your thoughts will slow down.

There are other less rigorous methods. One effective method is to close your eyes and visualize a symbol, such as a star, a lit candle, or a word like “truth.” You may choose to speak a sound or a word aloud as you concentrate on noticing and slowing your breathing. You may also prefer other activities, such as prayer, music, yoga, or spending time in nature, to help you find more inner peace. Yoga may be particularly suited for those with more active natures. Yoga is too complex to provide instructions in this book, but there are many YouTube videos to help you explore this path. Certainly, you are free to choose and encouraged to do whatever you feel is right for you. All these practices enhance your ability to focus on the present moment and help calm the mind. As this is a brief introduction to meditative practices, I strongly encourage readers to seek out additional books and articles on meditation to supplement their knowledge.

The following alternating focus exercise is a nice introductory relaxation exercise. It requires only minor concentration but provides a strong relaxation effect. It also takes only a few minutes. I have found that this exercise is suitable for everyone as it combines freedom and rest periods in a way that appeals to the subconscious mind.

Alternating Focus Exercise

1. Sit in a comfortable chair or on a pillow on the floor. Focus on an object placed in front of you or on one small part of a picture on the wall.
2. Keep all your attention on the item you have chosen. If you begin to think about anything else, switch your attention right back.
3. When your eyes begin to feel tired, feel free to close them. Breathe deeply from the abdomen about every 15 seconds or longer if possible. Say the words “PEACE AND TRANQUILITY” after each breath. Focus on feelings of peace and relaxation in your body.
4. If thoughts begin to interfere with your relaxation, open your eyes and stare at the object again. Once your mind becomes peaceful, you may close your eyes again if you wish.
5. Do this exercise for five minutes once or twice per day.

Mindfulness

The Buddhist practice of mindfulness involves being fully aware of one’s thoughts, actions, and feelings in the present moment, without judgment. The aim is to experience life more fully and richly. Not judging is vital because judging oneself or others, or the situation at hand, typically leads to negative emotions that cloud the moment. As we seek inner peace and contentment, it is essential to give our daily pursuits our full attention. Psychologist Jon Kabat-Zinn had this to say about mindfulness:

Fundamentally, mindfulness is a simple concept. Its power lies in its practice and its applications. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on

purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality. It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.²

Mindfulness in Action

After practicing meditation or another centering technique, try to stay in the moment for any activity you engage in, regardless of its relative importance. The goal is to walk through your day in the same focused, relaxed state. When you're walking to the bus, take a moment to enjoy the walk. When you are washing dishes, pay attention and enjoy washing dishes. Avoid spending too much time thinking about other things, especially the past or the future. Be kind and loving to others you encounter during the day. Graciously accept what they choose to give back and who they are. In the case of coping with ME/CFS, know that you are working within a system of recovery and that you are safe. This type of focus is called a walking meditation. Make each day a spiritual adventure!

Recovery Assignment

1. Repeat your positive statement about recovery five times, preferably in the morning.
2. Perform your visualization exercise for three minutes each day.
3. Meditate for 10 to 15 minutes or more. Twice per day is optimal.

Notes

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Chapter 8

Finding Peace and Joy

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is concerned with enhancing human capacity to find happiness, meaning, and purpose in life. Strengthening one's capacity to find joy in the flow of everyday events and maintaining a prosocial attitude toward family, neighborhood, and society are both considered integral components of positive psychology. Additionally, building character by cultivating virtues such as kindness, compassion, wisdom, responsibility, moderation, courage, and a strong work ethic is viewed as another key aspect of human development.

Research in the field of positive psychology has yielded valuable insights. Some interventions that have been shown to improve mood include optimistic thinking, recalling positive life experiences, socializing with others, counting blessings, practicing kindness, setting personal goals, expressing gratitude, and focusing on individual strengths.^{1,2} Much of the earlier research on happiness was based on correlational studies. This means that the researchers analyzed the associations between self-reported happiness and specific personal traits or life circumstances. David Meyers and Ed Diener summarized some of the chief findings on what makes a person happy in a 1995 article.³

Research Table on Happiness

Happy people tend to have these traits and behavior patterns	Happiness may be only minimally related to certain other factors
High self-esteem	Age
Optimistic, outgoing, and helpful	Race
Close friendships or a satisfying marriage	Gender (women are more often depressed, but also more often joyful)
Creative and energetic (participate in work and leisure activities that engage their skills and interests)	Parenthood (having or not having children)
Involved in a meaningful religious faith	Educational level
Trusting, forgiving, and grateful	Money (if minimal needs are met)
Good genetics for a positive temperament	Winning the lottery

Spirituality

Positive psychology is related to a practice as old as mankind: spirituality. Spirituality shares many similarities with positive psychology, but the two disciplines have subtle differences. Spirituality also encompasses cultivating positive feelings through altruistic actions, but perhaps extends beyond that to include the effective management of negative emotions and desires. Concepts such as acceptance, mindfulness, humility, sacrifice, and detachment from material things may be emphasized more in spirituality.

Individuals struggling with an unsettled mind need something to believe in to be able to cope. I propose that practicing this art of creating a positive mental and emotional state offers significant hope and comfort. Let me first make it clear that spirituality is not the same as religion. Practicing a religion generally involves adhering to a prescribed set of beliefs and practices. However, not everyone feels comfortable accepting the structure, commitment, and faith required to participate in an organized religion. Spirituality is more of a general philosophy than a fixed set of beliefs. For those who are already religious, further developing your spirituality will only enhance your ability to live in accordance with your beliefs.

The Dalai Lama had some well-chosen thoughts on the vital subject of developing our spirituality. He said that there are specific differences between religion and spirituality. He noted that religion is generally concerned with certain rituals, practices, and teachings designed to bring the believer to a better afterlife. However, he believed spirituality existed independently of religion and was indispensable to a good quality of life. This is how he defined spirituality:

Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit - such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony, which bring happiness to both self and others.⁴

Deciding to become a more spiritual person is a very significant choice. Spirituality is one of the few aspects of life over which we have some control. Happiness truly comes from within. Those who progress in their spiritual development become magnets for success, both socially and vocationally.

The fountains of content must spring up in the mind, and he who has so little knowledge of human nature as to seek for happiness by changing anything but his own disposition will waste his life in fruitless efforts and greatly multiply the sorrows he purposes to remove.

-Samuel Johnson

Finding the Spiritual Path

How do you learn the skills to become more spiritual? I believe it is somewhat of a “learn as you go” proposition. As soon as you desire to think and act more positively, you are ready to begin engaging in the process. There are many excellent books to read. You will meet good people who will be willing to share their knowledge, wisdom, and support. An Eastern proverb says, “When the pupil is ready, the master appears.” This chapter introduces basic concepts that can give you a head start in deepening your spirituality. A good place to begin is to practice PARK daily. This acronym reminds us to focus on being positive, accepting, relaxed, and kind throughout the whole day.

The profound symphony of emotions life brings us is what makes it all worthwhile. Nonetheless, life also brings harshness, anxiety, and tragedy. Learning to focus on what is good and beautiful makes the journey worthwhile. Picture a large reservoir fed by two streams. One stream is large with a steady flow of pure, clear water. The other stream is smaller than the first and flows periodically, carrying muddy runoff. When conditions

change and the muddy stream produces a significant flow, the reservoir temporarily loses its pure quality. The pure stream cannot flush the dirty water out fast enough to keep the reservoir clear, and the water becomes progressively murkier.

Individuals can dim their personal light by filling their spiritual reservoir with a preponderance of negative thoughts that lead to emotions such as anxiety, anger, guilt, envy, and pessimism. Harsh speech, unkindness, gossiping, or an unwholesome overemphasis on sexuality can also create negative feelings. These emotional miscues can have a very deleterious effect on our overall spirituality. It is essential to learn skills to minimize these negative feelings. True spirituality requires filling our emotional reservoir with a continual stream of positive emotions such as love, peace, compassion, and joy. Setting a goal to be a positive influence on those around us can yield numerous personal benefits. Part of spirituality is acquiring the wisdom to know those activities, thoughts, and attitudes that increase our light and happiness. Spirituality should be our primary focus each day because nothing else can change one's life so profoundly.

Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, man cannot live without a spiritual life.

–Buddha

Keys to Spiritual Living

1. Values and principles—Strive to live according to higher laws. Treat all others and yourself with dignity and respect. Be an influence for good.

2. Meaning—Seek truth and knowledge and create a personal philosophy and lifestyle that suits your unique personality, talents, and interests.

3. Enriching daily activities—The “4 L’s” can fill our hearts with positive emotions:

- Love is the royal emotion. Our ability to value and care about others has the greatest effect on our disposition.
- Labor provides balance and focus, helps us to find meaning, and builds self-discipline.
- Learning is food for the soul. Gain knowledge through reading great books. Enhance your skills and talents, and take time to contemplate important ideas.
- Leisure activities add to the joy in life and serve as a valuable mental release as well.

4. Centering activities—Meditation, yoga, prayer, reading books of wisdom, music, and being out in nature all create feelings of inner peace.

5. Mindfulness—Savor each minute and every day through mindful living. Stay in the moment by using centering activities, the contemplation hour, thought-stopping techniques, logic, and radical acceptance to divert attention from the negative. (These techniques will be explained in future chapters.)

6. Positive thoughts—Be optimistic, thankful, and compassionate in your outlook. See beauty and goodness in all your experiences. View difficulties as opportunities for learning and personal growth.

7. Detachment—Things do not *have* to be a certain way for us to be happy. We just *want* them to be different. It is fine to wish for more, as long as we are willing to strive to accept and be content with what we have right now.

8. Wellness—Learn and follow the principles of maintaining good physical health to preserve your vital energy.

9. Service—Think beyond yourself. Show compassion and service to family, community, and the world.

10. Continual progression—Set goals, small and great. Develop self-discipline. View personal progression as the central purpose of existence, the existential pearl of great price.

***Happiness depends, as Nature shows,
less on exterior things than most suppose.***

-William Cowper

Spirituality significantly enhances the human experience. The dividends of following this path are impressive enough to engender a great enthusiasm for the journey once one gets a taste of the fruit. Deciding to be a more spiritual person is one of the greatest decisions any of us ever makes. Nothing will change lives more profoundly.

A noticeable change occurs when one has wholeheartedly adopted the goal of becoming a spiritual person. Spirituality becomes your greatest priority. There are two parts to this. The first aspect is taking the right actions. This means “doing the next right thing.” The next right thing is whatever we choose from our interests, values, and duties. This could mean helping someone in need, visiting a friend, playing tennis, or taking a nap. The goal is to lead a balanced life, but to choose our daily activities rather than allowing our impulses to dictate our course. It starts with vision, recognizing that the person who can choose their behaviors is in charge of their destiny. Each task is accomplished through self-persuasion, considering the benefits of the action and overcoming the numerous objections and deceptions that the emotional mind presents.

The second part is maintaining the right attitudes and emotions in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, e.g., by continually practicing PARK (positive, accepting, relaxed, and kind). This means accentuating the positives and resisting negativity. At first glance, this challenge appears very difficult, if not impossible. I used to ask people in groups I ran, “What is the opposite of being loving, relaxed, and positive. They would note that they would feel annoyed, tense, and negative. I would then ask them which state they preferred. The battle is mostly in our minds. The more we practice, the easier this task appears, until it becomes second nature. We choose to be spiritually-minded one day at a time.

It is not easy for those with ME/CFS to find joy each day since their range of activities is so limited. Therefore, you will need to become an expert at identifying small, meaningful activities that require minimal energy. Some examples include listening to books on tape, sitting in a park, checking in with loved ones, playing with your pet, or sketching landscapes. In addition to pursuing activities, cultivating an attitude of gratitude helps in the struggle to be more positive. Since recovery takes time, finding pockets of joy goes a long way toward helping you survive the ordeal. For those with ME/CFS, the benefits

are twofold: not only are you developing habits that will benefit you for the rest of your life, but you are also practicing an important component of recovering your health. Strive to stay positive and relaxed amidst the storm of ME/CFS.

Recovery Assignment

Select a three-day period to track your mood in relation to your thoughts and activities. Try to remain aware of how each activity or thought focus affects your mood. Consider this on a 1-to-10 scale, with 10 being the best. Once you recognize that some practices are more uplifting than others, you can strive to engage in them more frequently. Additionally, it is fantastic to experiment with new ideas you may have come up with as you were reading this chapter.

Notes

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Chapter 9 Coping Skills (Part A)

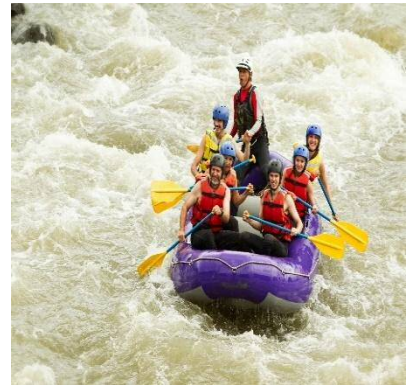
In 1995, Daniel Goleman wrote a book entitled *Emotional Intelligence*, which was on The New York Times best-seller list for a year and a half and has been translated into 40 languages. Five million copies of the book have been sold. He had this to say about the importance of mastering our emotional life, “Emotional intelligence is the key to both personal and professional success.” Goleman's EQ theory comprises five core components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.¹

Overview of Emotions

Ask yourself this question. For which essential life skill do we receive the least training? The answer is emotional coping skills. There seems to be the idea that everyone should just know how to do it. That is like expecting people to be skilled at playing the piano because they had one in the living room while growing up. If you desire to play the piano at a beginner level, there seems to be some consensus that you need instruction and must practice at least one hour per day for three months to a year. The simple point is that those who wish to improve their emotional skills likewise need instruction and practice.

Negative emotions are like pesky insects that land on us. We want to brush them off and move on. For most people, the first reaction is to ignore their emotions and try to distract themselves. They might return to work, have a snack, or surf the Internet. If the problem is small, the negative energy dissipates over time, and things soon go back to normal. It is when problems are larger or build up that trouble begins.

Dealing with emotions could be compared to river rafting. When the current is slow and the channel is wide, rafting is a simple endeavor. However, when the current becomes swift and there are large rapids, a great deal of expertise is required to keep the raft from overturning. Similarly, when life is calm, emotions are relatively easy to manage. We can suppress any negative emotions and move on. However, when larger problems arise and emotions become more intense, practical skills are essential for psychological survival. Generating positive emotions will be covered in a later chapter. We will begin discussing how to cope with negative emotions.



Stage 1: Expressing Feelings

Strong negative emotions are generally not addressed immediately but are approached in stages. Stage 1 is not so much about fixing problems but about calming the brain. This makes sense biologically as the logical and emotional systems have an inverse relationship. As one increases in energy, the other decreases in energy. Thus, it can be challenging to think clearly when we are emotional. For women, calming down often means

sharing feelings with a friend. Men might consider doing this more often. Other ways to calm oneself include exercising, spending time in nature, practicing yoga, or engaging in meditation. Expressing emotions in diverse ways can also be helpful. These options might include writing down your feelings, creating art, dancing, or listening to music. Sometimes, we talk out loud to ourselves!

If a solution to the problem connected to the negative emotions arises, then we are free to move on happily. However, modern life is complicated, and often there is no immediate answer to the issues we stress about. Stage 1 is always optional and dependent upon our needs. We may not be so distressed that we feel our cognitive abilities or perspective are compromised, and expressing our emotions may not seem necessary. In stage 2, we can begin to accommodate these problematic thoughts more cognitively.

Stage 2: Accommodation

It would be wonderful to wish negative emotions away, but they seldom cooperate. Our big brains are well-suited for logical thought and creative problem-solving. However, one annoying human characteristic is that when we have a problem, we often cannot stop thinking about it. Our inner fantasy is that we can fix any problem just by thinking about it intensely. Accommodating our emotions helps us carry on with our life duties and pursuits as we seek solutions to our concerns. The following are a few ideas for making room for negative thoughts when they persist.

Defusion Techniques

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) was developed by psychologist Stephen Hayes.² In his view, it is better to accept your negative thoughts and emotions as part of your experience, but not pay them undue attention. Instead, the focus should be on constructive value-based actions. Defusion techniques help people change their relationship with their thoughts rather than trying to control them. Defusion techniques can serve as a good initial step toward managing the chaos inside. Here are some examples.

Picture your thoughts floating away into the sky in the basket of a hot air balloon.

Repetition. “Apple, apple, apple...” or “desk, desk, desk...”

Noticing the thoughts. “I notice I’m having the thought that...”

Sports play-by-play announcer. “It’s the top of the fifth inning. Joe is having a meltdown.”

Thank your mind. “Thank you mind for that interesting thought.”

Naming the story. “Here is another ‘I am such a failure’ story.”

Say the thoughts in an ultra-slow, fast, or silly voice.

The Contemplation Period

We can make ourselves miserable by straying from the present moment and dwelling too much on problems. People can easily fall into the trap of feeling sad, angry, or guilty about the past and anxious or hopeless about the future. We can change our mood by choosing how much time to spend thinking about our issues. A focused 15-minute contemplation period is recommended. This time is used to feel emotions and to come up

with solutions to problems. It is acceptable to have more than one contemplation period, but it is recommended that the total duration be less than one hour per day.

This technique is surprisingly helpful, but it may take a week or two to train your subconscious to fully cooperate with the concept. The beauty of the method lies in finding consistent relief from stress without necessarily solving each problem. Say the following message each time you are ready to switch from problems to peace.

Message to the emotional system: *“OK, that’s enough focus on this problem. We can’t do anything about it right now. Let’s keep busy and move on. We are trying to have a good day. We can think more about this issue tomorrow (tonight).”*

Staying in Touch

Emotions are produced by the emotional system’s perceptions of life experiences. The conscious mind helps interpret many of these experiences and contributes to the mix. Since these reactions are subconscious, retrieving them is a skill we must develop. A detached family style or trauma can contribute to people not being fully in touch with their feelings. Therefore, awareness of subconscious thoughts is an essential aspect of emotional processing. If we do not know what is bothering us, we cannot work with it. The “magic list” method can be used to gain insight into what lies within. Tension and depression are important clues that deeper feelings and thoughts are disturbing us beneath our awareness. This method works quite quickly, and people can usually figure out what is bothering them within minutes.

The Magic List Method

1. Tell your inner self you would like to know what the issues of concern are.
2. On a piece of paper, write down the five greatest possibilities for what is bothering you. Be creative and try not to censor anything.
3. Read the list slowly out loud to yourself.
4. As you read the list, note which issues evoke the greatest emotional response. (This is how the inner self communicates about its troubles.)

Recovery Assignment

Practice each one of these excellent coping skills a few times. This will help you value, remember, and use them. Skills introduced in this chapter were defusion techniques, the contemplation period, and the magic list method.

Notes

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Picture 1 “Numerous family on whitewater,” 24 October 2015, photo by ammmmit, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 87800978.

Chapter 10

Coping Skills (Part B)

The Power of Thoughts



We all possess the ability to transform our lives dramatically. The primary ingredient in this process is an intentional change in thought patterns. It is invaluable to learn that it is not events that cause our emotional responses, but how we choose to think about those situations. Distortion and exaggeration can make problems appear far worse than they actually are. A person who tells himself he will “never get a job” or that he will “always be depressed” may experience those thoughts as being true. It is always our perceptions, even if brief or below our awareness, that produce the subsequent emotions.

It is neither good nor bad, but thinking makes it so.

-William Shakespeare

The proposed thought management goal is to transform negative thoughts to a point where they cease to be a significant concern. Many consider this almost impossible, but it becomes very achievable when the proper principles are applied. The first concept to appreciate is that when humans are upset, the critical factor is invariably thinking errors, rather than the situation that triggered the emotions. The second principle is that negative thoughts are triggered more by the perceptions of the emotional mind than by those of the conscious, logical mind.

When struggling with emotions, the challenge is to assist the emotional mind to think more accurately. This leads to the third principle. The logical mind can communicate with the emotional mind and alter its perceptions. This is known as self-talk, and we engage in it all the time. Unfortunately, our self-talk is not always effective. Convincing the highly reactive inner self to let go of its dramatic thinking is an art form in itself. Two highly effective cognitive tools will be introduced now to help the reader develop greater expertise in the significant challenge of changing thoughts and feelings.

Radical Acceptance

There is a key to understanding why people suffer so much mentally and emotionally. We make ourselves miserable mainly by trying to mentally control our earthly reality. Negative thoughts arise from the emotional mind reacting to things not going right. Behind every negative emotion is a desire that is not being realized.

Buddha named “selfish desire” as the main cause of emotional suffering 3,000 years ago. He said that when people become overly focused on worldly goals and pleasures, they end up sad and frustrated when things do not work out. Buddha, therefore, proposed that

most pain could be eliminated by letting go of desires. He exhorted people to focus on living a righteous, positive life, to practice meditation, and to basically give up the world. Fortunately, it is not necessary to live like a Buddhist monk to benefit from this superb concept. The Serenity Prayer, originally written by Reinhold Niebuhr, advises in this way, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Misery comes when we struggle to change the world, not through outward actions, but in our minds.

The best way to overcome mental suffering is to avoid the fantasy of having complete control over your environment and life course. It is better not to stress about things over which we have no control. Acceptance is our primary weapon against negative thinking! When upset, first ask, “What must I accept?” Once you courageously accept the present, you can patiently seek effective ways to improve your circumstances. Additionally, one can elegantly strive to find a positive in every difficulty.

One term that has evolved from the Buddhist tradition to describe this focus on accepting reality is “radical acceptance.” Acceptance does not mean being totally resigned. The Serenity Prayer tells us to have “the courage to change the things we can.” This implies planning and action.

Don’t Worry, Be Happy

Radical acceptance requires serious reflection to understand and considerable emotional resolve to put it into practice. Human beings prefer to avoid facing difficult truths, such as the fact that they have limited control over events and other people. Things are the way they are, and not so often the way we prefer.

Situations in Which to Use Radical Acceptance

Guilt about past actions	Past difficult events or circumstances
Anxiety about the future	Limitations of the present life situation
Personal inadequacies	Anger about others’ negative behavior

Here are some examples of radical acceptance in practice. Please pay close attention, as given the nature of the world, we use this tool more frequently than any other. When we are anxious, we do not want to accept that unpleasant things could happen to us. For instance, when students have a big math test coming up, their anxiety is based on the fear that they might get a low grade. They must accept the possibility that they could receive a C or D, and they will have to deal with it. They would then have to study harder for the next exam or possibly seek extra help at a study lab. However, since the test has not yet taken place, the focus should be on studying diligently and earning the best possible grade.

I have suffered many calamities in my life, most of which never happened.

-Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain)

Another example to consider is the common problem of low self-esteem. People feel bad about themselves because they are not as good or skilled as they would like to be.

They often use the word “should,” as in “I should be more successful in my career.” However, our desire to become more proficient, good, or wise instantly is merely a fantasy. It is helpful to accept the reality of our limitations since getting sad or upset does not change anything. This is called humility. Rather than being self-critical or comparing ourselves to others, we can choose to focus solely on becoming more effective in our behavior.

Consider the problem of anger. When we are angry, we struggle to accept that others are not ready or willing to live by the standards of conduct we believe in. These inner thoughts are more of a wish than a realistic possibility. Other people are not running around trying to understand and then live by the "rules" we have set up for their behavior. It is a fantasy that other people will act the way we think they should. In short, getting angry is often the result of a vain wish to control our environment. It is a waste of time and energy to be judgmental and zero in on the fact that someone did something wrong. It is much more helpful to accept that people act *the way they really are*. We would all do well to eliminate the word “should” from our vocabularies and substitute the phrase “I wish.” The more aligned with reality we are, the better we do emotionally.

The first step in letting go of anger is to accept that people are doing their best, given their values, level of knowledge, and self-management skills. The next step is to look at those who have offended us with eyes of compassion and try to understand their pain or perspective. If we need to communicate or set boundaries, we can do so with kindness.

The Editing Technique

Man’s nature is to strive mightily to change the world to suit his desires and fantasies. We hold tightly to our belief that happiness is tied to our script of how things must and should be. The majority of negative emotions are closely tied to our ineffective attempts to control our environment mentally. The inner emotional self has a persistent urge to gain control over this complex and challenging world. We make ourselves miserable by using dramatic, repetitive self-talk in response to perceived problems. Peace comes from seeing things as they truly are. The editing technique is designed to change our *desire* to indulge in negative thinking.

The editing technique sets up a fascinating emotional paradox. Human beings are drawn to negative thoughts rather than logical or realistic ones. It appears that holding onto the fantasy that things will change because we are upset is compelling to the inner self. The inner self does not like the truth, as reality forces us to change, work harder, or to accept something we dislike. “Editing” frees people from the desire to obsess and allows them to return to the present moment. Individuals gain insight and clarity of thought as they continue to practice this technique. Subconscious impulses for drama and control significantly decrease, and negative thinking begins to be cut off even before it starts! Correct thinking is a vital element in positive living. We become the masters of our moods as we learn to identify and revise incorrect ideas.

The gods plant reason in mankind, of all good gifts the highest.

-Sophocles

A list of four principal thinking errors has been constructed to help analyze self-defeating thought patterns. These thinking errors have a major impact on the production of negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, and anger.

THE FOUR GREAT THINKING ERRORS

Exaggerating



How big??

Labeling



Labels are for soup cans, not people.

Not accepting reality



I can't believe people are such terrible drivers!

Predicting



100% accurate?

The editing technique takes more effort than the other techniques previously provided, but it is well worth the investment. You can change your emotional reaction to difficulties by fighting thinking errors with truth. You will find that you will lose the desire to dwell on problems after processing them with this method. That may seem like a magical promise, but it is true. Follow the instructions exactly the first few times, and write it all out. After that, you will likely be able to do it in your mind. Make sure to read your corrected message a full five times, as that is what makes it work. The subconscious appears to require hearing reality several times before it will accept it.

Instructions for the Editing Technique

1. Write out your distressing thoughts about the present problem.
2. Cross out lines that contain the thinking errors of exaggerating, labeling, denial of reality, or predicting, as shown above.
3. Write the issue of concern in more accurate terms using the following Key Thoughts Guide.
4. Then read the new corrected statements at least *five* times.

Key Thoughts Guide

- a. What logical and rational statements can I make to help me view this problem more clearly?
- b. Am I maintaining a positive attitude? What encouraging declarations can I make? What are some of my strengths that will help me overcome this challenge?
- c. If the worst did come to pass, how could I best handle it?

Recovery Assignment

Practice using radical acceptance and the editing technique a few times each. With the editing technique, it will be important to write out each step the first few times. Also, please remember not to skip step 4, which tells you to read the corrected statements five times. This is the key to making it all work.

Notes

Picture 1 “Thinking mechanism,” 19 July 2015, photo by Sergey Nivens, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 78335386.

Picture 2 “Great Dane looking at a French bulldog puppy,” 25 July 2015, photo by lifeonwhite, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 78864094.

Picture 3 “Can of Campbell’s Soup,” 27 January 2014, photo by @dcwcreations, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 39633259.

Picture 4 “Angry Driver,” 23 January 2010, photo by vladacanon, standard license purchased from Deposit Photos, stock image ID 1784393.

Picture 5 “Fortune Teller,” 7 July 2011, photo by @Petesloutos, royalty-free license purchased from Dreamstime.com, photo file ID 9545594.

Chapter 11

Guiding the Inner Self

It is not difficult to observe different personality states in ourselves and others. These several ways of functioning appear to be part of our fundamental nature. Sigmund Freud observed them over 100 years ago and provided the terms *id*, *ego*, and *superego*.

It is fascinating to consider that modern neuroscience may be unraveling some long-debated questions about the structure of the personality. Contemporary neuroscience suggests that we possess a dual-process mind. Desires and emotions are primarily associated with the limbic system, a deeper part of the brain. Logical thought processes and self-control are mainly associated with the prefrontal cortex, located behind the forehead and part of the frontal lobe.

The limbic system (the emotional system) generates emotions and desires in response to memories and environmental cues. It also memorizes behavioral subroutines so we can act automatically. Playing the violin or driving a car are examples of rehearsed behaviors that skilled individuals can do automatically. The prefrontal cortex (the logical system) is responsible for abstract thought and reasoning. These two systems must work together to address issues as they arise. First, the limbic system creates a personalized response to each event. The prefrontal cortex interprets these emotions and impulses, and then logically attempts to regulate our thoughts, behavior, and feelings through extensive connections with other brain regions. If you were to remove the prefrontal cortex, we would be ruled by our desires and impulses, lacking the ability to appreciate consequences or plan future actions. This is the state of preschool children whose frontal lobes are still developing.

The emotional system works quickly and automatically on a subconscious level. This helps us do things like react to danger, play sports, socialize, or perform routine tasks without having to think through every action. These behaviors and reactions are already programmed in. When the logical mind wants to program a new behavior, it must convince the emotional system to join in on the goal. This is where the problems begin. The emotional system generally resists change. Change can be threatening and requires a significant amount of effort. Secondly, the emotional system is far stronger than the logical system. It does not have to cooperate unless it feels like doing so. Our two minds are more often battling than working together. This is why human beings struggle with self-discipline. The neuroscientist David Eagleman, author of *Incognito*, referred to the two systems as “a team of rivals.”¹

Jonathan Haidt likened this relationship of the two mind systems to that of a rider on an elephant. The rider knows what he wants the elephant to do, but if the elephant feels in danger or wants to meet a need, such as going into a river to cool off, there is very little the puny rider can do to stop it.²

This chapter explains the highly interdependent relationship between the logical and emotional systems and how the two systems communicate. Understanding the mechanics of this communication and practicing the skills involved is invaluable in developing self-mastery and inner peace.

The Inner Self

The emotional system, or inner self, is preoccupied with present experiences and momentary desires. It boldly embraces life and all its diversity and pleasures. To laugh or cry, to dance and sing, or to show love or anger are spontaneous expressions of the inner self. Our inner self is what gives our personality its sparkle and instills in us a sense of adventure and appreciation for beauty. To be truly happy, we must keep the inner self happy. The inner self is not only very real, but also the dominant part of the human personality.

We function far more effectively when we are in touch with the core self. Creativity, passion, warmth, and faith come from this center of our souls, the heart of man. Those who excel in music, writing, or the arts can attest to the importance of connecting with these marvelous powers within.

That man never grows old who keeps a child in his heart.

-Steele

Inner Diplomacy

The ability to effectively manage the desires and emotions of the inner self is a significant factor in successful living. The conscious mind uses logical and supportive self-talk to manage mood and behavior. This skill is essential because the conscious mind and the inner self often hold different ideas about things. The inner self tends to be impulsive and focuses on momentary pleasure, while the conscious, logical mind takes a more practical, long-range view. It is also important to live by our values and standards without being unreasonably demanding or harsh toward ourselves.

John Bradshaw used the term “nurturing discipline” in his book *Homecoming*.³ Nurturing discipline means teaching the inner self the proper place for discipline, hard work, and self-control without being a tyrant. Your inner self can learn through experience that there is a payoff for discipline, and the *carrot* can then replace the *stick*. The ultimate goal is to create a lifestyle that maximizes joy without sacrificing the future. We can learn to recognize the different parts of the mind by using the following Event Card

The Event Card

1. In reaction to the event, what is my inner self feeling and thinking?
2. What action does the inner self impulsively want to commit? Would this action create problems?
3. Thinking about the event, what is a more logical and rational response?
4. Am I being overly self-critical? What words of encouragement and support can I give myself?

**It is one thing to be moved by events, it is another
to be mastered by them.**

-Socrates

Discovering Your Heart

Take a moment to focus on what young toddlers are like. They are fully involved in life, full of emotion and energy. We value their enthusiasm, curiosity, warmth, openness, and sensitivity. Nevertheless, we can also see their limitations in logic and judgment. Little children have not yet fully developed the higher, more organized brain functions we associate with the adult part of the personality. They are largely unrestrained. Their core self is right at the surface of their being.

As we grow older, we can lose touch with our inner self. To control our impulses and conform to others' expectations, we create a facade or social mask that we show to the world. Carl Jung (a student of Sigmund Freud) developed his own psychological theories and called this social mask the *persona*. As adults, we can become so involved in presenting this false self that we lose sight of who we really are. If we become too removed from the inner person, we may feel detached and empty. In adults, the feelings and desires of the inner self are most clearly revealed in dreams. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, referred to dreams as the "royal road to the subconscious."

The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart.

-Mencius

Emotional Recovery

We cannot truly enjoy life without healing our wounded inner self. Insecurity and low self-worth, jealousy in relationships, fears of being alone, suspiciousness, and inappropriate anger all have their roots in childhood conflict. Living our lives without tackling these core issues is like trying to drive on snow-packed roads with bald tires. You cannot go very fast, and it is easy to get stuck!

The natural expressions of the inner self can be distorted if individuals suffer abuse or are exposed to harsh conditions while growing up. While the socialization of the inner self is important to help us adjust to the world, extreme distortions of regular channels of expression are problematic. The adult with a wounded heart struggles mightily to make life work, but the odds are stacked against him. Life seldom goes perfectly. Adversity can set off old fears and insecurities. Adult children of dysfunctional families instinctively fear facing their genuine emotions and dealing with their pain. Getting in touch with their feelings proved overwhelming in the past, and there is little desire to repeat those experiences.

The effort to remain in control by shutting off emotions takes many forms. Many emotionally wounded adults have one or more addictions they utilize to escape feelings. An addiction is a coping mechanism people are dependent upon, which, when carried to extremes, has long-term negative consequences. Addictive substances include alcohol, drugs, tobacco, caffeine drinks, and even food. Behaviors that can take the form of

addictions are work, television viewing, cleaning, pornography, gambling, shopping, exercise, and others.

It is only when you don't run from yourself that you begin to get somewhere.

-Author unknown

Support the Inner Self

Although we commonly look to others for approval and support, the most important endorsement we can receive is from ourselves. Because of its unique properties, your inner self responds to input from your conscious mind as if it were another person! True emotional healing starts from within!

The rules of the game change as we move from childhood to adulthood. Assume your adult responsibility as the caretaker of the heart, the inner person of the soul. *You, and only you, can provide the 24-hour acceptance and guidance you need to thrive in life.* Your inner self will listen to you more than anyone else. Your happiness depends upon your willingness to accept the inner self as a wonderful, vibrant, essential part of your being.

Inner Self Meditation

The following visual imagery exercise is an excellent way to begin reconnecting with one's inner self. Your response will reveal a great deal about how well you nurture yourself.

Relax comfortably in a chair or on a couch. Close your eyes and focus on the sounds around you. Listen to the sounds present both inside and outside the building. Focus on your breathing. Note how effortlessly you inhale as the need for oxygen arises. Pay attention to how it feels as you exhale through your nostrils.

Next, become aware of the different muscle groups in your body. Note the varying levels of tension in each area. Close your eyes and go from your feet to your head, sensing which muscles are relaxed and which are tense. Tense the areas that need loosening up for a few seconds and then release. Take a deep breath and slowly exhale after each period of tension.

Now, close your eyes and visualize yourself in a beautiful natural setting. It could be a place you have visited before or perhaps one that exists only in your imagination. It might be the seashore, a lake, or perhaps a forest setting. Feel the sun and wind on your face. Savor the smells of nature. Enjoy the panoramic view.

As you continue to enjoy the natural beauty of this special place, you begin to feel excitement and anticipation. You sense that someone important is coming. You see them approaching, but you feel no fear, only calm and positive feelings. As this person comes closer, you see that it is you, but older and wiser, having worked through the problems and filled with love and wisdom. Your kinder, wiser self is there for you. Let him or her give you what you need. Take all the time you want. When you are finished, say goodbye, but know that he or she can visit again anytime you wish.

This exercise can initiate a beautiful communication between the logical and emotional aspects of oneself. It is a powerful technique. We can be creative and custom-fit the visual imagery to suit our personality and inner needs. John Bradshaw related that he

personally used the image of a wise old wizard, complete with a robe, pointed hat, and wand, to help him play his supportive role.⁴ Visual imagery is helpful because the heart responds well to pictures and symbols. Once a link is established with the inner self, soft words of understanding and encouragement are all that are needed for successful communication.

The Need for Nourishment

As we mature, we can become overly socialized and learn to disregard the desires and feelings of the inner self. Our society emphasizes politeness, emotional control, self-discipline, and caring for others. These things are good and essential, but can be taken to extreme proportions. Too often, people neglect themselves and disregard their own needs. They can become unhappy, negative, and resentful. They live in a beautiful garden without allowing themselves to smell the flowers.

On the other hand, there are individuals who have not learned self-control and concern for others. This increasingly large element in our society appears to be consumed by self-gratification. They pursue pleasure like greyhounds chasing the mechanical rabbit at a dog track. However, like our canine friends, they never catch the prize. Alcohol, drugs, gambling, crime, and sex without love and commitment can never bring true peace or happiness. People who try to satiate themselves with pleasure are like men stranded on the ocean in a rowboat who drink salt water to satiate their thirst. There is the illusion that they will find real satisfaction, but afterward they will be more dehydrated and in greater need than before. Despite their strenuous attempts to capture it, real joy eludes them. They are empty inside, their needs overwhelm them, and they stumble and fall because they are lost in darkness.

One valuable step toward emotional healing is to focus on improved self-care. Make a promise to yourself to take care of “you” every day. Avoid self-destructive patterns and find fulfilling work and activities to engage in. Create rich relationships because, above all else, the inner self needs love. Some ways to connect with the inner self’s needs are listed below. Experiment with some of these or create a few of your own.

Activities for Nurturing the Inner Self

Walk barefoot in the grass	Go camping in a special spot
Swing in a hammock	Ask someone you trust to hold you
Soak in a hot tub	Go for a walk in the country
Toss a Frisbee	Play music, dance, and sing
Take a sauna	Buy new crayons and a coloring book
Play tag with your kids	Be spontaneous and do something fun
Build a sandcastle	Gaze into the flames of a fire and dream
Play in a park	Have someone give you a nice massage
Swing on a swing	Go out and look at the stars late at night
Climb a mountain	Have your partner take you dancing
Read poetry outdoors	Take yourself out for lunch and shopping
Walk along a river or lake	Reflect on a joyful time in your childhood

Once we decide to begin nurturing ourselves, we communicate a powerful message: we, too, are important. We will have more energy, renewed interest in life, and more capacity to love others. It takes real wisdom to choose the right path. Set appropriate limits on activities. Those who constantly take care of others can end up frustrated and burned out. Additionally, the body needs rest to prevent breaking down. Being kind to ourselves is a good investment. It is not selfish. It is practical!

Developing a sound belief in the inner self and learning how to communicate with this mysterious part of our being is integral to emotional growth. After the initial positive contact, one must continually guide and support the inner person with constructive self-talk.

Know thyself.

-Socrates

Recovery Assignment

1. The inner self meditation is an excellent way to begin connecting with this core part of your personality. This essential relationship can have a powerful impact on our functioning.
2. Use the Event Card to process at least three different situations that upset you. Sorting out the various aspects of the personality greatly increases our emotional awareness.

Notes

1. Eagleman, David. *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).
2. Haidt, Jonathan. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006)
3. Bradshaw, John. *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990).
4. Ibid

Chapter 12

The Art of Positive Thinking

It is not enough to be logical in our thinking. It is quite advantageous to be POSITIVE. We need to learn to notice what is good, recognize our strengths, and believe in a better future. Positive thinking involves downplaying the negative and maintaining an optimistic attitude. These skills usually do not come naturally but must be developed and practiced. There are great personal advantages to being a positive thinker. Unless we believe there are exciting possibilities beyond the horizon, we will make little effort to reach them.

**There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it,
if only we're brave enough to be it.**

-Amanda Gorman

When we think of the Disney Corporation, we think of successful animated films, Disneyland, Disney World, and rich profits. What is not so well known is that the entertainment empire's founder, the creative genius Walt Disney, experienced a significant setback early in his career.

At age 20, Disney was employed at the Kansas City Film Ad Company. At night, he worked to start his own cartoon business, Newman Laugh-O-Grams. His family had moved to Oregon around the same time. When his first project, Little Red Riding Hood, did well, he quit his day job and devoted himself entirely to his new company. Walt borrowed \$15,000 from investors in Kansas City, hired a staff of six animators, and set up a small studio. Things looked like they were going well until Walt's distribution company went out of business. They reneged on the \$11,000 he had been promised for the cartoons he had already produced. This was a devastating blow for a young artist with limited financial resources. All he received for six months of work was a \$100 deposit.

Suddenly, Disney was \$2,000 in the hole with \$400 per month in operating expenses. His employees left him one by one, and he was forced to work independently. Times were hard. He had to live in his studio and often had only beans and bread to eat. Eventually, a few small projects turned up that provided some income. Also, some New York distributors expressed interest in an Alice in Wonderland series that might have proved lucrative. Unfortunately, he was unable to persuade his investors to provide additional funds to complete the project.

Frustrated that he could not move forward and hopelessly in debt, Walt felt he had no option but to declare bankruptcy. However, he certainly did not consider himself a failure! Undaunted and ever the optimist, he sold his movie camera, packed his bags, and headed to Hollywood. We all know the rest of the Disney story. It is hard to imagine the world without his contributions. Walt Disney not only attained great financial success, but his artistic achievements have touched the hearts of millions.¹

Success is how high you bounce when you hit bottom.

-General George Patton

Think Your Way to Joy

Many individuals struggle to be optimistic due to ongoing problems or perceived emotional limitations. They have meaningful long-term goals, but view them as unrealistic or struggle to get started. It is true that not everyone will achieve the success they desire. Nonetheless, the future may reveal other wonderful surprises that can bring joy and meaning. A dedication to spirituality and self-development never fails to yield valuable dividends.

Becoming a positive thinker can revitalize our lives. It broadens our horizons, puts energy into our steps, and increases our self-confidence. Since we emotionally experience much of what we think, it is imperative to guard the gates of the mind. The following paragraphs will discuss several aspects of positive thinking.

Focus on the good qualities of others

The comedian Will Rogers said, "I never met a man I didn't like." Try to notice the most outstanding quality in every person you meet. Make it a practice to share your observations with each person you have good thoughts about. Sincere compliments are an excellent way to show appreciation.

Avoid judging

Judging others generates significant negative energy. Respecting others' right to grow and develop at their own pace helps us accept them more readily. Exercising compassion helps us better understand their choices. Those who strive to love and respect all people have happy hearts.

Be grateful

Remember what others have done for you. Express appreciation and thanks. Research has shown that being grateful improves reports of subjective well-being. Two frequently prescribed interventions are making a daily gratitude list and saying "thank you" to someone who has had a positive influence on your life.

**Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues,
but the parent of all others.**

-Cicero

Exercise compassion

Empathize with others' struggles, express loving concern, and lend a helping hand. Let go of anger and resentment. Accept that people are doing the best they know how. Be a peacemaker. Think of positive ways to help others be better.

Appreciate beauty

Human beings are highly perceptive and constantly take in information. While we cannot always change the environment, we can select what we wish to focus on. While walking through city streets, we can think negatively about the person whose lawn looks like a hayfield, or we can notice the fabulous flowers in his neighbor's yard. We can see children playing and appreciate their exuberance and ability to create joy, or we can be irritated by the noise. Historical sites can remind us of the sacrifice and vision of those

who came before us. We can continually seek out beautiful and uplifting things to fill our minds with positive thoughts.

Be hopeful about the future

Work on goals, great and small. Changing yourself makes the impossible possible. Those who continue to focus on self-development and value-based living will create opportunities for themselves. It is vital to believe that good things can happen, even when it is difficult to see the road ahead. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years in South Africa for struggling against the discriminatory policies of the South African government. Four years after his release, he was elected president of South Africa. Blacks and whites alike trusted him due to his character and integrity.

Become an expert at turning negative thoughts into positive ones

Magicians are skilled at creating illusions. The world-famous magician David Copperfield once made the Statue of Liberty disappear. Positive thinkers should strive to become experts at making negative thoughts disappear. Most statements can be revised quickly to create a different emotional tone. Here are some examples.

I will never be able to learn this.	I can try. If I take it one step at a time, it might begin to make sense.
No one at the party will talk to me.	I can say hello to people and see what happens. There are friendly people everywhere.
No one is hiring. Why even bother looking?	The situation may be difficult, but the more businesses I approach, the better the chances.
No matter what I do, everything seems boring.	I can investigate some new options.
I'm so disorganized and lazy. I'll never get my house clean.	If I do a little work each day, I will eventually complete the job.
People are such bad drivers. I can't stand it.	I need to focus on being a safe driver.
I never have any extra money.	I can find enjoyable activities that are free.
No one bothers to communicate with me.	I can take responsibility for letting others know that I want to be in the loop.
I've never done this before.	There's a first time for everything.
Nothing I do is any good.	I can improve if I apply myself.

Be resilient

Part of remaining positive is bouncing back when you hit obstacles. You can practice resilience by being patient with yourself in the face of defeat. Use encouraging words and avoid self-criticism. Note your strengths and past progress and set new goals. Even when greatly disappointed, there are positives to take note of. Setbacks highlight areas that need improvement and can serve as an impetus for greater self-development. Use negative

emotions as fuel for change. Changing personal habits and attitudes and learning new skills are often keys to success. Always maintain hope.

Diamonds in the Rough

Even when tough things occur, there is usually something valuable to be gained from the experience. When a flood hit my neighborhood, all the neighbors got to know one another better as we worked together to build sandbag barriers. If we are involved in a car wreck, we can always be grateful that we were not seriously injured. We could also consider it a valuable lesson that will help us drive more safely in the future. It pays off to find the good in disasters. We have already experienced the bad. Why not think of something that helps us feel better?

Gaining a solid belief in the power of positive thinking is a significant milestone on the way to emotional health and happiness. We walk and run because, as babies, we did not realize we could fail in learning motor skills. We just kept trying until we got there! As adults, we need to achieve victories and reach goals to feel like we are making progress. Like mountain climbing, life is more exciting when we are trying to reach the summit.

If you can imagine it, you can create it. If you can dream it, you can become it.

-William Arthur Ward

Recovery Assignment

For one week, make a concerted effort to maintain a positive attitude. Consider using some of the ideas presented in this chapter.

Notes

1. Green, K. & Green, R. *The Man Behind the Magic* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991).

Chapter 13

Beliefs and the Subconscious

The noted Spanish explorer Francisco Vázquez de Coronado first came to Mexico with Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza and was appointed governor of Nueva Galicia in 1538. The Viceroy was intrigued by reports he had heard of the great wealth of the Seven Cities of Cibola in the north, and he assigned Coronado to lead an expedition to search for this land of treasure.

The expedition set out from Compostela, Mexico, in 1540 and crossed through the Sonora region and then eastern Arizona until they reached Cibola, the Zuni villages in New Mexico. Finding no gold or treasure among the Zuni, Coronado sent his lieutenants in different directions to explore the potential for important discoveries elsewhere. One lieutenant, named Alvarado, met an Indian from a Plains tribe who told tales of a wealthy kingdom named Quivira, located to the east.

Coronado's hopes for riches and glory were renewed by the stories of this Indian they named "the Turk." After wintering on the Rio Grande near Santa Fe, New Mexico, Coronado set out in 1541 to find Quivera. According to historians, his company traveled to the Texa Panhandle, and then likely as far as Oklahoma and Kansas. They eventually reached the fabled Quivera, but found it to be just ordinary Indian villages (likely Wichita) with no caches of precious metals.

The Coronado expedition traveled thousands of miles through harsh, dangerous territory, waged a few mostly unnecessary battles with Native American tribes, and ultimately found no treasure whatsoever. Coronado returned to Nueva Galicia and was dismissed from the governorship in 1544. He quietly lived out the rest of his life in Mexico City, never finding the fame he desired.¹

Coronado's belief in the legends of the cities of gold led him to journey to those faraway places, risking his life and his men's. He expected a positive result from his explorations, and this hope sustained him. Every action reflects our beliefs. Webster's Dictionary defines a belief as "a conviction that certain things are true." Beliefs provide a frame of reference for interacting with our complex world. However, we should not assume our beliefs are always true and accurate. Not too many years ago, people believed the earth was flat, tomatoes were considered poisonous, and doctors thought they could cure illnesses by bleeding patients. Nevertheless, it is the nature of all men and women to follow their beliefs since they form our only map of reality.

The Missing Key

When people are struggling in their personal lives, they invariably hold incorrect beliefs about the world and themselves. One client I worked with many years ago had an unfortunate incident while on a date as a teenager. He had dropped his cigarette, and it rolled down the car seat and burned his date's leg. She was furious and told him off using very direct language. He developed the belief that no woman would ever want to date someone like him. I met him 15 years after this painful incident. He had never again asked

a woman out on a date, and had spent many years in alcoholic misery. What a terrible price he paid for his illogical belief!

One might suppose that individuals could analyze their problematic behavior and change their beliefs to more effective ones. Therapists would reason with their clients, explaining why certain beliefs were illogical, and clients would gratefully accept these valuable suggestions. They would then change their mistaken beliefs, alter their behavior, and get better. Therapists would take a direct cognitive-behavioral approach, relying mainly on reason and logic. I practiced therapy this way for several years and had varying degrees of success. However, I always recognized that something was missing. Sometimes, the most compelling evidence failed to persuade clients that their perceptions were illogical! There would be little or no change. Often, the client would feel worse than ever after such a debate. I would be frustrated and wonder what I was doing wrong. Finally, I came to realize that the *missing ingredient* was a correct understanding of subconscious processes. That was the key I had been searching for!

As we navigate life, the emotional system draws conclusions about the world based on its experiences. It associates various stimuli and situations with either pleasure or pain and makes simple approach-avoidance decisions. It also develops concepts regarding complex issues such as socializing, work, and religion. These ideas, or *schemas*, can become so deeply impressed that we later respond to them automatically without any conscious effort. The basic rule of thumb would be "the more powerful the experience, the stronger the schema." Insecurity and low self-worth, jealousy in relationships, fears of being alone, suspiciousness, and inappropriate anger all have their roots in childhood conflict. I call this array of deep-seated beliefs "the subconscious map." The inner self utilizes these ideas as a framework for navigating the world.

The subconscious map functions as an effective survival mechanism. It tells us how to think and behave without having to fully evaluate every situation. It works almost like a computer program. These ideas and beliefs can be non-personal, such as "fire burns," or personal, such as "I can't do anything right." Our awareness of the origin of each idea is often limited. Also, since the subconscious is far more powerful than the conscious mind, its preferences tend to prevail. Whenever we approach situations that evoke pain or discomfort, inner alarm bells ring. We become extremely uncomfortable and generally initiate a hasty retreat. On the other hand, when we think about items that we have learned to enjoy, such as money, specific foods, or certain activities, we generate impulses to obtain them.

Let us consider the example of someone suffering from claustrophobia. The claustrophobic knows logically that nothing will happen to him in a small closet or room. Nevertheless, the prospect of being confined is terrifying. The idea that small, enclosed places are dangerous was most likely formed when he was shut in a dark closet as a child. Fears conjured up in his imagination made it a terrible experience. The incident may have occurred at a very young age or been so repressed that, later in life, the individual would have no conscious memory. Despite the present lack of awareness, the inner program remains active. Each time the adult phobic is exposed to the prospect of being enclosed, he or she experiences overwhelming feelings of terror.

This example of claustrophobia illustrates one of the greatest limitations of the subconscious map. Programs can be necessary and advantageous at one point in time, but counterproductive in the years that follow. *Our world and the rules of life change as we transition from childhood to adulthood, but our inner beliefs remain constant.* Barring significant new evidence, everything will continue to be viewed the same way. These negative associations with past events can cause us to live fear-based lives. These inner beliefs can significantly impact our productivity, social life, ability to form intimate relationships, and self-esteem. Tragically, we can be conditioned to fail.

Common Mistaken Beliefs about Self

I will never have friends.
I am stupid.
I am no good.
Don't talk about problems.
I will always be depressed.
I am unlovable.
Things never change.
I will never be successful.
My sins can never be forgiven.
I am unworthy unless I have my parents' approval.
I can't do anything right.
Everything is my fault.
You can't trust anyone.
Everyone I get close to leaves me.
I am weaker than other people.
Unless I am a superstar, I have no worth.
I don't deserve to be happy.
Only lazy people take breaks or waste time with recreation.

The heart has its reasons which reason knows not of.

-Blaise Pascal

Notice how these statements tend to be absolutes. They can easily become self-defeating prophecies because our actions tend to follow our beliefs. The person who believes he is stupid is unlikely to attend college. The person who believes that no one could ever like him will not seek out friends. It takes true courage to overcome fears and risk the uncertainties of change. The subconscious map has a tremendous influence on our lives. It must be reckoned with, or we will make the same mistakes over and over again.

Patterns Tell the Story

Rocky Marciano, the only undefeated heavyweight boxing champion in history, exhibited unusual behavior throughout his life. He had a great fear of being poor and distrusted banks. As a result, he would only accept cash payments for his frequent public appearances. Once, Marciano refused a cashier's check for \$5,000 after giving a speech in

Montreal. Instead, he agreed to accept \$2,500 in cash as full payment, which the surprised organizer of the event had to raise on the spur of the moment.

Not only did Marciano insist on cash, but he also sometimes stored his money in paper sacks. Once, he got bored at the theater with his daughter Mary Anne and left early. By mistake, he left a brown paper bag on his seat. Observing this, his daughter Mary Anne put it into her purse. She later found out that the paper sack contained \$40,000 in cash. When Rocky died tragically in an airplane crash at age 45, he left his family little besides their Ft. Lauderdale home. He had no life insurance, and he never wrote a will. The family believed his hoard of money to be hidden away somewhere, but none of the cash was ever found.

Patterns such as these do not arise out of the blue. If we could trace Rocky's fear of using banks and his love for cash, we would speculate that it was related to his bleak childhood. He grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Brockton, Massachusetts during the Great Depression. During the summers, Rocky carried his father's lunch to him at the shoe factory where he worked. The stark, dreary lives of the factory workers likely made quite an impression on the young boy. Additionally, many banks failed during this period.²

Marciano's history suggests that he made some strong personal decisions to avoid poverty at all costs and never trust banks. Behind every strong maladaptive pattern is a set of beliefs that support the behavior. If we consider areas where we struggle, we can become more aware of programmed responses from our subconscious map. Individual "programs" manifest themselves very consistently, accompanied by intense emotions, illogical thoughts, and unhelpful behavior. Although these programs never wear out, they can be changed through insight and corrective experiences.

The Invisible Prison

Ranchers in the West are allowed to graze their cattle herds on public lands after paying a fee. I have always been intrigued by an innovative method the ranchers use to keep their cows from straying too far in a particular area. High canyon walls keep the herd from going east or west. The easiest escape route for the cows is the highway going north and south. The highway is also the most dangerous place for these vacationing bovines.

To deter the cows, V-shaped white stripes were painted on the black highway. The cows perceive it as a broken surface and are afraid to walk on it, for fear of damaging their legs. This strategy works because the cows *perceive the stripes as a danger*. Many individuals harbor inner fears and beliefs that prevent them from embracing change. Nevertheless, like the striped cow guards, they are usually mere illusions that appear very real. People have a strong inclination to believe that future outcomes will be similar to past ones. Whether it is relationships, academics, or self-worth, humans tend to generalize from the past. Yesterday's reactions to experiences become elements of the subconscious map and exert a tremendous influence on our thinking and behavior.

The "law of fit" tells us to look for things that fit or prove our negative beliefs. A person who believes he is stupid or a loser will provide substantial evidence to downgrade himself, but ignore data to the contrary. This law also explains that due to subconscious

influences, we often repeat behaviors that align with our past experiences, yet resist new, more positive opportunities. Our fears come in all shapes and sizes. Note the accompanying self-talk associated with the various fears listed below.

The Parade of Fears

Fear of rejection *No one would want to be my friend.*

Fear of being controlled *If I give in, they will totally take over.*

Fear of failure *I know I'll fail, and it will be unbearably painful.*

Habit *I've always been this way.*

Fear of criticism *If I make a mistake, people will laugh at me.*

Fear of success *Even if I do all right, I'll never be able to keep up with their expectations.*

Lack of confidence *No matter what I do, it never comes out right.*

Defeatism *I'll never be able to change.*

Fear of being alone *If I appear strong and independent, everyone will ignore me.*

Fatalism *If I change things for the better, I know something will eventually go wrong anyway.*

Meanings are not determined by situations, but we determine ourselves by the meanings we give to situations.

-Alfred Adler

Rewriting Subconscious Programs

Once we have identified some of the faulty programming in our subconscious map, we can begin to work on altering this negative conditioning. Knowledge of how to accomplish this critical task is essential to real change. The prison doors of the past can be unlocked, and we can walk out into the light, free to choose our desired path in life. Otherwise, improvements are often superficial, and there is a constant battle to avoid falling back into negative habits. This knowledge of how to change negative schemas is of immeasurable worth. For the individual, it is comparable to deciphering the extraordinary Rosetta Stone. The history behind the Rosetta Stone began with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. During the subsequent three-year French occupation of the Nile Valley, European scholars collected a large number of antiquities and historical records. The Rosetta Stone was discovered in the Fort of St. Julian, among the various treasures at Rosetta, a town located on the west arm of the Nile.

The stone was found to have identical messages carved on it in three languages — first in hieroglyphics (the picture script used by the Egyptian priesthood), next in demotic (the common written language of ancient Egypt), and third in Greek. Scholars worked on this language puzzle for several years until Jean-François Champollion successfully deciphered the hieroglyphic script in 1822. He made not only a dictionary but also a

grammar of the language. Thanks to key insights from the Rosetta Stone, the hieroglyphic writings of ancient Egypt became accessible to modern man.³

Before explaining how to alter past conditioning, it is worth noting that it is not always necessary to undergo therapy or employ elaborate techniques to effect change. Engaging in *experiences* that disprove our past perceptions is sufficient for change in many cases. I recall a patient from a psychiatric hospital where I worked who underwent some dramatic changes in about a week. He was a very paranoid, surly individual who had served time in a state correctional institution for attempted murder. If he felt frustrated by anyone, he would scream at them with a startling degree of anger. He seemed unapproachable, and most of the other patients avoided him. All the members of the staff were afraid of him, except one very experienced nurse.

One day, when he was complaining about how badly people treated him, she challenged him and said, "Of course, no one wants to be around you. You scare them away with those mean looks. Why don't you smile once in a while?" Amazingly, this tough, frightening guy took her up on the suggestion. He was amazed when people became receptive to him. He walked around beaming for a week and was very willing to discuss his newly discovered social skills with the staff. He had shattered his perception that no one liked him by creating a different experience. Over the next year, I had other opportunities to interact with him and saw that he never regressed to his former negative social patterns.

Beginning Your Historical Research

If we accept that events in our younger years influenced our present sense of self-worth, it makes sense to examine those situations thoroughly. To begin recovering the truth about the past, search your memory for situations and patterns that had particularly adverse effects. Amazingly, our inner self knows exactly what we need to work on. We may have tried to avoid thinking about the painful events of earlier times, but the emotional system struggled on alone to understand the source of its pain. Unfortunately, there is no way the inner person could ever succeed without your help. You are the hero armed with logic and knowledge who can set the prisoner free from his undeserved "jail of shame." It is your mission to rescue your inner self from the lies and distortions of the past!

Writing a personal history is a good way to begin. A natural division is to take ages 0-4, 5-11, 12-15, 16-18, and 19-25 separately. Each of these periods has some distinct developmental elements. If you do not wish to write out an entire history, jot down some general patterns, highlights, and difficult events for each period in a list form. Close your eyes and ask your inner self to recollect the events of significance. Do not worry too much if you cannot recall everything. Allow the memories to bubble up spontaneously. You will remember what you need to know or are ready to know. Specific areas of family life and human development can also be considered for their significance to your belief system. Ponder the following areas to help you identify additional experiences that may have played a significant role in creating a negative identity.

love and affection	trust and security	approval	vacations
work and chores	money and status	communication	holidays
attention	religion	sexuality	relatives

discipline	substance abuse	family roles	dating
needs and wants	emotions	abuse	academics
impulse control	family secrets	teachers	bullies
friends	independence	appearance	sports

Reinterpreting the Past

Past traumatic situations or problems do not form our personalities and patterns of behavior. *The active element is the interpretation of those negative experiences.* While we cannot change the past, we can alter the resulting negative beliefs. Once the faulty beliefs within the subconscious map have been identified, we can begin altering this negative conditioning. Insight and logic are essential for correcting the distorted interpretations of past events. The following technique will help you get started untangling the past. You may have to process several events. Write down the answers in a notebook.

Reprocessing Therapy

1. My negative belief (schema):
 2. One event that helped form that belief:
 3. What was the emotional experience of the younger self during this event?
 4. What was my younger self thinking during this event?
 5. I would like to strengthen my younger self with the following more correct interpretation:
 6. Behavior analysis - things I could have said or done differently:
- *To reprocess the past, say the new interpretation out loud several times and/or visualize your younger self doing things more effectively.

There can be no transforming of darkness into light and of apathy into movement without emotion.

-Carl Jung

Special Instructions

There are a few important tips to share about doing this history work. If there is abuse or trauma related to the formation of negative schemas, unpleasant emotions may be triggered as you begin to work through the past. Therefore, if the prospect of exploring your past seems frightening or overwhelming, please seek the assistance of a competent professional therapist. Courage and determination are required because there is no turning back once you commit to exploring the past. Think of this endeavor as running the emotional rapids. Once you start the process, the emotions that arise may become so powerful that they can no longer be controlled and must be expressed. Generally, people experience a range of emotions, including guilt, shame, anger, fear, disgust, sadness, and grief. There appears to be an emotional need to experience and express emotions that were

suppressed and then buried. Some ways feelings can be expressed include talking, writing, art, music, or exercise. Your heart knows what it needs. Your job is to discover what that may be.

Guilt is usually the first emotion to be worked through. Although it is marvelous to finally begin to let go of the burden of shame and self-blame, other strong emotions soon start to surface. Anger generally follows, as people realize they were violated. Many individuals who have been abused turn anger inwardly as they begin to get in touch with these feelings and can become self-destructive. It is essential to form a plan to handle these powerful emotions. These feelings build up so much energy over time that it is almost impossible to forgive and move on without some outward release!

The objective is to recognize the feelings of anger and develop a plan to express them safely. It is crucial to refrain from acting on aggressive feelings. Certainly, violence is never an acceptable solution. Firm boundaries must be set so one does not behave poorly during the emotion of the moment. Outbursts of strong emotion can damage relationships and lead to regrets. While it is sometimes appropriate to verbally confront someone (such as a parent) with your hurt and anger, it should be done in a mature fashion. Sending an email or a video clip may be the most effective way to convey your thoughts and initiate communication. This also tests the waters, giving you a sense of what might happen if a face-to-face discussion were to take place in the future.

Cathartic activities, such as vigorous exercise, may be necessary to manage the built-up energy of anger. I generally propose that my clients perform an “anger ritual.” This involves choosing a safe, physical way to express anger, such as hitting a pillow or shadow boxing (punching the air). The anger exercise should be performed vigorously every day until you reach a moderate level of fatigue, regardless of whether you feel angry. You continue to do this until you are ready to move on and work on letting go of the anger. Most people take one to two weeks to complete the process.

Sadness can be handled by scheduling time to feel sad at least a few days per week. Thirty minutes to an hour each day until the cup of sorrow is poured out is generally sufficient. Although the prospect of facing these difficult emotions may seem unpleasant, it is a valuable investment in enjoying inner peace in the future.

This next tip is a great one. It is simple and makes the whole process much easier. If you expect to have flashbacks or strong emotions while processing a past traumatic situation, simply tap your hands on each leg for a minute before and then during the memory, alternating from one leg to the other. The right hand hits the right leg, and the left hand hits the left leg, right/left, right/left, etc. You could also cross your arms and tap the outside of your arms by the bicep. The rate of tapping should be slow and rhythmic, about 10 taps every 7 or 8 seconds. It is a natural rhythm, so do not worry about counting. This technique, first developed by Marsha Linehan, works because the bilateral movements seem to interfere with memories. Everyone I have had use this method said it was effective and easy to do. With the emotional intensity of the memories reduced, it is much easier to process past events cognitively and arrive at more accurate interpretations.

When working through past issues, the invaluable tool of humility can help gain perspective. Rather than only focusing on the events that produced feelings of shame or

guilt, we can acknowledge and accept the lack of knowledge, skills, or abilities that contributed to the problem. By accepting personal limitations without resorting to labels or absolutes, the meaning of past adverse events can be dramatically altered.

Similarly, offenders can also be viewed differently. We can strive to look with eyes of compassion to recognize the individual's limited level of moral development. It is important to accept the reality of how very *deficient* the offending party was in his or her ability to be loving, reasonable, and empathetic. Accepting others' weaknesses and showing compassion for their pain can free us from our anger. While it can be challenging to see how abusive individuals can be in pain, recognize that the worse a person's behavior, the further away they are from happiness and positive relationships. Forgiveness becomes possible by exercising true charity, feeling compassion for those in darkness. Know that forgiveness does not free you from the requirement to take care of yourself. Boundaries must be maintained with those who have not learned to treat others with respect and dignity. Keeping a safe distance may be the only barrier to further abuse.

It is essential not to fear this natural process of confronting the past. Flashbacks represent the inner self's attempts to communicate its distress about the past. It wants the conscious mind to help it process the emotions and meaning of difficult events. The inner self recognizes that entanglement with past pain and negative thoughts interferes with finding fulfillment in the present. Once this challenging work is accomplished, the flashbacks and memories will largely cease, and you will have a much richer and more fulfilling emotional life.

Example of the Use of Acceptance and Compassion in a Letter to Self

First thoughts: I have been hurt very badly by the physical abuse Dad inflicted on me before Mom divorced him. It damaged my self-worth and made me afraid of many things. I used to blame myself, but recently I have been so angry that I wish he would die.

Corrected thoughts: I recognize that Dad was a severe alcoholic when I was a child. He had a lot of problems related to his past. His mother died when he was eight, and his father did not show much interest in him. He has had a tough life. He never learned to deal with his emotions and often felt overwhelmed. Now, he is separated from his second wife and lives in a dumpy little apartment by himself. Even though he doesn't drink anymore, his life is still a mess. He won't get help, and I don't think he will ever be happy. I hate what he did to me, but I recognize he has never learned to get along with other people. He did not know how to be a father, but he did a few good things for me despite the abuse. I must accept what happened and move on in my own life. I can maintain limited contact with him, but I can't allow him to be a big part of my life unless he makes some changes. I have a right to keep myself safe.

Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.

-Suzanne Somers

Memorialize the Past

When soldiers die in battle, memorials are often erected to honor their sacrifices and commemorate their memories. It is important to honor the psychic pain of the past by

not burying it in an unmarked grave. Everyone who has been hurt in the past deserves to have their story told and their pain acknowledged. There are various ways to accomplish the task of paying respect to one's trauma. The most critical step, of course, is stopping the lies. This is achieved by using the reprocessing technique to correct distortions and errors.

It is also important to share the story and bring it out into the open. While the most difficult events may be best handled in therapy, there are other stories that one might feel comfortable sharing with a friend or family member. It is important not to overwhelm others or expect them to do anything more than listen and care. An additional method might be to write one's story, thus bringing it out into the bright light of conscious awareness.

For some, taking tangible steps to memorialize what happened or celebrate a new beginning may prove very meaningful. If it seems beneficial, a memorial to your younger self and his pain and losses could be constructed. This might include pictures, a memento of the time, or even a slogan. A phrase such as "Every child deserves to be loved and to feel safe" might work well for many situations. Each person knows in their heart what they need.

There are many ways to mark and celebrate a new beginning. One could write a letter to a victimizer about an old incident and either bury it or (carefully) burn it. One might find an object that reminds him of a tough period from the past and pair it with a transitional object, such as a picture of the sun rising over the sea. Buying a special ring or other symbolic object, such as a piece of art, is also a great way to remind oneself of change and the promise of a new future.

Most importantly, we need to communicate to our inner self that traumas are tragedies no one deserves, and we are sorry he or she went through that pain. We can write a letter of sympathy to our inner self and promise to protect him or her in the future. We can correct cognitive distortions and shine the light of truth on the subject. We can resolve to learn from the past and become a better and stronger person. Another vital part of a new alliance with the inner self is committing to managing emotions correctly in the future and staying safe.

The business of life is to go forward.

-Samuel Johnson

Recovery Assignment

Please decide if you have any negative schema or significant trauma that needs to be worked on. Study the principles of change explained in this chapter and plan your next steps. In many cases, it is advantageous to seek support from a therapist. When you are ready, go on a mission to rescue your inner self from its prison of the past. After overcoming these challenges, you will be in a wonderful new territory, freer than ever to pursue your goals and find peace and happiness!

Notes

1. The Columbia Encyclopedia, s.v. "Francisco Vasquez Coronado," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), accessed June 8, 2009, <http://questia.com>.
2. Nack, W., Rocky Marciano: Remembering a Mysterious Champion, *Sports Illustrated*, August 23, 1993, 52.
3. Wikipedia s.v. "Rosetta Stone," <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosetta_Stone, December 30, 2017>.

Chapter 14

Universal Worth

Of all the things that human beings seek, higher self-esteem is one of the most slippery goals. The self-esteem game is competitive. Cognitive psychologist Albert Ellis declared, “Self-esteem is the greatest sickness known to man or woman because it’s conditional.”¹ Here are some of the main events in the daily self-esteem Olympics:

Social status	Career success
Wealth	Talent and skillfulness
Attractiveness	Receiving praise from authority figures
Popularity	Closest to perfection

Low self-worth, lack of confidence, and social anxiety seem to be associated with almost every mental disorder. However, changing self-worth is viewed as a complex process. Personality variables, in general, are thought to remain relatively stable over time and are difficult to alter. Presently, no widely accepted, scientifically validated methods for improving self-concept exist.

The overall lack of success in improving self-esteem appears to stem from a flawed paradigm. A paradigm is a pattern or model. The outstanding flaw is a bias toward improving self-worth by seeking praise and focusing on strengths and accomplishments. This approach is doomed to fail because people inevitably compare themselves to others. Establishing value by trying to feel superior to others can best be described by the old-fashioned word “pride.” Pride is a slippery mountain to climb. It is stressful to be competing constantly. Those who fall off the mountain feel like losers. Those who succeed in climbing the mountain can succumb to feelings of arrogance. Additionally, many attempt to inflate their egos through self-deception. They tell themselves that they are fine individuals with no significant faults, a false bubble that is easily popped.

The self-esteem game is rigged. It is like playing blackjack in Las Vegas. When the odds are against you, every player eventually loses. There is always someone better than you in every endeavor. It is impossible to go through life without making mistakes. There are always critics, and invariably, some people won’t like or approve of us. Therefore, the only way to succeed in the self-esteem game is to change the rules!

This proposed rule change is so profound that it can be called a paradigm shift. The new idea is simple. Quit playing the game! However, it is a personal decision. If you like the game, keep trying to win. If, on the other hand, you are tired of worrying about what others think of you or want to be free of self-condemnation, perhaps you are ready for a new way.

The first step is easy: decide to implement, then internalize, the following concepts. This is called the self-worth model.

Worth is a universal gift. All individuals have equal worth. Cease to judge yourself by others’ demands for performance or your perfectionistic standards. Most importantly, avoid comparisons to others. Every individual needs to focus on his or her own journey.

Secure self-worth does come at a price. To achieve this goal, we must relinquish the

quest to feel superior to others. To feel superior and to think one's rights and happiness somehow count more than others allows one to justify indifference, discrimination, and even violence. On a more personal level, arrogance devalues others' contributions and strengths, creates hurt feelings, and lowers morale. Therefore, the temptation to be competitive or compare oneself favorably to others must be well-controlled. Self-value must always be counterbalanced by humility.

If you are humble nothing shall touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know what you are.

-Mother Teresa

Seven Steps for Changing Self-Worth

1. Believe that all people have universal worth and equal value.

All people have worth! We do not have to *do* anything to be of value and significance. When we contemplate a flower bud, we do not belittle it for lack of petals but appreciate it for its promise of beauty. Likewise, we should accept ourselves for who we are and our potential. We are all travelers in this great universe, members of the human family.

2. Support the inner self.

Many entertain the myth that self-esteem problems can be alleviated by gaining the approval of significant others. This assumption is misleading. While pleasing others may fill a portion of the hole inside, the most valuable endorsement we can receive is from ourselves. The rules of the game change as we move from childhood to adulthood. Assume your adult responsibility as the caretaker of the heart, the inner person of the soul. *You, and only you, can provide the 24-hour acceptance and guidance you need to thrive in life.* Your inner self will listen to you more than anyone else. Your happiness depends upon your willingness to accept the inner self as a wonderful, vibrant, essential part of your being. Our self-talk can reflect this critical concept of equal worth.

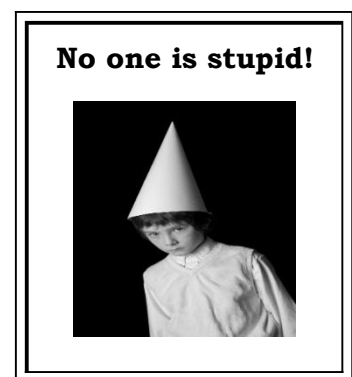
So much is a man worth as he esteems himself.

-Francois Rabelais

3. Avoid labels. Pledge to treat the inner self with respect.

Finding inner peace necessitates accepting reality. People often use labels such as "stupid," "loser," or "worthless" to describe themselves. This has a very detrimental emotional effect and is more discouraging than motivational. I propose that we strive to be both accurate and positive in our self-talk. Instead of using labels to put ourselves down, we can try to describe situations as they are, without exaggeration.

The most effective way to approach this goal is to make a sacred promise to your inner self to refrain from using negative labels. If we slip up and use an incorrect phrase, we can



immediately apologize and say things more constructively. For example, rather than calling myself a “terrible musician,” I could say, “I am not professionally trained in music and am just learning.” The sting of the first phrase feels far worse emotionally than the kinder, more realistic second phrase.

4. Recognize your good qualities. (Place a check next to each strength that mostly applies to you and add your talents on the line provided.)

Positive Qualities List

appreciative	aware	calm	caring
chaste	cheerful	compassionate	confident
conscientious	considerate	cooperative	courageous
creative	curious	dependable	disciplined
energetic	enthusiastic	fair	faithful
firm	flexible	forgiving	fun
generous	gentle	genuine	grateful
happy	honest	humble	independent
industrious	insightful	kind	likable
listener	logical	obedient	open
optimistic	organized	patient	practical
prudent	quiet	realistic	receptive
reliable	respectful	responsible	sensitive
serious	sharing	sincere	spiritual
strong	supportive	temperate	tender
tolerant	trusting	unique	warm

Special talents _____

It is refreshing to appreciate our strengths and talents without succumbing to the temptation to feel superior to others. After completing the list, read it to yourself. (It is helpful to say the words “I am” before each strength.) This experience is invariably very safe and positive. It illustrates the personal growth most of us have made over the years. It can be repeated many times.

I define comfort as self-acceptance. When we finally learn that self-care begins and ends with ourselves, we no longer demand sustenance and happiness from others.

-Jennifer Louden

5. Use humility to accept personal limitations and past mistakes.

Our society is so enamored with the idea of building self-esteem that it is difficult to accept that this concept is misguided. On a personal level, it can be challenging to relinquish our inner desires for praise and recognition (pride). Cultivating positive emotions and a noble character should be our chief aim in life, not seeking pride or fame. Pride is no more capable of making us happy than cocaine because it only provides an

illusion, a short-lived fantasy. It is the absence of self-condemnation that frees us to enjoy life.

Humility is a key to self-esteem problems and one of the most potent psychological tools available. Nicholas Emmler says that to be humble means to have a sense of self-acceptance, an understanding of one's imperfections, and to be free from arrogance and low self-esteem.²

The value of reminding ourselves of our limitations lies in providing emotional balance. Once we accept the reality of who we truly are, we become somewhat immune to the detrimental effects of criticism and setbacks. A person who is not troubled by fears of failure can conquer any obstacle and reach any goal. His direction is always forward. The Worth Protection Formula is a helpful tool for dealing with our reactions to setbacks or perceived criticism from others.

<p style="text-align: center;">Worth Protection Formula</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Is this criticism 100 percent accurate, or do I just strongly <i>feel</i> that way? What is the evidence that it is not totally correct?2. What is the function of focusing on my supposed mistake or weakness? What is my <i>fantasy</i> about what is supposed to happen next?3. Since I have uncovered more evidence that I am not perfect, what do I need to accept about myself? What is the <u>specific</u> weakness or limitation? (Be kind and avoid using labels.)4. I recognize and declare that despite my imperfections, I am still a human being and have great intrinsic worth.5. Say something positive about your abilities, attributes, or past efforts. State your plan for change.

Many people struggle with the idea that they are “not good enough.” This is a very insidious label, and it causes people untold pain. Humility and acceptance can neutralize this poisonous idea. The solution is simple: surrender to the truth. Of course, we are not good enough! All human beings are in a developmental process. We all have strengths, weaknesses, past disappointments, and goals for change. This is the human condition.

I have found that the best way to begin taking the sting out of this troubling phrase is to carefully define what it means to each person. List the items on your “not good enough” list. Then rewrite each concern logically and factually, ensuring the language is free of drama. It can be helpful to describe these limitations in a straightforward manner. I am not as effective in _____ as I would like to be. I could improve by _____.

6. Set realistic and achievable standards by which to judge yourself.

Some individuals have very difficult standards to reach. The following are examples of common, unrealistic goals: “Everyone must like me. I must be perfect. My parents must approve of me. I must be rich and successful. I must weigh 115 pounds. I must have a college degree and a professional career.”

Although these types of ideas are rigid and illogical, people often cling to them due to subconscious forces. They punish themselves unmercifully whenever they fall short, and consequently suffer endlessly. Since most people insist on standards by which to judge themselves, I suggest we switch to achievable standards tied to short-term goals. A simple standard that I use requires only that I put forth a reasonable effort in my work and strive to be kind to those around me.

7. Rescue your inner self from false beliefs of the past

If practicing the techniques provided in this chapter has helped you to gain the conviction that you are a person of value, keep it up. On the other hand, if you encounter strong inner resistance to self-acceptance, then some deeper work may be required. It is helpful to recognize that our self-esteem was primarily shaped by our past perceptions of how others viewed us. These ideas, or *schemas*, can become so deeply impressed that we later respond to them automatically. Schemas were discussed in the previous chapter. Without identifying and revising these faulty beliefs within the subconscious, improvements are often superficial, and there is a constant battle to avoid falling back into negative thought patterns.

Overall, it is essential to recognize that *interpretations* of past shaming situations are invariably false or exaggerated. When working through past issues, the invaluable tool of humility can again be used to gain perspective. Rather than focusing solely on the events that produced feelings of shame or guilt, we can acknowledge and accept our lack of knowledge, skills, or abilities that contributed to the problem. Accepting personal limitations without labels or absolutes can dramatically change the meaning of past adverse events. Similarly, offenders can also be viewed differently. Abusive people are on a low plane of spiritual/emotional development and do not have the insight or empathy to grasp the true extent of the hurt and damage they inflict upon others. Taking a realistic and compassionate look at their inadequacies can bring a clearer picture.

Powerful emotions can arise when examining the past. If you had particularly traumatic experiences as a child, it is advisable that you make sure you are prepared before you tackle the past. Preparation would first include practicing the various skills taught in this book. Additionally, you should have the support of a competent therapist. Tools for doing this history change work were provided in the previous chapter, particularly the reprocessing therapy technique.

Strengthening one's self-concept is a major undertaking. Work steadily, but remember that it is fine to take breaks, as this kind of work can require a great deal of emotional energy.

Recovery Assignment

Changing one's self-concept is a significant task that can require considerable time and effort. It is a process. To start, practice using the Worth Protection Formula when your self-concept feels threatened.

Notes

1. Ellis, Albert. *The Myth of Self-Esteem* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2005).
2. Emler, N. (2022). The costs and causes of low self-esteem, *Youth Studies Australia* 21 (3), 45.

Chapter 15

Fantastic Journey

Odysseus was one of the great heroes of Greek mythology. He was famous for his courage, cleverness, and leadership. Odysseus' resourcefulness was instrumental in the Greek victory in the Trojan War. Among other things, he conceived the idea of hiding his troops in a giant wooden horse, known as the Trojan Horse. After that conflict, Odysseus had many fantastic adventures during his Odyssey, the long ten-year voyage back to his kingdom in Ithaca. He fought a man-eating Cyclops, outwitted the Sirens (bird creatures with women's heads who lured sailors onto the rocks with their enchanted singing), escaped rock-throwing giants, and survived storms and shipwrecks. He finally made it home, reclaimed his kingdom, and lived happily with his wife Penelope for several years.

Overcoming ME/CFS is your own incredible Odyssey. Only those who have experienced this illness truly understand how discouraging and perplexing it can be. Success will depend on your courage, intelligence, and persistence. Few people get as much direction and support as they need, and the medical community receives little training in treating this disorder. I have reviewed the latest scientific research on ME/CFS and found very little information regarding treatment directions.

Where does that leave people searching for answers? There are certainly books available. Many voices are speaking about recovery on YouTube and other platforms. For those who desire more support, numerous programs are available, many of which can be attended online. As I noted in earlier chapters, my inspiration for writing this book was recognizing that virtually all the stories of recovered people had similarities. They all noted working on some combination of the same five elements: medical, diet and nutrition, pacing, mental health, and exercise. This was also true in my own recovery experience.

Given my limited training in these areas, this book offers only brief insights into medical aspects, diet, and nutrition. I will leave it up to the readers to do their own research. Regarding diet, most recovered individuals make significant changes. Decreasing refined carbohydrates, adopting a primarily plant-based diet, increasing fruit and vegetable intake, and reducing caffeine and alcohol intake seemed to be common choices. This book mainly addresses pacing, exercise, and mental health. I want to provide each reader with a challenge. Figure out which of the five areas you need to focus on the most. Some have had extensive medical testing and received an ME/ME/CFS diagnosis from a physician. Others may not have had a complete medical workup and received a diagnosis. I would urge those individuals who have not received a diagnosis to follow through and get this done. Many medical conditions can cause fatigue, and you should not delay seeking necessary treatment if it is warranted.

For those who have received a diagnosis of ME/CFS from a qualified medical professional, you are going to have to go on a trust walk. You are following in the footsteps of individuals who have recovered without the safety net of proven science. I urge you to embark on the journey this book suggests. Sitting at home, waiting for a miracle drug or a scientific breakthrough, is a hard way to go. I sincerely believe that those who work on

diet, pacing, mental health, and exercise can begin to see significant changes in 3 to 6 months.

You may not need to work on all these areas at once. Some may believe that their diet is quite good and that they are free of digestive problems and inflammation. Others may feel composed and relatively stress-free despite their ME/CFS symptoms. Some individuals may choose to seek specialized assistance from a professional in a particular area. Your challenge is to analyze what you need.

Once any medical concerns, except fatigue, are primarily controlled, it is time to begin implementing the changes suggested in this book. Pacing should be your initial priority. It may be helpful to create a list of your everyday activities and identify what you can do without exhausting yourself. Effective pacing is challenging because people often have multiple obligations, such as employment, childcare, food preparation, and home maintenance. Invariably, people must eliminate or reduce some of their responsibilities. Remember that these sacrifices are being made to set the stage for recovery. Also, there is a reality to consider. Once you have ME/CFS, there is little room for pushing through your limitations. That tactic will eventually fail anyway. Although it may be emotionally painful, cutting back on obligations is a necessary part of the health journey. The same guidance applies to social and recreational interests. You will not be able to do everything you used to do. You will be developing your patience more than you ever thought possible.

One of the more challenging aspects of recovery from ME/CFS is learning to relax. It is entirely natural to panic, knowing you have a chronic condition that is destroying your life. Unfortunately, keeping your sympathetic nervous system in fight-or-flight mode is not conducive to healing. So, what tools are available? Regular meditation or gentle yoga practice can help your body physiologically calm down.

Theoretically, most tension stems from fear of the future. The worrying thoughts commonly associated with ME/CFS are concerns about the future and immediate worries about PEM. The contemplation period coping tool would be most suitable for addressing future fears. A fear of PEM can be managed through logical thinking. "If I stay within my energy envelope today, I will not encounter any problems. I have proven this many times before. I know what activities I can do. I need to plan well and listen to my body."

Additionally, developing a plan for progress will do wonders for your sense of calm and control. The energy systems theory shared in this book offers a hopeful outlook. Your thoughts might look like this: "My symptoms are largely caused by being short on energy. My body is fine physiologically. I can build up my energy through measured exercise and a healthy lifestyle. I can continue to get stronger. Eventually, I will be able to do all the things I want to do."

When you begin exercising according to the detailed instructions provided in an earlier chapter, start slowly. You will soon recognize that you can exercise very safely. As you persevere, you will eventually gain invaluable proof that these theories on energy work. You will feel stronger, and your energy window will expand. This will provide hope and assurance, significantly decreasing any anxiety you may hold about the future. The main thing to remember is to be patient and continue to practice effective pacing.

This system of building energy has worked for me, and it can work for you as well. You deserve a bright future. We all paid expensive dues to be part of this exclusive club. The lessons you learn from your struggles will help you be a happier, healthier, more compassionate person. Remember to pay it forward and look for opportunities to help others struggling with similar disorders. I know you can persevere and triumph. I will celebrate with you when you find success with your recovery! My contact information is included at the beginning of this book. Please email me to share your success experiences. My thoughts are with you as you embark on this healing journey. Be strong! I know you can accomplish your recovery goals!