

Praise for *Bloom*

“Dr. Carrasco is a bright light in the world of functional medicine. She leverages the most forward-minded clinical research combined with a fresh perspective on how compassionate self-care, nourishment, and natural medicine can bring one back to a state of sustainable wholeness.”

—MARK HYMAN, M.D.

Ten-Time #1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author and Medical Director at Cleveland Clinic’s Center for Functional Medicine

“In Bloom, Dr. Carrasco has outlined exactly what it takes for women to overcome modern health challenges while nurturing a conscious attitude of growth, self-care, and compassion.”

—IZABELLA WENTZ, PHARMD, FASCP

#1 *New York Times* Bestselling Author
of *Hashimoto’s Protocol*

“Bloom demystifies the world of nutrition, detoxification, and functional medicine while providing a compassionate template for women to take back control of their health and live their lives with meaning and joy.”

—JJ VIRGIN CNS, CHFS
Nutrition, Fitness, and Mindset Expert *New York Times*
Best-Selling Author of *The Virgin Diet & Sugar Impact Diet*

“Are you stressed, tired, sick, hopeless, and dragging through each day? Then let this remarkable book show you the road back to a healthy and joy-filled life. Bloom’s seven simple and powerful steps will empower you to regain your energy, heal your body, and rekindle your “spark.” Filled with wisdom and compassion, this book is a must for any woman who wants to truly live rather than merely survive.”

—DR. KELLYANN PETRUCCI
New York Times Best-Selling Author of
Dr. Kellyann’s Bone Broth Diet, Host of The PBS Special
“21 Days to A Slimmer, Younger You”, Creator of drkellyann.com

“Dr. Alex invites you to explore your infinite potential as a woman! Bloom gives women proven and effective strategies to create amazing energy, resiliency to life’s stress, and tools to raise the vibrancy of their spirit to truly flourish.”

—DR. JOLENE BRIGHTEN
Best-Selling Author of *Healing Your Body Naturally After Childbirth*

“Dr. Carrasco’s approach to compassionate healing, along with her meticulous research and easy-to-follow advice on detoxification, nutrition, and functional medicine, makes this an instant classic for health-conscious women.”

—DR. V. DESAULNIERS
Best-Selling Author and Founder of
Breast Cancer Conqueror and The 7 Essentials System

“This is the book I wish I had read when I was a young mom. In Bloom Dr. Alex gets to the heart of women’s greatest fears and health challenges by offering seven powerfully practical steps to reclaim your health, sanity, and spark for living. All women can benefit from the wisdom and strategies this book offers, and I look forward to recommending it to my patients.”

—NICOLE BEURKENS, PHD, CNS
Licensed Psychologist and Board-Certified Nutrition Specialist

“Dr. Carrasco has created a complete guide to harnessing the power of integrative medicine for the modern woman. Bloom shows readers, specifically busy, stressed-out women, how to hit the reset button on their physical, emotional, and spiritual health, and how to cultivate vitality for the long run. This will be recommended reading for all of my patients.”

—SHAWN TASSONE, MD, PHD
Author of *Spiritual Pregnancy: Develop, Nurture,
and Embrace the Journey to Motherhood*

“Dr. Alex’s compassionate and artful seven-step healing process guides readers on a practical journey to root out and resolve unwanted ailments, while creating an abundant reservoir of health for the future.”

—ANTHONY YOUNG, MD
America’s Holistic Plastic Surgeon And
Best-Selling Author of *The Age Fix*

“Dr. Carrasco’s Bloom provides inspiring and insightful science-based solutions to help you find true health—mind, body, and spirit. It’s a must-read!”

—ANN SHIPPY, MD
Functional-Medicine Physician

“Bloom is a refreshing and informative read that provides the modern woman with an essential mix of education, inspiration, and tools to reignite her lost desires and empower herself back to a true and lasting state of optimal health and well-being. Dr. Carrasco does an amazing job structuring this book to uncover hidden ailments to support women at every phase of their healing journey.”

—DR. MARIZA SNYDER
Best-Selling Author of *Smart Mom’s Guide to Essential Oils*

“Dr. Carrasco is the true physician of the future. In Bloom, she integrates the physical, emotional, and spiritual elements necessary to live a vibrant, satisfying, and healthy life. I highly recommend it!”

—MAYA SHETREAT-KLEIN, MD
Author of *The Dirt Cure*

“What I love most about Bloom, Dr. Alex’s debut book, is the analogy of a garden as the foundation for your health, centered around the gut, your own internal garden. This book will inspire you to cultivate the garden of your health in an actionable, science-based seven-step process that is simple to implement. Dr. Alex leaves no stone unturned as she compassionately shows readers how to “re-bloom” with a life-enhancing, total body, mind, and spiritual transformation. This book is a must-read for any woman seeking to reignite her inner spark.”

—ANN SHIPPY, MD
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—VINCENT PEDRE, MD
Bestselling Author of *Happy Gut*,
Creator of The Gut C.A.R.E. Program

Bloom

7 Steps to Reclaim Your Health,
Cultivate Your Desires &
Reignite Your Spark

Alejandra Carrasco, MD

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Bloom
7 Steps to Reclaim Your Health, Cultivate
Your Desires & Reignite Your Spark

2nd Edition

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*For Danny —
whose love and devotion nourishes me profoundly.*

*For Mami and Papi —
whose love and care have given me deep and enduring roots.*

*And for Camila, Lucho, and Bruno —
whose love and affection inspire me to live my life in full bloom.*

A Note About the 2nd Edition of *Bloom*

I'm so happy that you are here reading the 2nd edition of my book, *Bloom*.

Bloom was written as a roadmap to help people strategically approach any health challenge through the lens I use in my clinical practice.

After starting my garden in 2015, I found a beautiful correlation between the different facets of growing a thriving garden and cultivating lasting health.

The first edition of *Bloom* was published in 2017, and in the years since its publication, I have felt called to update the book. I've updated every chapter to reflect what I currently find most useful for my patients in clinical practice.

On a more personal note, I have spent the last 5 years on a profound spiritual journey that has led me back home to Jesus. In the health and wellness world there is a huge focus on spirituality and when you're looking for healing, it's easy and compelling to explore the many esoteric healing practices that exist and have gained popularity in recent years.

As a curious seeker, I followed many of these paths only to be left empty and wanting. Ultimately they led me away from Jesus, the Great Physician, who came to heal the sinner and the sick through His death and resurrection.

Praise God, He took the scales from my eyes and allowed me to see that without Him, I would never experience true healing and lasting peace. Knowing Jesus, and growing in Him, has been the most beautiful gift I've ever been given.

If you don't know Jesus, I invite you to seek Him. He is the Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace who will never leave you or forsake you. No matter what you're going through, He will bring you peace and comfort without measure.

I hope this book blesses you and brings you clarity on your health journey.

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Introduction

Once upon a time, there were two best friends who each decided to start a garden.

The first friend worked a demanding job, had two children to take care of, and not a lot of time for herself. Eager to see the fruits of her labor, she took the modern route.

She paid landscapers to dig up a random garden plot in the backyard, bought pre-planted seedlings from the big box store, a huge bag of fertilizer-infused drought-resistant potting soil, pesticides, weed killer, and quickly threw everything into the ground as fast as she could.

She watered when she thought about it, applied weed killer once a week, sprayed pesticides at the first sign of a bug, and waited for her garden to grow.

We'll call her "the hurried gardener".

The second friend also worked a demanding job, took care of two children, and had very little time. She decided to fully embrace the gardening process as a stress-relieving exercise, she included her children, and took the more sustainable route.

She carefully chose a plot of land with just enough sun and protection from the elements, she had her soil tested, so she knew how to best nourish it; she sourced out hardy, heirloom seeds and started them indoors; she amended her soil with organic compost, patiently “hardened” her seedlings before transplanting outdoors; and finally, she planted them into the rich soil following the season’s last frost. Then, she and her children took turns mulching, watering, pulling weeds by hand, pruning branches, and even singing to their plants while they patiently waited for them to grow.

We’ll call her “the mindful gardener”.

The hurried gardener’s garden grew quickly. However, the plants were sporadic in size and hardiness; their roots were shallow; pests were a constant problem; the fruits and vegetables looked nice but lacked flavor; and when the first big storm came, it uprooted nearly all the plants. The hurried gardener was left defeated, with little to show for her efforts.

The mindful gardener’s garden required more effort and took a little longer to grow. With her tender love, patience, and care, the garden was well nourished, and the blooms, fruits, and vegetables grew strong, resilient, and produced the most intensely pleasing flavors, colors, and aromas.

What’s more, the garden provided a much-needed sanctuary for her. A quiet, beautiful place to slow down, be present, and reconnect with herself and her children as she cared for the God’s beautiful earth.

When autumn came, the hurried gardener felt regret, for she had only a muddy, weed-ridden plot of soil left. Her garden was spent.

Meanwhile, the mindful gardener carefully gathered all the seeds from her remaining plants to use the following year and had more than enough seed left to share the precious gifts of her little garden with her friend and the greater world.

How Does *Your* Garden Grow?

Most of us who live in the real world—working, raising kids with little support, and chasing dreams—are more likely to identify with the “hurried gardener”. Imagine for a moment you are the mindful gardener, and you are standing in your beautiful garden.

What does your garden look like?

What fruits, vegetables, and flowers do you see and smell?

How does it feel to stand in the middle of the beautiful, blooming, vibrant garden that you created and tended?

The story of the two gardeners is an analogy for the rest of this book. You, the reader, are both the gardener (hurried or mindful) and the garden of your own level of health, vitality, and happiness.

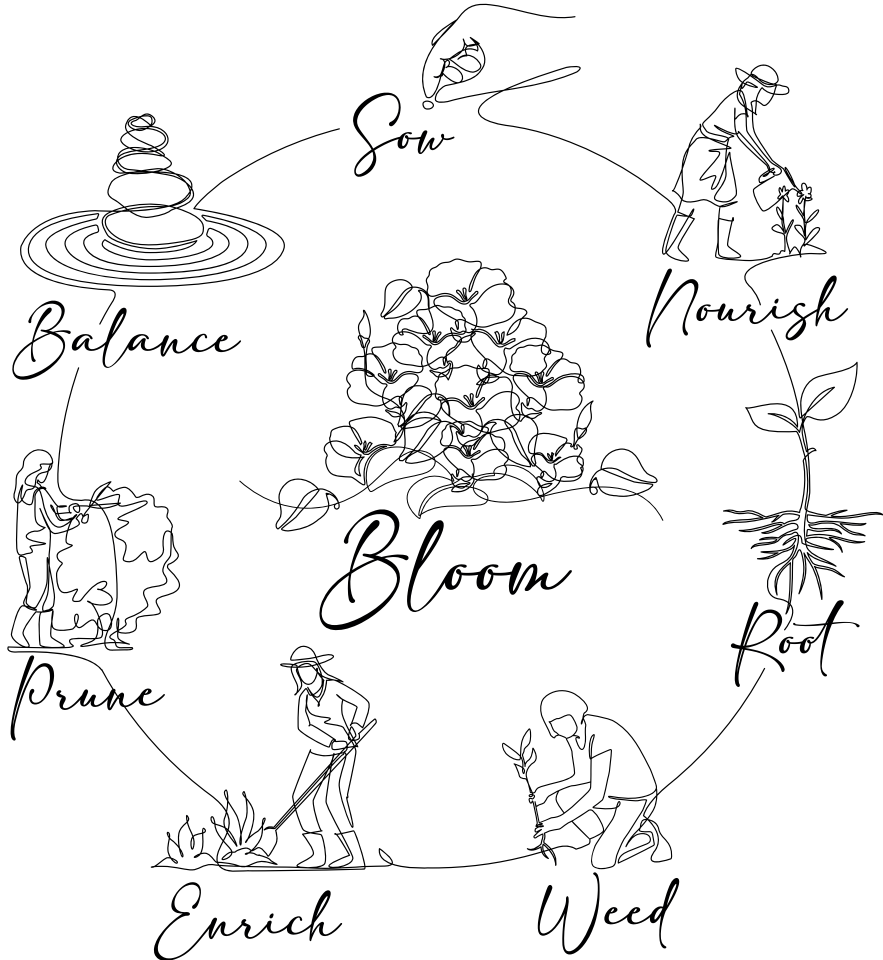
So, how does your garden grow?

If at this moment you identify with the hurried gardener, or you wince at the thought of gardening altogether, FEAR NOT and KEEP READING because this book was written for you. Over the next few chapters, I will guide you through the same 7 step process I have used with thousands of patients to help them get to the root of their health issues and establish a clear path to lifelong well-being.

This book was not written for one particular condition or ailment, nor does it offer a fixed “protocol” for reclaiming health. Rather, it is structured so anyone at any phase in their health journey, can use it to uncover hidden conditions, pull them out by the root, and get on with living a vibrant life.

This book was built around comparisons to gardening for a reason: I was inspired to write it when I started my own garden, because in doing so I realized just how close an analogy it is to the state of the modern women’s health.

Here's how we will work together using these 7 steps to reclaim your health, cultivate your desires, and reignite your spark.



Before we begin our steps and journey together, you will be invited to give yourself official, signed permission to go through the Bloom process. We will also discuss how to open your mind to embrace expansion, growth, and self-compassion, which will fuel the healing process ahead.

Once we have gotten your head and heart in the game (so to speak), we will move on to Step 1: SOW.

This first step takes you through a specific exercise to identify and own your core desires for your health and life—which I call “seeds”. These will be different for everyone and will form the basis, purpose, and desired outcome of your Bloom journey. Once we have isolated those unique seeds, we will “sow” them by uncovering the big “Why” behind those desires, setting goals, and putting your personal health plan in place. This step is the most important in the entire process, as it establishes the framework from which you will build upon in your journey.

Now that you have an actionable plan in place, we will move on to step 2: NOURISH

This second step shows you how to nourish yourself by making the right food choices for your individual biology and current state of health. You will learn exactly how to nurture your personal earth by identifying energy-zapping food sensitivities, optimizing nutrient intake, choosing the right supplements, and increasing your consumption of the little-known “primary foods”. By taking the time to nourish yourself in this step—body, mind, and spirit—you prepare your body to heal fully in the steps ahead.

With your individual nourishment strategy in place, we will continue along the garden path to Step 3: ROOT.

In this step, you will learn how to establish strong and deep roots and become grounded by switching your nervous system response to “calm”, resetting your sleep cycle, and reconnecting to yourself, and others, spiritually. By embracing this step fully, you will establish an unshakeable inner strength and stability you would have not thought possible.

With your roots firmly established, we move into new territory in Step 4: WEED.

This step goes in-depth by teaching you exactly how to find and weed out the numerous insidious toxins in your food, home, environment, and relationships that quietly degrade your health. This is a crucial step in reducing body burden and overcoming many puzzling health issues.

Now that you have learned to weed your garden effectively, you are ready for Step 5: ENRICH.

This fifth step is profound as it shows you how to identify and heal common gut health issues using food, lab work, and natural remedies. Gut health abnormalities are at the heart of many chronic conditions plaguing women, such as autoimmune disease and mood disorders. This one step alone, if taken seriously, will help you support your immune system, optimize nutrient absorption, stabilize your mood, and prevent a cascade of future health issues.

In Step 6: PRUNE, we will work on trimming back the overgrowth surrounding your symptoms.

In this step we will determine if you would benefit from partnering with a functional medicine physician. You will also learn about the most common under-diagnosed health issues, sub-clinical and clinical conditions affecting women, and exactly which advanced lab tests will help your new doctor identify them. Step 6 will either help you get unstuck, over the hump, or it will arm you with the information you need to establish a reputable health-care team that can help you nip any future conditions in the bud.

With the overgrowth pruned and your desired health outcomes in sight, we move confidently into our final step together, Step 7: BALANCE.

This last step shows you how to create *resiliency* in your health, so you can weather the inevitable storms of life and health. You will learn how to use mindfulness, along with some of my favorite practices, and the power of nature to stay strong, no matter what life throws at you, plus

how to return to these 7 steps any time you need to reset a specific area of your health and well-being.

Finally, after all seven steps are completed, we will take a moment to reflect on all you have done to come to this point of full Bloom, and how you can harvest your seeds of health and share them with the greater world.

How do I know this seven-step process can work for you?

Because, as a physician, I have used these same seven steps as guiding principles to treat hundreds of patients with thousands of symptoms in my own integrative functional medicine practice—many of whom you will meet in the coming chapters. That is the beauty of this process, it does not discriminate based on your age, level of health, or diagnosis; rather its application and results are universal and can be tailored to meet your needs within life’s ever-changing seasons.

Before we get started, let me tell you a bit about my harrowing journey from health- train-wreck-medical-student to integrative-medicine-specialist, and how the “Bloom” process came to be.

My Story

I’m Alejandra Carrasco, M.D. or “Dr. Alex” as my patients call me. I’m a mother of three, wife and partner to my soul mate, and a board-certified medical doctor practicing integrative and functional medicine.

In the integrative functional medicine model, we seek to treat the whole person by uncovering the root cause of illness, not just masking the symptoms. To do this, we rely on a systems-based approach to every patient, which includes a lengthy intake and history, advanced laboratory testing, and a heavy reliance on integrative therapies such as functional nutrition, pharmaceutical grade nutritional supplementation, herbal medicine, and mind-body healing.

I often compare the goal of integrative functional medicine to that of treating a splinter: if you get a big, painful splinter in your foot you're not going to treat it with painkillers and hope it goes away, you're going to remove the splinter. Functional medicine follows the same practical course – treat the cause not the symptoms.

The path to my current method, however, was neither straight nor smooth. I used to be the mirror-image of the “hurried gardener”, complete with a debilitating bill of health to boot.

My whole life, I aspired to be a doctor. It was definitely a vocational calling, and since there were no doctors in my family I was forging a new path. It was an exciting, purposeful, and incredibly *stressful* journey that consumed my childhood, teen, and young adult years.

After years of test-stress, completing undergrad, and passing the MCAT, my hard work paid off, and I finally got into medical school. My excitement turned to anxiety as I was introduced to the brutal realities of medical school. I went from a small, out of the box-thinking, liberal arts university, to eighteen-hour days of studying in an incredibly competitive, cold, and institutional environment. It sent my stress levels through the roof, but I adapted and carried on.

Then, after two years of grueling basic science work, I reached the Holy Grail: seeing patients. This was the moment I had waited for my whole life, but things went downhill fast.

Almost overnight, I developed full blown panic attacks that struck anywhere—during rounds at the hospital, in the middle of church, at dinner with friends—severe irritable bowel syndrome that reared its ugly head at the worst possible times, migraine headaches, and extreme fatigue.

It hit me like a ton of bricks, and left me scrambling from doctor to doctor, getting test after test, CT scans, EKGs, etc. with little more insight

than: “Your tests are normal. You must be stressed. Here are a bunch of prescriptions you can start taking.”

Obviously, that wasn’t the answer I was looking for. Though I was relieved everything appeared “normal”, I didn’t *feel* normal, and I didn’t know how to fix any of my symptoms.

On top of it all, I experienced crushing feelings of shame and helplessness. I had made it all this way and sacrificed so much, only to be knocked off my game by a mysterious condition dismissed by the medical professionals I looked up to. Plus, I was training to be a doctor, for goodness sake. I felt like a hypocrite - what patient in their right mind would want to take advice from a doctor in such poor health?

However, one thing those specialists told me hit home—I was *stressed*. Stressed to the max, and **I had been stressed as long as I could remember**. I had been chased by the proverbial lion for way too long, and my body was finally breaking down.

Fortunately, that’s when I met Sister Alice – a seventy-year-old Catholic nun, who gave me counsel. She taught me how to use breath work and prayer to take the edge off my anxiety and control my panic attacks. This got me through that third year in medical school.

Then, as I went into my fourth year, I was fortunate to do a rotation at Dr. Andrew Weil’s Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. It was a real education in botanical medicine, nutrition, bodywork, acupuncture, and different forms of healing practiced throughout the world.

As I learned about these ancient healing practices, I couldn’t help but wonder why we didn’t use these tools in the conventional medical model. When I asked Dr. Weil, “Why are we stuck in this paradigm? Why do we act as if everything is so separate?” He replied, to paraphrase, that

“Integrative medicine is just good medicine. We shouldn’t have to separate it from conventional medicine. Unfortunately, given the way the system is built, that’s just what we must do.”

My time in Arizona was therapeutic on so many levels, and after graduation my anxiety had nearly disappeared, but I continued to suffer from intense migraines and irritable bowel syndrome. That’s when I met Dr. Mark Hyman, a stronghold and pioneer in functional medicine at a medical conference.

I had no idea who he was at the time, but he spoke about the science and systems applied in functional medicine and it blew my mind! None of this information had been presented in medical school. I knew I had to connect with him, so I approached him after his lecture, and he graciously gave me his email address. We corresponded about my ongoing health issues, and on his advice, I went gluten-free, dairy-free, and off processed foods. I must admit, after all my years of training in conventional and integrative medicine, I didn’t expect a miracle from this, but that’s exactly what I got.

Within two weeks, my bowels were normal for the first time in two years, and my migraines were much better too. I was blown away. It had taken me two years to get a handle on any of my own issues, and within two weeks they were nearly gone. I had not encountered anyone treating people as Dr. Hyman had suggested in the conventional medical world. That was when I knew I would follow the functional medicine path.

After completing a family medicine residency and taking a job in urgent care that left me unfulfilled, I knew I had to start my own functional medicine practice. I had to practice medicine in a way that felt impactful.

That’s how I got here. Now, every day since 2012, I help patients get to the root cause of their health issues—using a purely integrative and functional medicine approach. Plus, my own health has bloomed; no more panic attacks, crippling anxiety, or IBS. I am fulfilling my

purpose in medicine, and in honoring that, I was able to find ways to heal, as well.

I know this book can help you do the same.

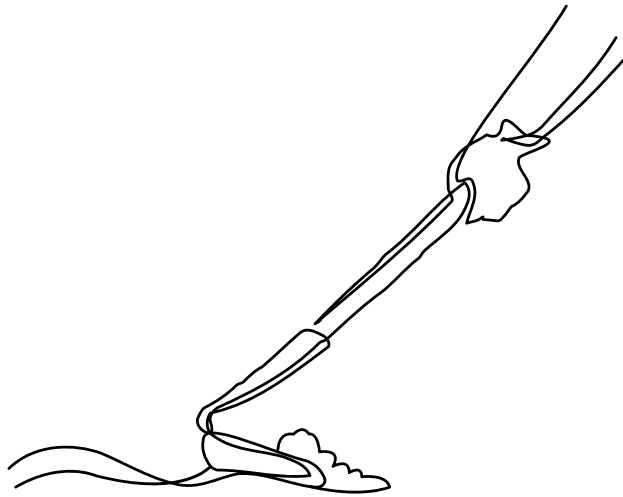
Who Is This Book For?

This book was written for the stressed out, the sleepless, the hormonal, the moody, the exhausted, the uninspired-ready-to-be-inspired, the overweight – be it ten pounds or one-hundred pounds – the person who knows something is wrong even when their doctor says they are “normal”, and the “spent”.

It was written specifically for women—mothers, daughters, aunts, and grandmothers who have lost touch with themselves and their health, and are tired of feeling sick, fatigued, and stuck just “surviving” at life.

If you are ready to stop “surviving” and start living your life in full Bloom, then step through the garden gate, and let’s get started.





Chapter 1

Preparing the Soil— Permission and Attitude

Your Permission Slip to Health

Flip the Switch!

A woman found herself in a completely dark room, feeling lost and helpless. She pleaded and expressed her desperation for the light to illuminate the space.

“Please,” she implored, “Let there be light. This darkness is overwhelming.”

Despite her persistent pleas, the room remained in darkness. She continued to cry out for help, but the light did not appear.

After a long while, someone heard her pleas and came to her aid. “I heard you crying, and I’m happy to help, but did you consider standing up and using the switch on the wall to turn the light on?”

The woman was taken aback and responded, “I didn’t realize that was an option.”

I see this exact story played out every single day in my practice. A patient comes to me distraught, shamed, and feeling powerless, after having their health concerns dismissed by the conventional medical system.

They are typically told, “All your tests are normal, it must be stress. Here’s a prescription for anti-anxiety pills and sleep meds.”

The great news is, you have the power to flip on that proverbial light switch—to keep searching for answers, to do our own research (like reading this book), to listen to our bodies, and to find the right healthcare providers to help us reclaim our health. You have so much agency and power; all you must do to flip the switch is to STOP giving your power away.

As mentioned in the introduction, before you can get started on the seven steps to reclaim your health, cultivate your desires, and reignite your spark, you must do a little preliminary work to prepare your soil for what is to come. This means becoming aware of how you take care of yourself, and how you don’t.

Often when I ask my patients how they take care of themselves on their first visit, nearly all of them stare at me blankly, and then we engage in a dialogue like this:

The patient says, “What do you mean?”

I explain, “Well, how do you nurture yourself? What do you do that brings you joy? What do you do for self-care? What hobbies do you have? What dreams do you have for yourself?”

Then, after laughing, scowling, or thinking hard, they answer something like, “Gosh—no one has asked me in such a long time. After I got married/

started a demanding career/became a mom, all those things have taken a back seat. Honestly, I feel like I just can't do those things anymore. I have too many tasks to complete, other people to take care of, and responsibilities to fulfill. All that taking-care-of-me-stuff feels selfish."

There it is. The dreaded "s" word when it comes to women's health and happiness: "selfish". Our mothers felt it, our grandmothers felt it, but I would wager no generation feels it quite so profoundly as the busy, stressed, and isolated working moms of twenty-first century America.

Well, here's the thing: "all that taking-care-of-me stuff" is not selfish—it's *essential*. If my experience as a doctor and former health-train-wreck has taught me anything, it's this: if you aren't well cared for, then you can't share your gifts with others effectively. If you're not able to share your gifts, you will feel empty, unfulfilled, and burnt out, because a huge part of fulfilling our life's purpose comes down to our ability to effectively share our gifts and sow and grow our seeds.

Self-care involves taking intentional steps to prioritize your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. By practicing self-care, you are ensuring that you are in a better position to meet your responsibilities, engage with others, and contribute positively to various aspects of your life

Too often, due to cultural, family, or self-imposed expectations we think we must pour ourselves out completely—into our work and others—to give generously. If you pour everything out, what is left for you? How do you refill your cup?

Just like in the story of the hurried gardener or my story of med-school burnout, you can't give what you don't have. If you keep pouring yourself out without refilling your cup, eventually you will have nothing left to give, and your health will suffer. You deserve to live a healthy, joyful, and deeply satisfying life, but you've got to give yourself the opportunity to do so. If you want to get better, have more energy, feel happy and

fulfilled, and rediscover what “normal” should feel like, you need to give yourself *permission* to take care of yourself, to amend and prepare your personal soil for growth in a profound way.

What does it mean to give yourself permission in the context of this book? Imagine you are preparing a space for your garden plot, choosing the right location with enough sun and space for the plants to grow and enough protection from the elements. Likewise, as you begin this journey, I want you to give yourself the freedom, time, and space to follow these seven guiding principles. Even if some of the work feels indulgent or uncomfortable, you must prepare mental space for growth and expansion.

How much time will you need to dedicate to this process? That is up to you, as I understand everyone’s circumstances and health issues are different. However, I would recommend you commit to reading one chapter a day, and implementing at least one to three of the recommendations therein. Depending upon how fast you read (and this book was designed for skimmers and detailed-readers alike), that could take up to thirty minutes a day for reading, and additional time to implement the recommendations. If you wish to read faster, be my guest. If you want to see real changes in your health, you must implement what you learn.

Remember when you were a child, and a responsible adult signed your permission slips for different school activities? Well, now YOU are the responsible adult, and I want you to sign the permission slip below and commit to allowing yourself the time and space to reclaim your health and happiness.

Sign this permission slip and give yourself the gift of permission.

I, _____ give myself permission to prepare the space and time to apply these seven steps to reclaim my health, cultivate my desires, & reignite my spark. I give myself permission to come into full BLOOM.

Date:

Signature:

Cultivating An Attitude of Health—Perfection or Expansion

Now that you have given yourself permission to go through this process (huge congrats!), it's time to talk about how attitude, or our overall beliefs about health and healing, can affect this seven-step process.

When it comes to health, there are essentially two attitudes dominating the conversation.

The first is a **perfectionist attitude**. The perfectionist attitude thrives in a rigid frame of mind, avoiding failure at all costs (because it is seen as a huge weakness), and seeking a fixed idea of perfection as their ultimate goal. The perfectionist is focused on the end-result only, and therefore misses out on what could be gained through adapting to the natural ebbs and flows of a process.

The second is an **expansive attitude**. The expansive attitude is focused more on growth and progress than achieving perfection. Those who adopt and cultivate this attitude do not fear failure, because they know setbacks can wind up being great blessings if they are willing to learn and grow from them.

It is critical you realize the importance of adopting an expansive attitude with respect to this process, because cultivating true and lasting health is not a rigid process or destination. Rather, like a garden, it goes through cycles unique to the individual's desires, goals, circumstances, limitations, capabilities, and season of life. Perfection is not the goal.

The great news is; if you suspect you have been living with a perfectionist attitude, you can easily switch to an expansive attitude with very little effort. Here's how to cultivate the new soil of an expansive attitude:

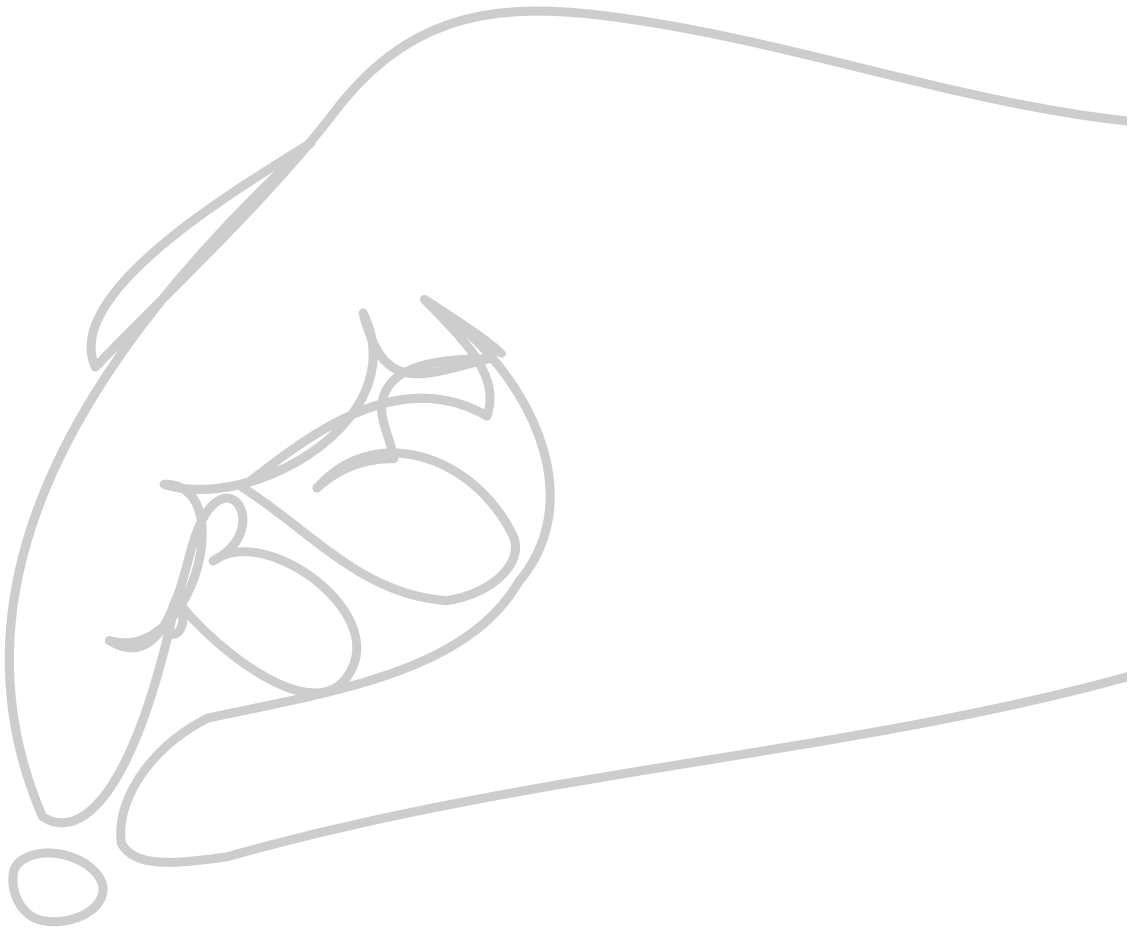
- When faced with a challenge: embrace it and view it as an opportunity to grow.
- Make a concerted effort to embrace change, because that effort will lead to growth. It may not feel comfortable at first, but building up an expansive attitude is like building a muscle—you must train it and strengthen it.
- Remember that mistakes are opportunities to learn. They are just data points that can help you reverse your course into a more positive direction.

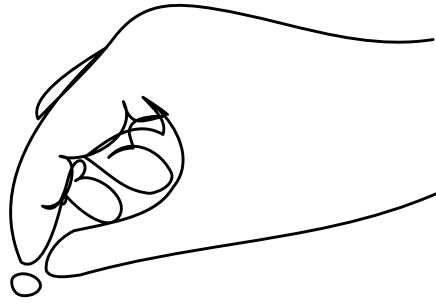
To summarize, your attitude towards health and growth is not set-in-stone, and that is great news for all of us; because, regardless of our past, we can all adopt expansive attitudes. If you find yourself slipping back into a perfectionist attitude or state of mind at any time during this process, just return to this chapter and repeat this exercise as many times as you need to. You will get there, because the very nature of life is to EXPAND and GROW.

See, prepping your soil wasn't so hard was it? You didn't even have to get your hands dirty. Next, we will officially start with our first step in the Bloom journey by creating your health goals and sowing of your seeds of intention, desire, and compassion.

Preparing the Soil Action Steps:

1. What is your attitude or frame of mind when it comes to your current state of health? Perfectionist or expansive?
2. Sign your permission slip—download this at: nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources —hang it up, take a picture of it.
3. Write down one thing (besides reading this book) you will do to care for yourself this week. Some ideas: take an Epsom salt bath, deep belly breathe for 10 minutes, spend time reading Scripture, pick up an old hobby you used to enjoy, or get together with a girlfriend (no kids allowed).





Chapter 2

Step 1: SOW— Intention, Desire, and Compassion for Self

Every Plant, Tree, and Blossom Starts as a Seed

Now that you have prepared your soil by giving yourself permission to undergo this process and switch to an expansive attitude, it's time for Step 1: Sowing Your Seeds— which are the specific **desires** and **intentions** you hold for your health.

Even before I gardened, seeds had always fascinated me. These teeny embryonic plants are chock full of dormant potential, but will only awaken when given the ideal environment and the right amount of tending and care. Likewise, your metaphorical seeds will sprout, grow, bloom, fruit, and flourish as you provide them with the proper consideration, attention, and care.

As you sow, so shall you reap, and that is what this step is all about:

selecting the seeds you wish to sow and creating the perfect environment for them to be planted, so they can awaken, grow, and bloom.

To begin this step, I will take you through a series of mini-steps to help you choose exactly what “seeds” you want to sow in your life. This seed selection process is a crucial first step in getting the health outcomes you want in your life, so do not skip it.

The Process of Intention

The process of intention is a concept that describes the steps that will take you from intention and desire (SOWing seeds) to our ultimate outcome: health (BLOOM).

The first mini-step starts by defining your *overall desires*.

- How do you want to *feel* in your life?
 - › Happy?
 - › Joyful?
 - › Calm?
 - › Inspired?
 - › Free?
- What are your specific desires for your *health*?
 - › What do you want to change about your health?
 - › Do you want to stop feeling so tired all the time?
 - › Do you want better digestion?
 - › More stable mood?
 - › To lose weight?
 - › To sleep better? Etc.

The second mini-step is to create an **intention**. An intention is just a goal, aim, or purpose you set to accomplish.

In the third mini step, it's time to **act** to achieve that intention/goal. In the Bloom process, this may mean cleaning up your diet, eliminating toxic influences in your life, and creating a daily self-care regime (more on this to come).

The fruits of your actions is your **outcome**. In this case, your outcome may be more energy, resolution of a chronic condition, inner peace, weight loss, or a renewed confidence in your ability to care for yourself.

The seven steps outlined in this book follow the process of intention:

- Define your desires and create specific intentions (SOW—as you will today).
- Take strategic actions (NOURISH, ROOT, WEED, ENRICH, PRUNE).
- Finally, enjoy your outcome (BLOOM).

Though the principle is simple, it is important to understand the process, so we can create clarity around your desires, intentions, and actions as we move through these seven steps together.

Now, let's start by selecting your *Seeds Words*.

Visualizing Your Garden of Health— Selecting Your Seeds Words

Desires are the things you wish for yourself and for your life. The term “desire” refers to a strong feeling of wanting or longing for something, often accompanied by a sense of passion or urgency. It is a motivational state that when paired with intention, drives you to attain a specific outcome.

To help you select your Seeds Words, I have created a box below. As you browse through these words, I want you to think about the positive outcomes they suggest. Which ones resonate with you in relation to your

health and life goals? Put a checkmark next to the words that resonate with you (and don't worry about checking off too many, we will whittle it down in the next section).

Seed Words

- balanced
- bold
- cheerful
- clarity
- compassion
- connection
- courageous
- creative
- delighted
- empowered
- energetic
- enthusiastic
- expansive
- faithfulness
- forgiven
- forgiveness
- freedom
- gentle
- grounded
- happy
- healed
- healthy
- hopeful
- imaginative
- inspired
- joyful
- lighthearted
- love
- loved
- loving
- nourished
- pain-free
- peaceful
- purpose
- regenerated
- relaxed
- restored
- rooted
- satisfied
- self-control
- strong
- transformed
- understood
- unity
- vibrance
- vitality
- warmth
- wellness
- wise

Now that you have checked off your Seed Words, it's time to narrow them down to your top three. These are the desires we will focus on as we begin this journey together. These are the three things you long for most of all in your life and health.

These core desires are your “seeds”, and they are precious, so take your time in selecting them.

Write them down below or using the downloadable form provided at the end of this chapter on the Bloom Resources website.

Seeds:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

If you need more help pinning down your top three, see the resources section at the end of this chapter for a special meditation to zero in on your core desires.

Your Big Why

Nice work narrowing down the list to your top three seeds. Now that you have them, I want you to think about **Why** you want to feel this way. Defining your why is crucial for motivation, purpose, and direction throughout the Bloom journey; which will make this process—or any process in life—easier.

Grab your journal or in the space below write down why you want to feel this way based on your Seed Words/core desires. To help you get in the flow, I suggest using the “so that” method.

For example:

1. Seed Word: Joyful: I want to feel joyful, **so that** I will be a better parent and spouse, and can approach my life with more enthusiasm.

2. Seed Word: Energetic: I want to feel energetic, **so that** I can play with my kids and make memories with them.
3. Seed Word: Forgiveness: I was to feel forgiveness, **so that** I can let go of bitterness and make more space love and peace.

Now it's your turn, go:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I know self-analysis isn't always the most natural or comfortable thing in the world, but by completing these exercises you are well on your way to cultivating a happier and healthier you.

If, like many others, you are struggling with your big whys, try returning to the first exercise to make sure you have selected the Seed Words you truly desire most of all. If you are certain you have chosen the right seeds but can't flesh out the whys behind them, you can try one of two options:

- Option 1: Look at it another way and ask yourself: "How will this positively affect other people (your spouse, partner, children, friends, etc.) in my life?"
- Option 2: Pray about it. Ask for God to help you discern what your big why is.
- Option 3: Check out the resources section at the end of this chapter to help you discover your whys.

PEELING BACK THE ONION LAYERS OF “WHY”

Natalie came to my practice at the end of her rope. At the age of 31, she suffered from a plethora of mysterious symptoms with no conclusive diagnosis in sight.

*She was exhausted, her hair was falling out, she had digestive distress, panic attacks, trouble focusing, unexplained weight gain, and terrible joint pain. She was overwhelmed, under-served by her doctors, and didn't know how to make sense of her baffling symptoms. We did a thorough intake and history, ordered lab tests, and started prioritizing by figuring out what changes she desired most in her health and life (her seeds) and **Why** she desired those changes.*

*At first, the exercise was difficult and a bit awkward for her; but as we went through it together, she discovered what she wanted and needed. First and foremost was **more energy**, so she could have the resolve to work on the rest of her health issues; next, she desired to get her digestion back on track, so she could eliminate those embarrassing and frustration trips to the bathroom and find joy in eating and socializing again—which in turn would help with her weight gain; and finally, she wanted to get her panic attacks under control, so she could feel **strength** in herself again. **So, Natalie's seeds were: energy, joy, and strength.***

The wonderful thing about Natalie's story, and most others, is – as she planted and nourished these seeds of intention – most of her other symptoms resolved as her health bloomed. That's the power of taking time to select the right seeds to sow.

Please, don't skip this step, because you find it difficult. Self-analysis is never easy, but we can't expect change and transformation if we don't give it a good shot. Switch your attitude, believe in yourself, and get back to it. Remember: you cannot fail at this, you deserve this, and you will grow and learn from it—so don't you dare give up.

Congratulations! You have now selected your top three Seed Words and the Whys that will allow them to grow. You are officially ready to sow your seeds.

Sowing Your Intention

What does it mean to “sow” in this context? It means planting your Seed Words by setting a clear intention to surround those desires. In other words, it's time to put some skin in the game. To do this, we will create a simple exercise around setting your intentions/goals.

Let's have some creative fun sowing your seeds!

Optional Supplies:

- Your favorite music
- Colored pencils/pens
- Stickers
- Flowers
- Scrapbooking supplies

Plant Your Seeds Exercise

Find a quiet space where you can sit down, write, and draw.

Now, using the space below or the downloadable form provided at nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources, imagine planting your three Seed Words in the fertile soil of your expansive attitude/state of mind.

As you do so, plant your intentions by drawing or writing down your Seed Words using markers, your favorite pen, colored pencils, etc.

The purpose of this exercise is symbolic: to relax and have some fun while creating a tangible and beautiful space for your seed words. If you'd like to decorate the space below with stickers, dried flowers, other scrapbooking supplies, etc. go for it. If you're less inclined towards artwork, write them down with a nice pen. Just relax, and enjoy the process.

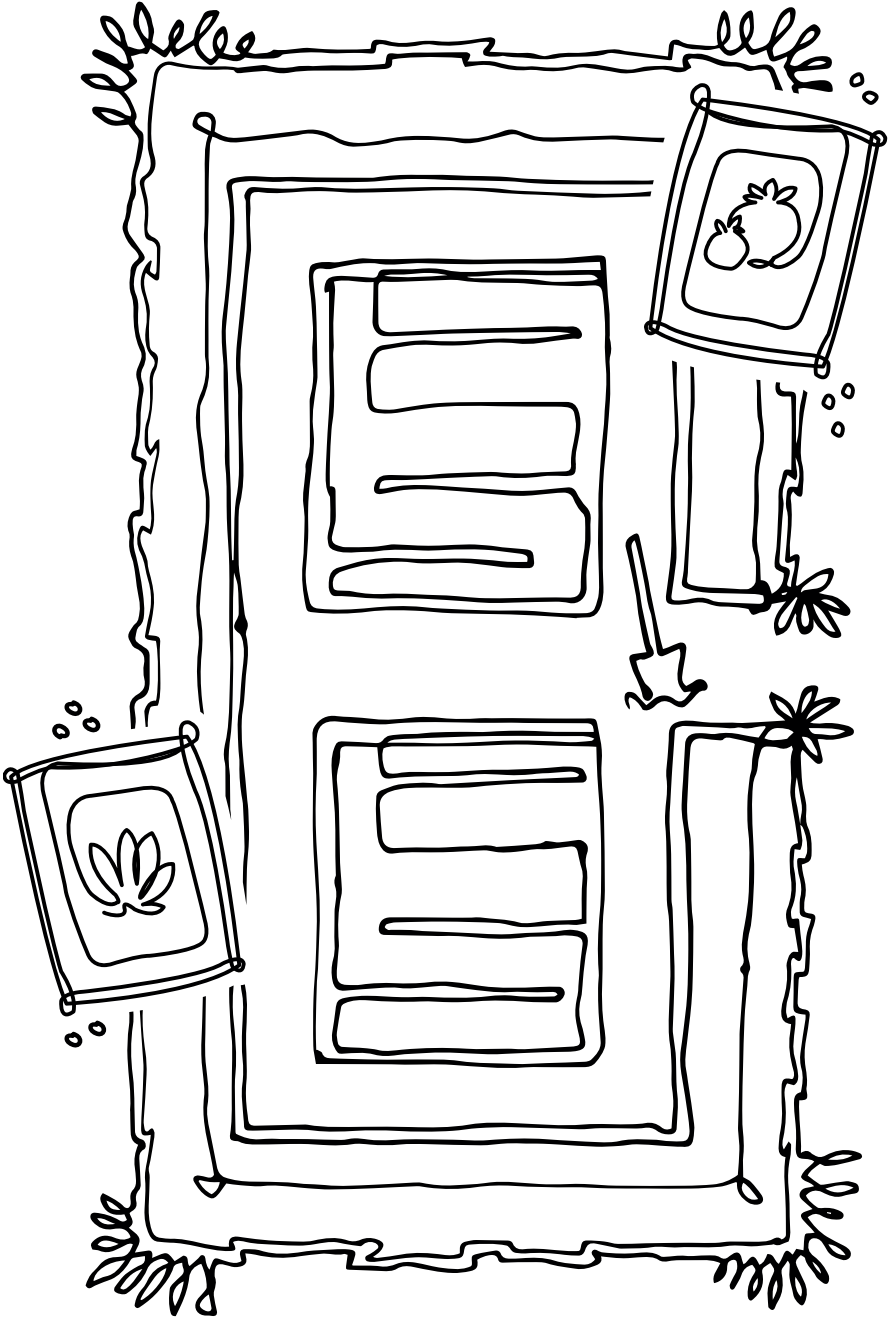
Once you have created a space for your Seed Words, I want you to imagine what your life will look like once those seeds have bloomed. Hold that image in your mind's eye.

Feel it.

Imagine it.

Relish it.

Pray over it.



Congratulations! You have planted your seeds in a profound way, but you're not finished yet.

Since your seeds are still young and vulnerable, it is important they are remembered, nourished, and cared for every day throughout this process. Think about it, you can't throw seeds into fertile soil and expect them to grow without a significant level of care. You must water them, fertilize them, protect them from harsh weather, etc. Only then, can you expect them to grow.

How do you do this with your seeds of desire?

- By watering them with optimism
- Nourishing them with an expansive attitude
- Staying mindful of their presence

Studies have shown optimistic people and those with an open mind/attitude of expansion are more likely to expect positive outcomes. When people imagined—or pictured—a future where everything had turned out optimally for them, and did that for five minutes every day over a two-week period, their health and well-being improved.¹

Here are some other ways you can care for your seeds by keeping them in the forefront of your mind.

Find an Accountability Buddy

Choose someone close to you who can help hold you accountable for your seeds. Tell a dear and trusted friend what you are doing and why and check in with them weekly. A quick text to let them know you are staying on track or experiencing roadblocks will go a long way.

Daily Practice

It's important to remind yourself of your intentions daily!

Here are a few ways to practice daily:

1. Visualization — when you first wake up in the morning, take a few moments to visualize your seeds in full, glorious bloom. Imagine what your life looks and feels like. It is important to create a strong mental image. In the short term, it will help you feel more optimistic. In the long run, staying focused on your goals and your desires will help you achieve them.
2. Pray — pray upon your intentions. Ask God to help you reach your health goals. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you in your day to day as you take positive action.
3. Use reminders — write your Seed Words and your Whys on sticky notes and place them around your home and office. Set an alarm on your phone to be reminded of your goals. You can also take a photo of your planted intentions paper and use it as a visual reminder on your desktop, phone, or tablet. This makes your journey a bit more private while giving you a consistent visual reminder.

As you sow, so shall you reap. Be deliberate about keeping a constant watchful eye on those seeds as we move forward.

The Plight of Perfection

When you come upon a roadblock in this process, you must remember to be kind and compassionate with yourself. We often struggle to find purpose and meaning amidst the chaos of our busy lives. Perhaps, our struggle would lessen if our ambitions weren't tangled up in the pursuit of perfection.

Perfection. It's a fantasy that hinders our freedom and happiness to a terrible degree. Perfectionistic thinking, driven by a perfectionist

attitude, can play a role in the development of eating disorders², and increases our risk of anxiety and depression³. We must let go of the pursuit of perfection – it’s a false idol. Instead, we must accept and understand that nothing is going to be perfect or stay perfect, because life is not static.

Have compassion for yourself if you start to feel the false pull of perfectionistic thinking. I recommend using this motto – “Progress OVER perfection. This is a process, not a race.”

In addition to helping you make positive changes in your health, self-compassion has been shown to produce statistically and clinically significant reductions in depression, distress, as well as diabetes.

That attitude of compassion—for yourself and others—contained within an expansive attitude, will allow you to find real, lasting healing.

With your Seed Words and intentions firmly planted in fertile soil, the next chapter will focus on how to nourish yourself—body, mind, and spirit—through specific nutrition, identifying food sensitivities, choosing the right supplements, and harnessing the little-known power of primary foods.

SOWING SEEDS

- *You have permission to pursue your own well-being.*
 - *Plant your garden seeds and think about how they will grow in your life.*
 - *Foster compassion for yourself.*
-

Step 1 - Sowing Action Items:

1. Choose your Seed Words with care.
2. Next, whittle them down to your top three seeds
3. Define your “Why” for each seed. What’s your Why? Why are you taking this journey? What is it that you want to achieve? What seeds do you wish to sow? Write them down and use additional resources as needed.
4. Switch your attitude to one of compassion for yourself; you’ll need it to complete this journey and find lasting healing.

SOW Resources at nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources:

- Downloadable form to write your Top 3 Seeds Words
- Access to Simon Sinek’s Ted Talk on Finding your “Why”
- Downloadable form for Plant Your Seeds Exercise





Chapter 3

Step 2: NOURISH— Love, Care, and Nourishment

In Step 1, we learned how to select your hardy Seed Words and sow them with pure intention, so they can grow and flourish as you go through the Bloom process. In Step 2, we will learn how to create the ideal conditions for those seeds to grow and bloom using specific principles of physical, emotional, and spiritual nourishment.

To begin, we will start with everyone's favorite topic on nourishment: food.

Food As Information

Food contains an enormous number of chemical substances, properly referred to as nutrients. Though most of us think about nutrients in terms of vitamins and minerals, there are in fact *thousands of nutrients*⁵ that enter our bodies via the foods we eat every day, including amino

acids, antioxidants, enzymes, essential fatty acids, fibers, prebiotics, probiotics, and others in addition to essential vitamins and minerals.

To help paint a picture of how these nutrients interact with and nourish your body, picture a grand orchestra with nutrients as musicians and you as the conductor. As conductors, we have the potential to feed a harmonious symphony by choosing foods that optimize our health, or create disharmony and cacophony by choosing foods that deplete our health.

In functional medicine, we view food as information, because what you eat sends your body powerful messages and cues. For example, nutrient interactions cause your immune system to respond to hormones, zap viruses and cancer cells, and to express—or not express—specific genes. When you think about it this way, it's hard to deny the simple act of eating as one of the most direct ways you can impact your health and longevity.

In other words, food may very well be the most powerful medicine on the planet.

However, nutrient interactions aren't the only way food impacts health. There is also the mental and emotional impacts food—or the *promise* of food—has on our physiology. You probably learned about the most famous example of this in elementary school science class: Pavlov's dog. Based on his studies, Nobel-prize winning scientist, Ivan Pavlov, coined the term “psychic secretions”⁶, which we now refer to as “the cephalic response of food” or “anticipatory physiological regulation”.

What does this mean? When you anticipate, sense, smell, and/or think about food, it causes your body to begin the digestion process by producing saliva, before the food has even graced your lips. One of the most interesting parts of this whole process, in relation to the mental and emotional impacts of food, is that the cephalic response is driven by the vagus nerve—the largest nerve in the body which connects your brain to the gut⁷.

With this understanding, you can see why it is so important to slow down enough to really think about your food; to perceive, appreciate, and sense it fully, thereby activating that initial phase of digestion. In contrast, if you feel stressed out, distracted, or are eating on-the-go, your entire digestive process will be compromised from the start.

Beyond just slowing-down, studies have shown positive or negative thoughts can affect digestion and nutrient processing (think about trying to eat and digest your food when you're upset versus happy), and that is likely related to the gut-brain connection via the vagus nerve⁸. Likewise, our interactions and attitudes toward food can have a distinct impact on our spirits. A perfect example is food shared at the dinner table. Numerous studies—coupled with good old fashioned common sense—demonstrate families who consistently sit down together at the dinner table are more bonded; and children who sit with their parents to eat have better life and health outcomes across the board^{9, 10}.

So, is it the food or the company profoundly nourishing our spirit? It's both. You can't have good health without good nutrition, and as new research is proving, you can't have good health without regular, loving, social connection either¹¹.

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, nutrients are only one part of the nourishment puzzle. Combine good food with mindfulness in a social setting and you've got a perfect recipe for healing and nourishing your body, mind, and spirit.

Not Your Grandmother's Dinner

Michael Pollan, *New York Times* best-selling author and expert on science and food, speaks at length in his books and publications, such as *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, about how the western diet has radically shifted from whole foods to refined foods made up of simple carbs¹². When and why did this happen? After World War II, processed food made its way from the battlefields into the North American kitchen. With food

companies' success in providing inexpensive, processed food to our troops, the onset of The Great Depression, and more women working outside the home, the country was eager to embrace the new concept of "convenience foods".

However, as things got more "convenient", we lost sight of the value in traditional cooking methods that had sustained us since time immemorial. In essence, we forgot how to cook. The Baby Boomer generation shunned the Depression-era generation who still had this culinary wisdom. Unfortunately, as we lose our elders, we lose their time-honored nutritional cooking methods. Traditional cooking methods were developed for survival and economy while often enhancing foods' nutritional value and aiding digestion and immunity.

One of my favorite traditional foods (which is experiencing a revival) is bone broth. Bone broths were born out of necessity to avoid wasting food while creating a nutritious base for soups, sauces, and stews. As the bones are simmered with water and vegetables, the process extracts amino acids, gelatin, glycines, and glycosaminoglycans, which are all very healing and beneficial for your gut, your body's mucosa, your eyeballs, and all your collagenous structures, including your nails, teeth, and bones^{13, 14}. These days, traditional bone broth is often replaced by the bouillon cube or quick-made commercial stock, which gives you the flavor of broth but lacks its nutrients.

Fermenting foods, such as vegetables, dairy, and beans, is also a lost art in many ways. The fermentation, pickling, or souring process naturally preserves food while creating a plethora of probiotics which nourish your gut and enhance immunity¹⁵. While many of us may make it a point to consume yogurt or other pickled products regularly, too often those yogurts are loaded with sugar and artificial ingredients, and commercial pickles aren't traditionally-fermented pickles, they are made using added vinegar, which means you're not getting the probiotic benefit of a traditionally pickled food.

In traditional Mexican cuisine, all corn-based foods were prepared using a nearly forgotten process called: nixtamalization, in which the freshly ground corn was mixed with lime or ashes. Adding those elements extracts the B vitamins, makes more calcium and protein available, and reduces citric acid—an antinutrient that blocks the absorption of calcium and other minerals¹⁶. Needless to say, nixtamalization is not used in modern production of corn products.

Another nearly lost culinary art is the simple act of soaking or sprouting cereals, grains, and legumes to reduce phytates (another anti-nutrient that inhibits nutrient absorption) while improving bioavailability of zinc and vitamin C¹⁷.

THE HEALTHIER SIDE OF BREAD

Whether bread is healthy is the subject of great debate among the nutritional and integrative functional medicine community. Though many people with sensitivities to wheat, gluten, and other grains would be well-advised to avoid bread, the issue with bread may lie in the loss of its traditional preparation.

Up until the 20th century, bread was made by incubating flour and water with natural fermented yeast or a sourdough starter for an entire day. During that time, the natural yeasts and cultures would break down much of the gluten while neutralizing anti-nutrients and creating probiotics. Hence, many nutritional experts believe the problem with bread and gluten may have more to do with its modern fast-rise preparation and the intense hybridization of modern wheat, than the bread itself.

Yes, you can buy sourdough at the supermarket; but if you look closely, most inexpensive sourdoughs are made with conventional wheat and commercial yeast, and not allowed to ferment 24 hours as a traditional sourdough would.

The impact of diet on future generations has been studied at length by famous physicians and researchers like Weston A. Price, a dentist who spent years studying the health and bone structures of indigenous cultures. His discoveries, made famous by the book *Nourishing Traditions* and the Weston A. Price Foundation¹³, confirmed processed foods cause a notable decline in the dental and overall health of future generations. Likewise, Francis Pottenger, a medical doctor famous for his work: *Pottenger's Cats: A Study in Nutrition*¹⁸, proved how replacing a cat's natural diet of raw foods with cooked foods degraded their physical and mental health with each generation. Pottenger believed that the same effects took place in humans who had turned away from their natural and ancestral diets, and those genetic weaknesses could be reversed by returning to an unprocessed diet.

It is my belief, that the current rise in gut health issues, digestive complaints, nutrient deficiencies, food sensitivities, and chronic inflammatory disease is largely due to the abandonment of our traditional culinary framework compounded by increased toxic load. Despite the gains we have experienced since World War II in freedom, technology, and equal rights, the loss of those simple cooking skills, along with our more sedate way of life, has been detrimental to us all.

What Hunter Gatherers Can Teach Us About Work-Life Balance

According to a book on Stone Age economics¹⁹ in hunter-gatherer communities, women would spend one day gathering enough food to feed their families for three days. Then, the rest of their time was spent on leisure activities, such as embroidery or visiting with friends from other camps. For each day spent at home, the women would spend only about three hours on housework (cracking nuts, fetching water and firewood, etc.), and take the rest of the day “off”. They maintained that balanced routine of work and leisure throughout the year.

For a long stretch of human development, we devoted only one to three hours to hard work a day, and even then, we spent a lot of time visiting with people and pursuing useful hobbies. We weren't and aren't meant to be on our own and on the go all the time.

AVA'S STORY

When she came to me, Ava had horrible irritable bowel syndrome, along with stomach pain and rashes all over her body. I did my typical work up which showed that, ultimately, she needed to nourish herself better by changing her diet. But there was a snag: she had already planned a mission trip to Thailand. She was going to be there for a month and wouldn't have any option as to what she could or couldn't eat there.

Fortunately, Thai cuisine is very traditional, even today. To her surprise, her irritable bowel syndrome completely reversed during her trip, purely by virtue of eating foods prepared in a traditional manner.

Food Sensitivities

When I talk about food sensitivities, I'm not talking about an allergic reaction to food, which is known as an IgE-mediated response. A food allergy will cause symptoms like swollen lips or hives. A food sensitivity, on the other hand, is a delayed hypersensitivity response, which is triggered by IgG antibodies—food antigen and antibody complexes to which the immune system reacts²⁰.

Food sensitivities occur because of leaky gut syndrome, also known as hyper-permeability of the intestinal wall²¹. I see food sensitivities due to leaky gut in my practice all the time and treating them does not have to be difficult. But before we get into treatment protocols, let's learn a little more about leaky gut, and why it afflicts so many otherwise healthy people.

Your gastrointestinal tract is a long tube that runs from the mouth all the way to the anus, and includes all the organs that contribute to digestion and waste removal, such as your esophagus, stomach, and intestinal tract. Once a food, substance, or toxin enters our body and reaches the gut, it must then get by the “guardian at the gate”, known as the gastric epithelium. Its job is to protect and discern what foods, nutrients, chemicals, etc. are safe to be absorbed into our body.

Now, picture your intestines as an absorbent yet tightly woven net. This net serves as a physical and functional filter between our inner body and the outside environment, allowing tiny, easy-to-absorb nutrients to flow in, while larger harmful substances and pathogens are kept out and eliminated through the bowels. When the intestinal wall becomes compromised due to toxins from food²², medications such as NSAIDs²³, stress, gut flora imbalance²⁴, and chemicals²⁵, the tightly knit holes in your net become weak, stretched, and can easily tear.

These tiny tears leave the compromised gut wide open to undigested food proteins which cause an immune system response. Sensing these “foreign invaders”, the immune system goes into an inflammatory attack mode to reject these unwanted substances. Symptoms of this “red alert” I have observed in practice and research may include congestion, diarrhea, a rash, bloating, brain fog, joint ache, depression²⁶, and—you guessed it—food sensitivities²¹.

When a patient comes to me with symptoms of leaky gut and food sensitivities, two things I suggest are a simple Elimination Diet (the gold standard in functional medicine) and an IgG food sensitivity test. Elimination diets have not only been shown to help resolve gut-related health issues like IBS²⁷, but they also help us identify causal factors and trigger foods²⁸.

TOP EIGHT SYMPTOMS OF FOOD SENSITIVITY

- *Anxiety*
 - *Brain fog*
 - *Bloating*
 - *Chronic congestion*
 - *Fatigue*
 - *Joint aches*
 - *Headache*
 - *Rashes*
-

Complex health problems often require simple solutions. It doesn't get simpler than removing a few things from your daily diet to replace with more nourishing foods. Remember, food is information; therefore, I recommend anyone reading the book, regardless of whether you have digestive issues, to take the time to eliminate the following most common reactionary foods for four weeks. After four weeks, reintroduce them slowly, one at a time every three days, so you can observe your body's reaction and pinpoint the exact issue.

The most common reactionary or “inflammatory” foods to eliminate from your diet:

- Gluten
- Dairy
- Grains (including corn)
- Beans
- Soy
- Eggs
- Sugar
- Alcoholic beverages

Now, before you have a melt-down at the thought of eliminating bread and cheese, remember your seeds and your big Why, check the status of your attitude (this is an opportunity for growth and expansion), and consider all the amazing new foods you can eat and experiment with such as:

- Gluten-free, grain-free breads, chips, and tortillas.
- Dairy-free creamers, milks, and cheeses.
- Replace grains, beans, and legumes with more vegetables, sweet potatoes, veggie noodles, soy-free shirataki noodles, riced cauliflower, coconut, and almond flour.
- Replace soy-based products with coconut and nut-based products like coconut and almond milk.
- To replace eggs in baking, mix 1 tablespoon flax meal with 1 tablespoon water. Soak until it gels and use 1:1 in place of eggs.
- Sweeteners such as natural stevia, raw honey, coconut sugar, and xylitol.
- Kombucha in place of alcohol—you will be surprised how it relaxes you and calms the mind (especially when enjoyed from a wine glass).

I also recommend reviewing “Dr. Alex’s Elimination Diet Quick Start Guide” at the end of this chapter, which includes sample recipes and menu plans and downloading a version of the guide and menu plan at nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources.

Just in case that’s not enough to get you motivated, consider the common beneficial side-effects of an Elimination Diet:

- Weight loss
- Tons more energy
- Clearer more youthful skin
- Better sleep
- Improved digestion and elimination
- Reduced cravings for sugar and other processed foods

- Laser-sharp focus and concentration
- Easier periods
- More balanced hormones
- A higher sex drive
- Stable mood and increased feeling of happiness and well-being
- Better endurance
- Less aches and pains
- Less headaches
- Better vision
- Improved memory
- A greater awareness of your body and what “healthy” feels like
- Less worry knowing you are giving your body what it needs to heal

As you go through this process of nourishment, keep your end-goal in mind, remember your Seeds Words, and join us in the Life in Bloom Facebook group for support. You’ve got this—now get to it!

Ten Guiding Principles to Everyday Eating for Vibrant Health

1. Eat Real Food

Food is information; therefore, we want to provide our bodies with the right information to heal, rebuild, and thrive. The three best ways to “eat real food” are:

1. Purge your diet of processed foods (even the “all natural” varieties) such as: fast food, artificial sweeteners, frozen dinners, packaged foods, canned foods, boxed foods, sodas, and cold cuts.
2. Stick to the perimeter of the grocery store and avoid the middle aisles where the packaged and processed foods live. Try to buy fresh meat and vegetables, and don’t eat anything out of a box if you can help it.

3. Shop your local Farmer's Market to get fresh food that's super-nutritious and naturally-grown.

2. Eat a Rainbow of Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables contain a huge number of essential chemical substances and phytonutrients (the chemicals that give fruits and vegetables their color and flavor). All these different substances work together to support health in numerous ways—from cancer prevention^{29, 30, 31} to heart health^{32, 33, 34}.

The more colorful your diet, the better—and leafy green vegetables are king. Aim to make half your daily vegetable intake green and the rest colorful.

How many servings of fruits and veggies should you eat daily? I suggest aiming for ten servings of vegetables daily, and no more than two to three servings of fruit. A serving is defined as one cup of raw leafy greens or half of all other vegetables, one medium fruit the size of a baseball or half a cup of chopped or cooked fruit.

Why do I recommend so many fruits and vegetables when the USDA recommends less? Because our bodies require more nutrients, antioxidants, etc. to repair, heal, and function optimally in this less-than-perfect modern world. Remember, this isn't your Grandmother's dinner.

Now, if you're thinking, "How the heck am I going to eat that much produce every day?" Let me assure you; it's a lot easier than you may think. Here are the tips I share with my patients on getting their ten servings per day:

Here are some ways that you can incorporate more veggies into your life:

- **Start slow** — if you're eating less than the recommendation above, start by adding in one extra serving of fruit or veggies every three days. Replace your usual snack with a piece of fruit one day then add

a cup (or two) of veggie-based soup to your lunch the next day. Before you know it, you'll have worked your way up to ten to seventeen veggies and two to three fruits.

- **Explore** — different global cuisines, nutrition philosophies, and their vegetable dishes. For example, raw food and vegetarian cookbooks have a lot of creative ways to enjoy veggies in dips, sauces, as snacks, etc.
- **Get creative** — by incorporating vegetable soups, salads, steamed vegetables, raw fruits, vegetables as snacks, vegetable drinks, green juices, etc.

3. Eat Healthy Fats

This is a loaded topic. Of all the food and nutrition controversies out there, fats dominate the confusion. A few years ago, after decades of low-fat-is-heart-healthy dogma, *The New York Times* ran an expose entitled: *How the Sugar Industry Shifted Blame to Fat*³⁵ on how Harvard scientists were paid off by the sugar industry in the 1950s to point the blame of heart disease on fat, when sugar had been the real culprit all along. That's a game-changer.

Yet, those of us who grew up in the seventies and eighties have been conditioned to fear fat (especially saturated fats). We have a hard time accepting its role in health and healing. So, here are the real facts on fat:

Omega-3 fats, found in fatty fish, flax seeds, chia seeds, and walnuts are associated with anti-inflammatory benefits across the board³⁶. You want these fats in your diet every day.

In contrast, omega-6 fats from vegetable oils and other common cooking oils are very inflammatory³⁷. You need to limit these fats for two reasons.

#1: They are everywhere, so it's easy to get too much of them. In fact, most of us consume a ratio of 20:1 omega-6 to omega-3, when 2:1 would be ideal.

#2: No one living in the twenty-first century needs more inflammation in their body, period.

Your best sources of beneficial fats include:

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Avocado oil
- Coconut oil
- Grass-fed butter or ghee (not during The Elimination Diet)
- Wild salmon and other cold water, low-mercury fish
- Avocados
- Olives
- Pecans, almonds, walnuts, hemp seeds, chia seeds, flax seeds
- High-quality, pasture-raised animal fats such as lard, and tallow

Saturated fats have been vilified for the last fifty years as the leading cause of heart disease. However, new research is showing saturated fats do not cause heart disease³⁸ and is instead pointing the blame at sugar and processed carbohydrates³⁹. Based on this new research, the study of health-promoting traditional diets, and my own clinical experience, I do recommend including moderate amounts of high-quality saturated fats in your diet. When it comes to animal-based fats choose butter, lard, and tallow from healthy animals raised on pasture. This gives them a superior fatty acid profile and flavor. If you're sensitive to dairy, skip the butter or opt for clarified butter or ghee which have had their milk solids removed.

For vegetable-based saturated fats, you can't go wrong with olive oil. It's tried and true and has been used for millennia.

4. Eat Protein at Every Meal

Protein is found everywhere in the body and helps build muscle, repair tissues, regulate metabolism, and power enzymatic reactions through-

out organs and systems. Given the vast role protein plays in our bodies, we need to replenish our stores regularly.

Here are some tips on choosing high-quality proteins from animal and plant-based sources:

- **For meats and poultry** — choose grass-fed/pasture-raised and organic whenever possible. Pasture-raised/grass-fed meats like beef, for example, are higher in anti-inflammatory fats and much healthier for you⁴⁰. Organic meats from animals raised on organic feed and/or grass are a better option than conventional, but pasture-raised and/or grass-fed meats are superior and are typically available at farmer's markets, natural foods stores, food co-ops, local butchers, and many grocery stores. See resources section for more information on finding a local source.
- **For fish and seafood** — look for wild-caught, sustainably-harvest fish and seafood with low-mercury content and avoid farm-raised. This typically means choosing smaller fish, such as wild-caught salmon, sardines, anchovies, and shrimp. See resources section for a link to the Environmental Working Group's guide on choosing healthful fish from clean waters.
- **For plant-based proteins** I suggest avoiding soy products, unless they are organic and fermented or cultured—such as tempeh, miso, or tamari. The reason is soybeans are highly allergenic and loaded with anti-nutrients and phytoestrogens⁴¹, which is typically bad news for anyone with autoimmune, gut, or hormonal issues. Fermented soy products, however, are a better choice as the fermentation process neutralizes those antinutrients⁴². Beans and other legumes may be fine post-Elimination Diet for those who can tolerate them, as are nuts and seeds and hemp or pea protein powders. Please steer clear of soy protein and soy protein powders, period. These products are highly processed and very hard to digest.

To determine how much protein you need, take your body weight in pounds, multiply it by 0.75, and the resulting number is how many grams of protein you should be eating per day. At a minimum, I recommend 30 grams of protein three times a day. If this seems like too much at once, start by consuming a palm-sized amount of protein with every meal and increase over time.

DR. ALEX'S TOP PICKS FOR PROTEIN POWDERS

Protein powders are a convenient way to get more protein in your diet and can be a great addition to smoothies and green drinks. However, not all protein powders are created equal in terms of nutrition—in fact, with their long lists of synthetic, processed ingredients, many of them are just plain junk food.

Here are my top favorite protein powders that provide the purest, cleanest source of protein and are allowed on the Elimination Diet:

- *Hydrolyzed grass-fed beef protein powder—an excellent source of protein and has many of the healing properties of bone broth.*
- *Hydrolyzed grass-fed collagen—similar properties to the beef protein powder and is a staple for helping maintain youthful skin, hair, and nail. It is tasteless and can be added to any beverage for a quick protein boost.*
- *Organic pea protein isolate—an excellent plant-based vegan option made from yellow split peas.*
- *Organic hemp protein—another highly nutritious plant-based vegan protein powder with a balanced fatty acid profile.*

You will find specific brand recommendations and links to these protein powders at nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources, plus a green drink/protein shake tutorial coming up later in the chapter.

5. Eat a Variety of Foods

Though we are all creatures of habit, it is essential we not default to eating the same foods every day—even healthy foods – for a couple of reasons:

#1: It limits the amount and types of nutrients you're receiving.

#2: When you eat the same foods day in and day out, it increases the chances your immune system will “see” and react to the food, which can lead to food sensitivities.

You can take this a step further by eating in-season for superior nutrition and health benefits. Eating in-season not only ensures year-round variety in your diet, but it can also help ward off seasonal ailments. For example, many indigenous cultures consumed nettles and/or dandelion greens in the spring, which help cleanse the liver and reduce the likelihood of seasonal allergies⁴³.

6. Support Healthy Blood Sugar

The amount of starch and sugar consumed in the modern diet, coupled with our sedentary lifestyles, leads to blood sugar crashes and energy dips.

Studies have shown that eating less sugar and starchy carbs is beneficial for blood sugar and decreases your risk of diabetes, low-immunity, and heart disease⁴⁴. To cut carbs without feeling deprived, replace them with vegetables or healthy fats at snack time, decrease the amount of sugar you consume daily to twenty-five grams or less (less is much better), and make sure no more than one-eighth to one-quarter of your plate is made up of starchy vegetables, bread, or grains.

7. Do a Thirty-Day Elimination Diet

See above and “Dr. Alex’s Elimination Diet Quick Start Guide” at the end of this chapter for detailed information on how and why to do this. Get to it!

8. Stay Hydrated

If you're not hydrating regularly, it can make you feel very tired. Dehydration causes a drop in blood volume, which makes your heart work harder to deliver oxygen to your muscles and skin. Studies have shown even mild dehydration of just two percent can cause people to feel unfocused, fatigued, and anxious⁴⁵.

How much water do you need? I recommend six to eight glasses of water every day, while avoiding fruit juice, black teas, energy drinks, and soda. Carrying a glass or stainless steel water bottle with you will make this a no-brainer. If you don't like water, try infusing it with whole slices of fruit, such as lemon, berries, or orange, or opt for sparkling water, green tea, or herbal tea.

9. Eat Traditional Superfoods

Such as the bone broths, fermented foods, soaked nuts and seeds, and others mentioned in the “Not Your Grandmother’s Dinner” section of this chapter.

10. Eat with Joy

Have you ever heard the saying, “Drinking beer with lots of cheer is better than eating bread with lots of dread”? Food, community, and connection are so important. Gathering socially and joyfully with your friends and loved ones for food brings a different kind of information to your system. It is important to eat happily, mindfully, and gratefully and to enjoy the experience—no matter what you're eating.

SOPHIE'S STORY

Sophie came to see me for a nutritional therapy approach for her new diagnosis of Rheumatoid Arthritis. When I first talked to her about the Elimination Diet and the Ten Steps to Eating for Everyday Vibrant Health, she became very angry. She kept asking, “How can I not eat pizza? How can I not eat pasta? How can I not eat that? That’s going to be tough. How can I participate in life and community, if I don’t eat these foods?”

Eventually, after much discussion, she agreed to follow a custom Elimination Diet that also included restrictions on nuts, caffeine, and all cheeses—three foods that tend to be troublesome in those with autoimmune conditions.

Despite her initial reaction, she followed through. Within about a month, her pain went away. Her arthritis has not progressed, and she has maintained pain-free joints by eating in a nourishing way and eliminating her trigger foods we discovered through the Elimination Diet and food sensitivity testing: nightshade vegetables (tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, and peppers), gluten, dairy, and eggs. By sticking to this program, she is living a fuller life than she would have otherwise. That’s the power of nourishment.

Nourishing the Soul with Primary Food

Several years ago, *The Institute of Integrative Nutrition* created a concept known as “primary food”—but the name is a bit misleading as it’s not food-related. Our “primary foods” are the things—people, activities, spiritual practices, hobbies, traditions, places, laughter, prayer, etc.—that bring us nourishment on a spiritual level.

Primary foods feed the soul, and when you nourish yourself this way, your body rewards you by releasing a slew of feel-good hormones and chemicals that serve much in the same way food does.

If you have forgotten what it means to feed your soul in this way, start by thinking about what brings you pleasure and joy, and ask yourself these questions:

- What did you love to do as a child?
- What did you love to do as a teenager?
- What did you enjoy doing before you got so darn busy keeping up with your own life?

This should stir up some memories like, “I used to love playing outside,” or, “I’d always enjoy taking a long walk after work with a girlfriend,” or, “I used to unwind by playing the guitar.”

DISCOVERING YOUR “PRIMARY FOODS”

Ask yourself:

- *“What did I love to do as a child?”*
- *“What do I love to do for fun?”*
- *“What’s something I’ve always wanted to do and never tried?”*
- *“What was the last thing I did that made me feel accomplished?”*
- *“What was the last activity I engaged in that made me feel alive?”*

Once we enter the grown-up-world, it can feel as though all our resources go to advancing our career, running our family, or taking care of others, instead of doing the things that nourish our soul. Though we may long to go meet up with friends for coffee or try out for the local theater, finding the time and space to organize your hobbies can feel daunting, indulgent, or worse, non-productive (gasp!).

Well, let me ask you this: would you consider eating a balanced meal daunting, indulgent, or unproductive? No, of course not, because if you don't eat, you'll get sick, tired, and cranky. Same goes with consuming enough "primary foods", if you don't nourish your soul on a regular basis you are going to get sick, tired, cranky, and, ultimately, burned out.

Personally, my primary foods are reading my Bible, worshiping at church, gardening, reading, and playing the cello—something I enjoyed doing as a child and have picked back up again. Gardening, on the other hand, was something I had always wanted to do, but never made the time and space for. When I finally started a garden eight years ago, I did it with my family, and it's been such a blessing to us all—and the inspiration for this book. This brings up an important point: nourishing yourself this way doesn't have to be an isolated experience unless that's what you desire. These things must be done in "real-life", so why not include your children, husband, partner, friends, pets, etc.? The point is to make time to nourish your spirit every day.

You have taken a tremendous step in this process by learning to nourish yourself through honoring your individual nutritional needs. Though changing your relationship to food can be a challenge, you have set yourself up for success by taking the time to identify and plant those seeds of desire and holding true to that attitude of expansion and growth. I encourage you to check out the Step 2 resources—including some of my favorite Elimination Diet recipes on the Bloom website.

Our journey continues in the next chapter with Step 3, where you will learn how to get grounded and build physical, mental, emotional strength using proven restorative practices.

Remember, the grass is greener where you water it so take care to consistently and deliberately nourish your seeds.

NOURISHING YOUR WHOLE SELF

- *What type of cuisine did your grandparents eat? Do you have a specific cuisine at your family's origin? What can you do to incorporate some of those (or others mentioned) traditional cooking methods into your life?*
 - *Do any of the symptoms of food sensitivities or leaky gut syndrome sound familiar to you? What steps in the "Ten Steps to Eating for Vibrant Health" do you need to incorporate in your nourishment routine?*
 - *What nourishes your spirit that you're not doing? What can you do to fix that?*
-

Step 2 — Nourishing Action Items:

1. Plan to start your Elimination Diet using the list provided above OR come over to nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources for my Elimination Diet Quick Start Guide and recipe downloads.
2. Print out the Ten Steps to Vibrant Everyday Eating Guide from nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources and tape it on your fridge. Implement those steps into your daily routine.
3. Seek out your primary foods: the hobbies, activities, and things that will nourish your spirit and soul.
4. If you're struggling with the Elimination Diet or implementing the Ten Guiding Principles to Vibrant Eating, check out the resource section below.

NOURISH Resources at nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources:

- Green Smoothie Guide
- Dr. Alex's Elimination Diet Quick Start Guide
- Recipe Guidebook
- Ten Steps to Vibrant Eating Guide
- Additional online recipe resources
- Recommendations for discount and specialty natural foods resources

DR. ALEX'S ELIMINATION DIET QUICK START GUIDE

To Help You Reclaim Your Health, Cultivate Your Desires, & Reignite Your Spark

Your Intention/Goal: Eliminate the following most common reactionary foods for four weeks and replace them with non-reactive foods to nourish your body.

Your Why: You are eliminating these reactionary foods so that you can discover what food sensitivities you may have and which foods your body thrives on.

Reactionary Foods to Eliminate for Four Weeks:

- Gluten—found in breads, some grains, flours, sauces, and processed foods
- Dairy
- Grains—including corn, rice, couscous, pastas, quinoa, millet, wheat, spelt, teff, rye, barley, etc.
- Beans and Legumes—includes peanuts as a legume
- Soy—beans, milk, yogurt, tofu, oil, edamame, soy sauce, etc. Read labels carefully as soy is in many packaged foods as an oil or soy lecithin.
- Eggs
- Sugar—white sugar, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, sucanat, turbinado, cane sugar, sugar in the raw
- Alcoholic beverages

Foods You CAN Eat During the 4 Week Elimination Diet:

- Vegetables—of all kinds including potatoes, sweet potatoes, and plantains.
- Fruits—up to two servings per day

- Meats and poultry—preferably pasture-raised/grass-fed and/or organic. Wild game is also an excellent source
- Wild-caught fish and seafood
- Grain-free flours—for baking, thickening, dredging, and “breading” such as coconut flour, almond flour, and tapioca flour
- Vegetable and seaweed crisps and chips—provided they are not cooked in inflammatory oils (choose coconut oil, olive oil, and avocado oil).
- Healthy fats—olive oil, coconut oil, and avocado oil
- Nuts and seeds—except peanuts, which are a legume
- Sugar-free, peanut-free nut butters—such as almond butter, tahini, and sunflower butter
- Sugar substitutes—such as stevia and xylitol. Coconut sugar and raw honey are allowed in very limited quantities
- To drink—plenty of filtered water, kombucha, coffee (one cup a day without dairy or refined sugar please) herbal, and green teas

How to Start Re-Introducing Reactionary Foods after Four Weeks:

Patience is a virtue, when it comes to the re-introduction phase. If you re-introduce those reactionary foods too quickly, you will wind up missing crucial information and possibly negating this whole process.

- Start re-introducing the eliminated foods one at a time
- Observe how you feel for three days before introducing another
- Write down your observations

Signs of Food Sensitivities to Look for When Re-Introducing Eliminated/Reactionary Foods

- Acne
- An unwanted change in mood
- Athlete's foot or other fungal issues
- Bad breath
- Brain fog
- Canker sores
- Congestion
- Constipation
- Diarrhea
- Digestive upset
- Dry eyes
- Fatigue
- Gas and/or bloating
- Headaches
- Insomnia
- Itching or skin irritation
- Joint pain
- Puffy face or eyes
- Rashes, irritation, or redness which may occur anywhere on your skin including around your anus or genitals
- Scratchy throat
- Stomach ache
- Weight gain

7-DAY SAMPLE ELIMINATION DIET MENU PLAN

The following is a sample of how one week on the Elimination Diet would look. Some featured recipes are listed at the back of this section; others can be found at nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources.

You can access dozens of delicious BLOOM-friendly recipes on my website, or you can design your own menu plan and recipes sticking within the non-reactive food limits.

DAY 1:

- Breakfast: *Nut Butter Pie Smoothie and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *An apple with almond butter*
- Lunch: *Green Goddess Cobb Salad with a cup of Bone Broth or Easy Chicken Broth*
- Afternoon Snack: *Crudit  with Baba Ganoush or your favorite soy-free, dairy-free dressing or dairy-free pesto*
- Dinner: *Buffalo Burger in a Napa Wrap*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

DAY 2:

- Breakfast: *Sweet Potato Breakfast Hash and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *Green Drink/Smoothie*
- Lunch: *Steak Salad with Mojo Dressing or a Vegetable-based soup with shrimp or chicken*
- Afternoon Snack: *A cup (or more) of bone broth with carrot sticks*
- Dinner: *Phenomenal Pho (recipe available on my website)*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

DAY 3:

- Breakfast: *Cinnamon Chai Protein Smoothie and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *Goji Chocolate Nut Bar*
- Lunch: *Leftover Phenomenal Pho*
- Afternoon Snack: *Raw veggies with Pumped Up Guacamole with Watercress and Pomegranate Arils*
- Dinner: *Chicken or turkey stew with potatoes and loads of veggies, OR grilled chicken or turkey strips (marinated in your favorite sugar-free, soy-free marinade or dressing) with baked potato and salad.*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

DAY 4:

- Breakfast: *Pumpkin Pie Smoothie and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *Diced avocado and mango fruit salad with hemp seeds (chop up ½ and avocado and 1 mango, add hemp seeds and a squirt of lime juice and enjoy)*
- Lunch: *Leftovers from the night before (stew or grilled chicken or turkey) with a cup of Bone Broth or Easy Chicken Broth OR Watercress Almond Soup with Chicken or Shrimp*
- Afternoon Snack: *Green Drink/Smoothie*
- Dinner: *Grilled salmon with Pineapple Salsa and grilled vegetables of choice (make enough salmon and grilled vegetables to save some for the next day)*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

DAY 5:

- Breakfast: *Veggie and meat scramble with 2-3 strips of bacon with greens and leftover grilled vegetables and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *Celery sticks stuffed with nut butter*
- Lunch: *Leftover Grilled Salmon with Lemon or Lime and Grilled Vegetables with a cup of Bone Broth or Easy Chicken Broth*
- Afternoon Snack: *Double Dark Chocolate Smoothie*
- Dinner: *Spiralized veggie noodles with lamb, bison, or turkey-based meat sauce.*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

DAY 6:

- Breakfast: *Chillin' Cucumber Smoothie and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *Goji Chocolate Nut Bar*
- Lunch: *Steak Salad with Mojo Dressing OR Herby Chilled Beet Soup with Avocado*
- Afternoon Snack: *Nori rolls stuffed with shredded veggies, pickled ginger, and avocado*
- Dinner: *Roasted organic/free-range chicken with sweet potatoes and a variety of roasted vegetables such as zucchini, leeks, carrots, etc. Make enough sweet potatoes and veggies for left overs*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

DAY 7:

- Breakfast: *Green Drink/Smoothie and a cup of coffee or green tea.*
- Morning Snack: *Diced fresh pineapple cubes with crushed macadamia nuts*
- Lunch: *Leftover roasted chicken and veggies*
- Afternoon Snack: *Guacamole with chopped veggies*
- Dinner: *Ground Beef Picadillo with Lettuce Cups*
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water

ELIMINATION-DIET-FRIENDLY RECIPE SAMPLES

(more available at: nourishmedicine.com/bloomresources)

BREAKFAST RECIPE:

Sweet Potato Breakfast Hash

This savory-sweet hash makes a hearty, nutrient-dense breakfast that will leave you feeling full and satisfied for hours. For easy morning prep, you can roast the potatoes the night before, then just add bacon or pre-made, organic, nitrate-free sausage and wilt in some greens.

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 medium sweet potato, roasted
- 2 green onions, sliced
- 3 strips of nitrate-free, preferably organic bacon OR 2 nitrate-free, sugar-free, preferably organic sausages
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil or coconut oil
- Handful of fresh spinach
- 2 tablespoons salsa or red or green mojo (mojo recipes listed below)

Procedure:

1. Cook bacon or sausage according to directions. Remove from pan and set aside.
2. In the same pan, add pre-baked sweet potato with skin on (lots of nutrients in there) and mash up.
3. Add spinach to the same skillet and wilt in with sweet potato.
4. Add back the bacon or sausage and heat through.
5. Top with your favorite salsa or mojo and enjoy.

DRINKS AND SMOOTHIES:

Nut Butter Pie Smoothie

Nut fans will nod their heads in approval upon first sip of this creamy treat. It may seem too good to be labeled a healthy breakfast- but this smoothie offers a good dose of minerals and antioxidants from nuts and spices. Dial up the flavor with cinnamon (great for controlling blood sugar) and nutmeg (potent antibacterial).

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ cups cold tea such black or green tea
- ¼ cup coconut milk
- 3 tablespoons nut butter, such as almond or cashew
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- 1 scoop vanilla or chocolate protein powder (choose pea, hemp, hydrolyzed beef, or hydrolyzed collagen)
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- 8 ice cubes
- Stevia to taste

Procedure:

1. Place the tea, coconut milk, nut butter, chia, protein powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, and ice cubes in a blender.
2. Process until smooth and sweeten with stevia to taste. If too thick, add ¼ - ½ cup water.
3. Divide into two glasses. Serve immediately.

Cinnamon Chai Smoothie

If you're a fan of coffee shop drinks with flavorful spices, you'll adore this healthier smoothie that's higher in protein and lower in sugar. Don't toss cold coffee or tea, use it to make this smoothie.

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups coconut milk or coconut kefir (dairy-free)
- 1 ½ cups iced coffee or black tea
- ¼ cup macadamia nuts or almonds
- 1 scoop plain or vanilla protein powder (choose pea, hemp, hydrolyzed beef, or hydrolyzed collagen)
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 8 ice cubes
- Stevia to taste

Procedure:

1. Place the coconut milk or coconut kefir, coffee or tea, nuts, protein powder, vanilla, cinnamon and ice cubes in a blender.
2. Process until smooth and sweeten with stevia to taste. If too thick, add ¼ - ½ cup water.
3. Divide into two glasses. Serve immediately.

Double Dark Chocolate Smoothie

Fiber, nutrient rich avocado gives this shake its thick, creamy texture. Using unsweetened organic cocoa powder ensures you get 100 percent of chocolate's flavor and nutrition like iron, fiber, and loads of antioxidants.

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups coconut milk or coconut kefir (dairy-free)
- 1 cup iced coffee or black tea
- 1 ripe avocado
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened cacao powder
- 2 tablespoons macadamia nuts or almonds
- 1 scoop plain, vanilla, or chocolate protein powder (choose pea, hemp, hydrolyzed beef, or hydrolyzed collagen)
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon honey or stevia to taste
- 8 ice cubes

Procedure:

1. Place the coconut milk, iced coffee or black tea, avocado, cacao, nuts, protein powder, honey or stevia to taste, vanilla, and ice cubes in a blender.
2. Process until smooth—if too thick, add ¼ - ½ cup water.
3. Divide into two glasses. Serve immediately.

Spicy Pumpkin Pie Smoothie

Celebrate the season (any season) with this pie-inspired smoothie that's high superfood pumpkin, rich in skin nutritive compounds like beta-carotene and tummy filling fiber. Apple, an unsung superfood, is high in cancer fighting compounds and pectin that can help you to feel full with less calories.

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 cup coconut milk or coconut kefir (dairy-free)
- 1 apple, quartered, cored
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup canned pumpkin
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chia or hemp seeds, or 1 scoop protein powder
- 1 scoop plain or vanilla protein powder (choose pea, hemp, hydrolyzed beef, or hydrolyzed collagen)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 8 ice cubes
- Stevia to taste

Procedure:

1. Place the coconut milk or coconut kefir, apple, pumpkin, chia or hemp seeds, vanilla, cinnamon, $\frac{2}{3}$ cup cold water and ice cubes, in a blender.
2. Process until smooth and sweeten with stevia to taste. If too thick, add $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water.
3. Divide into two glasses. Serve immediately.

Chillin' Cucumber Smoothie

Cool down after a hot workout with this low-cal smoothie that can also double as a calorie friendly snack. Cucumber is high in water content which helps to hydrate. Coconut milk contains anti-inflammatory fats that soothe, satiate, and satisfy.

Serves 2

Ingredients:

- 1 cup kale
- ½ large cucumber, peeled
- 1 ripe pear or apple, quartered, cored
- ½ cup coconut milk
- ½ cup cold green tea
- ½ cup hemp, pistachios, or pumpkin seeds
- 1 scoop plain or vanilla protein powder (choose pea, hemp, hydrolyzed beef, or hydrolyzed collagen)
- 8 ice cubes
- Stevia to taste

Procedure:

1. Place the kale, cucumber, pear or apple, coconut milk, green tea, seeds and ice cubes in a blender.
2. Process until smooth and sweeten with stevia to taste.
3. Divide into two glasses. Serve immediately.

SNACKS:

Goji Chocolate Nut Bar

This flavorful chocolate nut bar contains healthy brain compounds from dark chocolate (for memory) and walnuts (omega-3 for detox). It also boasts a whopping 3 grams of cleansing fiber per serving that you won't find in commercial milk chocolate bars.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 1 cup assorted nuts, chopped
- ½ cup goji berries
- 12 ounces (2 cups) 70% dark stevia-sweetened chocolate like either Lily's® brand
- Pinch of cinnamon and cayenne
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds

Procedure:

1. Coat an 8x8 baking dish with wax paper. Spray the top of the wax paper and around the nuts and goji berries over.
2. Place the chocolate in a small saucepan over low heat and warm 2 to 3 minutes, stirring well until melted.
3. Pour over the nuts and gojis, smooth the top with a spatula.
4. Sprinkle with the chia and refrigerate at least 1 hour until firm.

Pumped Up Guacamole with Watercress and Pomegranate Arils

Watercress, rich in a long list of vitamins like A, C, and K, pumps up the nutrition in your standard guacamole. Dip in with veggies, instead of corn chips, to keep calories in check and your elimination diet on track.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 2 Hass avocados
- 1 cup watercress or spinach, chopped
- ¼ cup cilantro, chopped
- 1 jalapeno, seeded, minced
- 2 tablespoons minced onions
- 1 lime, juiced
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup pomegranate arils
- 1 red pepper, thinly sliced, seeded

Procedure:

1. Place the avocado, watercress, cilantro, jalapeño, onions, lime juice, and salt.
2. Mash the avocado with the back of a wooden spoon.
3. Top with the pomegranate arils and serve immediately with the peppers.

SOUPS:

Herby Chilled Beet Soup with Avocado

Sweet beets, a feast for the eyes, are also body-beautiful and high in folate—a heart and cancer protective compound. If you prefer the taste of cooked beets, shop for pre-steamed beets in your local grocer or roast them yourself if you desire a richer flavor.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ pound raw beets, peeled, grated
- 1 quart homemade chicken broth
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ½ pound cooked shrimp or chicken
- 2 avocados, diced
- ½ cup thinly sliced radish (optional)
- ¼ cup chopped herbs

Procedure:

1. Place the beets, broth, onion, garlic, salt, and black pepper in a blender and process until smooth.
2. Divide into four bowls and top each with a 4 to 5 shrimp or sliced chicken, ½ avocado, radish, and herbs.

Watercress Almond Soup

Watercress, a spicy green that is part of the cruciferous family, gives this soup a horseradish like kick. If you are not a fan of spicy, substitute baby spinach or kale for the watercress. They are just as nutritious.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 4 ounces watercress
- 2 large cucumbers
- 2 avocados
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup unsweetened coconut or almond milk
- 2 tablespoons almonds
- ½ teaspoon garlic salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, diced
- 2 tablespoons chopped tarragon, lemon balm, or basil
- 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 pound cooked shrimp or shredded chicken

Procedure:

1. Place the watercress, cucumber, avocados, chicken broth, coconut or almond milk, almonds, garlic salt, and black pepper.
2. Blend until smooth.
3. Mix the cherry tomatoes, herbs, vinegar, and salt.
4. Divide into bowls and top with the tomato mixture and shrimp or chicken. Serve immediately.

BROTHS:

Bone Broth

Savory slow cooked bone broth has a superior taste and a silky texture that makes the effort well worth it. Some studies show that eating bone broth may boost immunity and functional doctors prize it for its collagen content which can sooth leaky gut and improve gut health.

Serves 8

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3 pounds beef marrow and knuckle bones
- 2 pounds beef shanks or oxtails or meaty bones such as short ribs
- 3 celery stalks, halved
- 3 carrots, halved
- 3 onions, quartered
- ½ cup fresh parsley stems and leaves
- Pinch of salt
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ½ cup vinegar

Procedure:

1. Warm the oil in a large stockpot over medium-high heat.
2. Add the bones in batches and brown 4 to 5 minutes, turning often until they brown. While you brown the last batch add the tomato paste to brown reducing the heat to low. Return all the bones to the stockpot and add the vinegar and 3 quarts of water.
3. Add the celery, carrots, onions, parsley, tomato paste, and salt.
4. Add the vinegar and 3 quarts of water.
5. Bring to a boil over high heat.
6. Simmer, covered, 12 to 24 hours.
7. Alternatively, transfer it to a slow cook and set to high for 14 hours.
8. Let the broth cool and strain it, making sure all marrow is knocked out of the marrow bones and into the broth.

Serve immediately or cool completely before storing in an airtight container, refrigerated, up to a week. Or freeze for up to 6 months.

Easy Chicken Bone Broth

Use this stock as the base of your cooking for the week—in soups, sauces, or in place of water/liquid in any other recipes.

Ingredients:

- Whole, free-range chicken
- Apple-cider vinegar
- 1 onion
- 6 peppercorns
- 3 bay leaves
- 6 cloves of garlic
- 4 carrots
- 1 bunch of celery
- 3 potatoes

Procedure:

1. Place a whole free range chicken in your crock pot.
2. Chop all vegetables and add to pot.
3. Add spices to pot.
4. Fill the pot with cold, filtered water.
5. Add 2 tablespoons of apple-cider vinegar.
6. Cook on low for 24 hours.
7. After 24 hours, remove chicken, chicken pieces, and vegetable with a slotted spoon—reserve for other dishes if desired.
8. Strain stock and reserve liquid in covered containers in your refrigerator or freezer.

SALADS:

Steak Salad with Mojo Dressing

Scrap the high calorie steak frites and dig into this steak salad that tops the charts with nutrition. Mixing proteins and superfood veggies like watercress, spinach, red bell pepper, and artichoke packs in high levels of nutrients like Vitamin C, Niacin, and Zinc.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- ¼ cup red or green mojo (see recipe below)
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil avocado oil
- 1 pound watercress or spinach
- 4 large tomatoes, sliced
- 4 carrots, peeled chopped
- ½ pound thinly sliced flank steak
- 9 ounces frozen artichokes, defrosted

Procedure:

1. Place the mojo in a small bowl along with the olive oil. Whisk well to combine and set aside.
2. Arrange the watercress or spinach, tomato, and carrot onto a platter.
3. Arrange the flank steak and artichokes on top and drizzle with mojo dressing. Serve immediately.

Red Mojo

The word mojo comes from the Spanish word for sauce. If you've never tasted mojo you will adore this tangy sauce that gets its deep flavor from dried chilies and garlic with a lift from citrus.

Makes 1 cup

Ingredients:

- 4 dried chilies such as, ancho or arbol, stems removed, seeded
- 4 garlic cloves
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 cup roasted red pepper
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- ½ cup olive oil

Procedure:

1. Place the chilies in ½ cup warm water and rest for 30 minutes to hydrate them.
2. Place the garlic cloves, paprika, and salt in a food processor and process until the garlic is finely chopped.
3. Add the chilies along with their soaking water, the roasted red pepper, and vinegar. Process until the chilies are finely chopped.
4. With the motor running, add the olive oil until a thick sauce forms. Use immediately as a condiment or with any of the recipes that call for green mojo, or store in an air-tight container, refrigerated for up to 1 week

Green Mojo

Most green mojos use cilantro as its base, a flavorful floral herb that you can find next to the parsley in the produce aisle. This functional twist adds superfood spinach to boost nutrition without compromising taste.

Makes 1 cup

Ingredients:

- 3 cloves garlic, peeled
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 2 cups packed spinach leaves
- 1 bunch cilantro, stems trimmed
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil

Procedure:

1. Place the garlic and salt in a food processor and chop.
2. Add the spinach and cilantro, pulsing until the greens are finely chopped.
3. With the motor running add the olive oil in a stream until a thick sauce forms.
4. Use immediately as a condiment or with any of the recipes that call for green mojo, or store in an air-tight container, refrigerated for up to 1 week.

Green Goddess Cobb

This is not your standard cobb salad; it's powered by serious greens. Use them in the dressing to add taste and nutrition, and serve your fixings on top of super food kale or spinach for health.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- ½ pound nitrate-free, preferably organic bacon
- 10 ounces chopped or baby kale, any variety
- 2 large tomatoes (about 1 pound)
- 1 avocado, diced
- 4 scallions, chopped
- 1 cup packed kale or spinach leaves
- 1 lemon, zested and juiced
- 2 tablespoon tahini paste
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ¼teaspoon sea salt
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Procedure:

1. Prepare the bacon per the package instructions.
2. Once cooled, chop the bacon.
3. Arrange the kale on a large platter. Top with the bacon, tomato, avocado, and scallions.
4. Prepare the dressing.
5. Place the kale or spinach, lemon zest and juice, tahini, olive oil, salt, and black pepper in a blender. Process until smooth.
6. Drizzle over salad and serve immediately.

ENTREES:

Ground Beef Picadillo with Lettuce Cups

Picadillo, a traditional Latin beef dish with a sweet and sour flare, is a fragrant chopped meat flavored with tomatoes, raisins, and olives. Use grass fed beef for less fat and more nutrition, plus a big boost of iron. To save on grass-fed meat, shop in bulk, and store them in your freezer.

Serves 8

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 pounds grass-fed ground beef
- 1 large white onion, chopped
- 8 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 bay leaves
- ¼ cup tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon mild chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 (14-ounce) can diced tomatoes in juice
- ¾ cup sliced drained pimiento-stuffed green olives (from 5-ounce jar)
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 head butter lettuce, broken into leaves (at least 12 leaves)

Procedure:

1. Warm a large stockpot over medium-high heat. Add the beef and cook 2 to 3 minutes, without breaking it up, until it browns.
2. Flip and cook 2 minutes more to brown.
3. Next, scatter the onion, garlic, and bay leaves over the browned meat, cooking until the onion is soft, about 5 minutes, breaking up the beef as the onions cook.
4. Add the tomato paste, chili, and cayenne powder, cooking one minute more until the spices become fragrant.
5. Add the diced tomatoes and their juice, olives, raisins, and vinegar.
6. Simmer until picadillo thickens, stirring occasionally, about 8 minutes.
7. Discard bay leaves.
8. Serve half the picadillo warm in lettuce cups and reserve the remainder for leftovers.

Grilled Salmon with Pineapple Cilantro Salsa

Juicy sweet pineapple is the perfect foil for fatty rich salmon. Asparagus, the ideal veggie partner with salmon adds a colorful green base along with prebiotic fiber for optimal gut health.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 1 cup cubed pineapple, finely chopped
- ½ green bell pepper or poblano chili, diced
- ¼ red onion, diced (about 1/4 cup)
- 2 tablespoons fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
- 1 lime, zested and juiced
- ½ teaspoon salt, divided
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cayenne or paprika
- 1 pound wild salmon filets, skin removed
- 1 tablespoon Sriracha
- 1 pound asparagus trimmed

Procedure:

1. Prepare the salsa. Place the pineapple, pepper, onion, cilantro, lime zest and juice, half the salt, and cayenne or paprika in a small bowl, toss well.
2. Preheat the grill over high heat. Sprinkle the salmon with the remaining salt and spread the Sriracha over top.
3. Place the salmon and asparagus on the grill and cook 4 to 5 minutes for the asparagus, turning the salmon once continuing to cook the salmon 3 to 4 minutes more until the salmon is still pink instead but no longer translucent.
4. Serve immediately with the asparagus and the salsa.

Buffalo Burger in a Napa Wrap

Swap out the bun means there is more space for vitalizing veggies that can help give you an energy surge. Collards work as the ideal wrap and have the added benefit of nutrients like Vitamin A and folate.

Serves 4

Ingredients:

- 1 pound ground buffalo or bison meat
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 tablespoons olive or avocado oil
- 4 large Napa cabbage leaves
- 1 large tomato, thinly sliced
- 8 pickles (optional)
- 4 tablespoons organic, sugar free ketchup, mojo, or mayo
- 1 head broccoli, cut into 4 large florets

Procedure:

1. Prepare the burgers. Mix the meat with the salt and form into 4 patties.
2. Heat a large skillet over high heat, add the oil and the burgers and cook 10 to 12 minutes, turning occasionally until the burgers are medium-rare.
3. Wrap each burger in a cabbage leaf and top with the pickles, ketchup, or mayo.
4. While the burgers are cooking, fill a large stockpot with 1 inch of water and bring to a boil over high.
5. Add the broccoli and steam 4 to 5 minutes until fork tender.
6. Once cooked and plated, drizzle with olive oil and salt.
7. Serve immediately with burgers.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO MAKE GREEN DRINKS AND SMOOTHIES YOUR OWN

Once you get the hang of it, green drinks and smoothies are easy to make, and the combinations are endless. Below is a simple framework that you can follow.

STEP 1: CHOOSE YOUR BASE

Add 2 cups of one of the following bases to your blender:

- Water
- Coconut water
- Coconut milk
- Almond milk
- Cashew milk
- Hemp milk
- A2 milk, Bulgarian or sheep's milk yogurt and kefir—allowed post-Elimination Diet for those without dairy sensitivities

STEP 2: CHOOSE YOUR GREENS

Choose 2 cups (tightly packed) of the following greens and add to your blender:

- Spinach
- Kale
- Swiss chard
- Collard greens
- Dandelion greens
- Turnip greens
- Beet greens
- Sweet potato greens
- Romaine lettuce
- Spring mix

STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR FRUIT

Choose ½ cup – 1 cup of the following fruit to add to your blender:

- Banana
- Cherries
- Raspberries
- Blueberries
- Blackberries
- Strawberries
- Mango
- Pineapple
- Papaya
- Avocado
- Peaches
- Pears
- Apples

STEP 4: ADD YOUR PROTEIN

Choose 1 scoop of the following protein powders:

- Hydrolyzed beef protein powder
- Hydrolyzed collagen powder
- Pea Protein Isolate
- Hemp protein powder

STEP 5: SUPERCHARGE IT

Choose 1 tablespoon of the following superfoods to add to your blender:

- Coconut oil
- Cacao
- Chia seeds
- Hemp seeds
- Cinnamon
- Vanilla
- Maca
- Spirulina
- Chlorella

Blend and enjoy! Will yield roughly 32 ounces which may equate to 1-2 servings.

