

# Building Blocks for a Healthy Life

Andrew E. Leifer, M.D.

There are four basic building blocks that set you up for a healthy foundation to your life:

- How you eat.
- How you sleep.
- How you exercise.
- How you care for your spirituality.

## EATING:

Eat in balance and in moderation. Limit intake of sweets and consider a moratorium on dessert and snack foods in your home. Making access to things that are not so healthy for you makes it easier to eat things that are good for you. Avoid high fructose corn syrup. If you consume significant quantities of caffeine, substitute decaf green tea for some of your coffee or soda intake and begin cutting back. Avoid caffeine after noon. If regulating intake remains a challenge, use a [food log](#) to track what you are actually eating over a two week period. It can be surprisingly educational to track what you eat then review it with your therapist or other accountability partner.

## SLEEP:

Care for, protect, and nurture your sleep. Have a consistent bedtime and getting up time and stick to this, even on weekends when you might otherwise be inclined to “catch up” if you’ve been burning the candle at both ends. See my [sleep hygiene](#) notes for more detail on this topic. If you have much difficulty with sleep, use my [sleep log](#) to track your sleep patterns for a two week period and bring the log to me or your therapist for review and further assessment. The log allows you to track one week of sleep at a time and should be kept on your nightstand and filled in upon awakening first thing each morning. My goal is that it takes you less than 60 seconds to fill it in each day.

## EXERCISE:

A little bit each day. If you've not been doing much physically, start slowly with 5-10 minutes on arising then build a few minutes more every one or two months. Your initial routine might look like a bit of gentle stretching on the floor and a few [yoga](#) positions. Just this little bit of stretching on the floor in your bedroom will get the blood flowing and start your day in a pleasant and calm manner. Some people exercise in a gym, some in the outdoors. Be sure to keep your exercise fun and change what you're doing if it feels like drudgery. I'd rather see you in the outdoors walking for ten minutes than slaving away in a gym for two hours. If it isn't fun, you're less likely to make it part of your daily routine. The Colorado sunshine has a tremendously restorative effect and can directly decrease depressive symptoms in as little as four to eight weeks. Some find it helpful to keep an [exercise log](#) to track their physical activity. Remember, it's not how much you do, but that you add it to your daily patterns. It will build into something meaningful on its own! It's good for you to stretch. Dynamic stretching is better than static stretching... in other words, gradual slow movements into positions that you can hold comfortably rather than sudden bouncing, jerky movements. Breaking a sweat through aerobic exercise (slow and steady, moderate increase in heartbeat with breathing in a regular rhythm) rather than pushing hard in anaerobic (high heart rate, panting breathing patterns) is your healthier goal.

## SPIRITUALITY:

This refers to how you "center" yourself or achieve balance in life. As you consider this, think about what makes you feel good, in charge, satisfied, proud of yourself, focused, in balance, in control, less anxious and calm. There are many ways to attain this goal and may include time with family, standing on a mountain top regularly, a higher power as it meets your conceptualization, music, playing chess or many other possibilities. This may be meditation; it may be mental focus in whatever way works for you as long as you feel your heart open through this practice. Discuss this with someone important in your life and decide how fits best for you, then create a structure for yourself in which this becomes a regular and cherished tradition. Your goal is to make this something you address regularly and consistently.

## A FINAL WORD:

These suggestions are just a start but make up what I view as the four basic building blocks that set the stage for a healthy life. Start here and give it three to six months then reevaluate. It may help to make some notes below about what you are currently doing in these areas of your life:

EATING \_\_\_\_\_  
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SLEEP \_\_\_\_\_  
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EXERCISE \_\_\_\_\_  
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SPIRITUALITY \_\_\_\_\_  
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*Disclaimer:  
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