

Teacher Self-Care

Teacher Self-Care:

A Joyful Ode to Good Health

Edited by

Sarah Ransdell

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Teacher Self-Care: A Joyful Ode to Good Health

Edited by Sarah Ransdell

This book first published 2020

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2020 by Sarah Ransdell and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-4431-1

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-4431-4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Sarah Ransdell	
Chapter 1	5
Nutrition for Teachers	
Marilyn Gordon	
Chapter 2	19
Yoga and Meditation	
Caitlin Morris	
Chapter 3	31
Exercise for Teachers	
Kirsten Laursen and Marie Struttmann	
Chapter 4	51
Disease Prevention for Teachers	
Sarah Ransdell	
Chapter 5	61
Media and Health	
Elliot Montgomery Sklar	
Chapter 6	79
Teachers and Screen Time	
Sarah Ransdell	
Chapter 7	87
Let's Talk About Sex!	
Gillian A. Sealy	
Chapter 8	97
Developing as a Teacher	
Jia Borrer	

Conclusions 111
Sarah Ransdell

INTRODUCTION

SARAH RANSELL

This book is for those who want to put more joy and health in their lives. Teachers put joy in students' lives. The joyful tips in this book keep us balanced and complete so we can teach well and live well. **This book includes over 80 tips for helping you focus on your own self-care.** Self-care keeps you the best you can be. As a teacher, many people are counting on you to be well. Put your own oxygen mask on first, and then help others. You don't have to be on an airplane for that to make sense. Take care of your own health and you will be better equipped to take care of others.

Laugh out loud. Be joyful. Remember your blessings. Read these tips. Tell us what you think. The World Health Organization provides a recent list of ten threats to global health at www.who.int. Noncommunicable diseases are those such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease, that we have some control over preventing. Five major risk factors for these diseases include tobacco use, physical inactivity, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, and air pollution. In addition, vaccine hesitancy is the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines. Among our set of tips, we find ways to discuss and change behaviors in order to avoid disease among teachers, like getting a flu vaccine and practicing good lifestyle hygiene. Come join us for our chapters of joy and be the well person we know you want to be. Here are some introductory snapshots to get us started. You may read the chapters in any order. Enjoy and be healthy!

Chapter 1 reminds us that **“what we eat is just as important as what we don't eat”**. For example, if I think about rainbow-colored vegetables and fruit, I will be more likely to eat them every day.

Chapter 2 says **“take it off the mat”**. Yoga brings harmony and joy. Take that harmony and joy off the mat with you into your classroom and home. Try a pose or two at home or take a class in a gym.

Chapter 3 offers good ideas for exercise and general wellness. Make sure your chair is comfortable and **“be kind to your spine”**.

Chapter 4 helps us keep disease away. “**Wash your hands**” every time you think about it. Get a flu nose spray if you don’t like shots.

Chapter 5 is about media and health. “**Support companies**” that promote joy and good health. Watch out for bad advice lurking online and in all advertising.

Chapter 6 prompts us to “**limit screen time**”, especially for our youngest children and students. Students watch what teachers do, at least as much as what they say, so put down your screens!

Chapter 7 recaps the basics of good personal health. **Make good decisions** about the most personal behaviors in your life. No matter your age, you need to promote good sexual health.

Chapter 8 is an homage to the joyful development of teachers. **Inspire your students** to be the best versions of themselves that they can be.

Conclusions summarize a potential home list. **Make a home list** in your own hand, type or handwrite it, and post it online or on the fridge. And here is our Table of Contents.

Table of Contents

1 Nutrition for teachers.

Marilyn Gordon

2 Yoga and meditation.

Cait Morris

3 Exercise for teachers.

Kirsten Laursen and Marie Struttmann

4 Disease prevention for teachers.

Sarah Ransdell

5 Media and health.

Elliot Sklar

6 Teachers and screen time.

Sarah Ransdell

7 Let's talk about sex.

Gillian Sealy

8 Developing as a teacher.

Jia Borrer

Conclusions.

Sarah Ransdell

We give thanks for all those tireless teachers out there who inspired us to be teachers ourselves. Thanks to them and thanks to you.

CHAPTER 1

NUTRITION FOR TEACHERS

MARILYN GORDON

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has documented that fad diets have been around since the early 1800's and it appears that there is no sign of relief from hype and misinformation related to food. Electronic communication, although quick and convenient, allows everyone to blog, post, and author the latest and greatest diet. The old saying "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is" applies here.

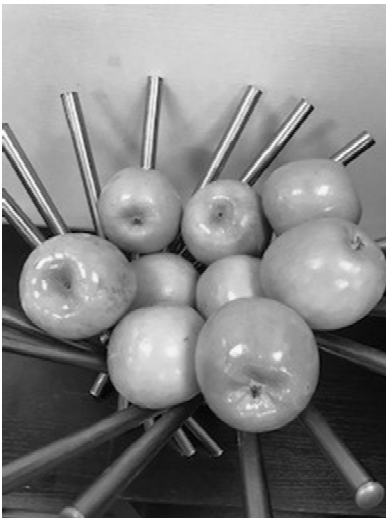
Today, based upon our knowledge of human nutrition and science, two eating plans prevail in promoting health and preventing disease: the Mediterranean Diet <https://oldwayspt.org/traditional-diets/mediterranean-diet> and Plant-based or Vegetarian Diets <https://vegetariannutrition.net/> or <https://www.vrg.org/>. Both eating plans emphasize plant-based protein foods <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/protein-foods-vegetarian>, a variety of colored vegetables, whole grains, fresh fruits, nuts, seeds, and plant-based oils (olive) and fats. More recently emphasis has been placed on planetary wellness and food system sustainability. An interesting report released by the *EAT-Lancet* Commission <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2818%2931788-4> is a call to action to protect the environment and improve human health by shifting towards healthier sources of proteins and fat and an increase in essential nutrients that tend to be lacking such as iron, calcium, folate, vitamin A, and zinc.

Tip 1: Meal Planning for Teachers

Plan: When it comes to food and nutrition, if we fail to plan, we set ourselves up for failure. Rarely does good nutrition fall into our lap or onto our plate. A sure-fire way to eat healthfully all day is to plan for it. It is like creating a lesson plan for the classroom but instead you are planning when and what you will eat to maintain even energy and focus throughout your day. Sunday may be a great day to plan your breakfast and lunches for the work week. If planning five days seems daunting, begin with two or three, but stick to your plan. Nothing is better than looking forward to enjoying the meal that you brought to work.

Fuel up at the start of your day: Showing up for eight hours in a classroom with an empty stomach is asking for trouble. Initially caffeine might get you going but soon the energy crash will come unless you consume more caffeine, creating a vicious, draining cycle and sometimes irritability and a headache. Instead, remember that you have fasted all night and your body is eager to be refueled. The preferred energy source for the brain is glucose which comes from the breakdown of carbohydrates in the diet. So, keeping carbohydrates in your morning meal is essential.

As I mentioned, fads come and go. Currently, carbohydrates are being maligned but go back five years and dietary fat was the bad guy. That being said, it is true that many individuals consume more carbohydrates than what are needed for activity and metabolic functions. Carbohydrates are our



“energy” source, needed to fuel the brain, other organs and cells, and physical activity. Truth be told, most adults do not engage in the suggested amount of physical activity recommended by the American College of Sports Medicine. These extra carbohydrates can be stored as excess body fat and lead to future health problems. Total carbohydrates needed per day should mirror the activity of the day: More active days require more carbohydrates, less active, reduced carbohydrate foods. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and the



American College of Sports Medicine have co-authored a position paper providing carbohydrate guideline ranges based upon time spent in activity. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26920240>

Along with carbohydrates for your morning meal, consider adding a tasty protein source. Protein contains amino acids which are needed for healing, repair, growth, enzyme and hormone production, and immune system function. We need protein from exogenous sources daily and preferably multiple times throughout the day. Protein at our first meal of the day provides these amino acids and because protein foods take a little longer to digest, they contribute to satiety.

Some quick breakfast ideas that include a protein source are:

Oatmeal, walnuts, and blueberries	Egg-white wrap with cheese
Greek-style Yogurt and fruit	Hummus and vegetables
Peanut/Almond butter on whole grain toast	Avocado Toast and fresh berries
Egg cupcakes with vegetables	Sliced salmon on a bagel thin
Toasted Cheese or lean meat sandwich	Omelet with spinach in a wrap

Bring your lunch: Granted, it takes extra effort, but it is well worth it when it comes time to re-boot yourself for an afternoon of instruction, planning, and parent conferences. When you bring your own lunch, not only do you

have foods that you like and have personally prepared, but you save time by not having to wait in the cafeteria line only to be disappointed by the offerings of the day. Besides a bite to eat, this is a good time to hydrate with water. Bring a reusable container and set a goal to empty it in the first half of the day, refill midday, and empty it again during the second half. Water requirements are 2.7 L/d for women and 3.7 L/d for men. Dehydration can lead to foggy thinking, poor performance, and health problems.

Bring your snacks: Who doesn't love snacks? Especially as a teacher, for whom eating on the fly can become essential. Again, planning with snacks you have strategically placed in a refrigerator or desk drawer can energize you without sabotaging your efforts to eat healthfully.

Here are a few snack ideas:

Fresh fruit: apples, pears, bananas	Dried fruit: plums, raisins, cherries, blueberries
Individual cheese sticks	Greek style Yogurt; carton of milk
Nuts: almonds, walnuts, peanuts	Dried edamame
Hummus with carrots/cucumbers/peppers	Trail mix
Figgy Pops Super Snacks Graham crackers	Kind, Power, Lara, Clif, Zing, RX, Nature Valley Bars
Whole grain fruit bars; Fig bars	Whole grain crackers: Mary's Gone Crackers

Tip 2: Energy Boosters

As mentioned earlier, showing up for a day of classroom instruction without fueling up with food is a sure-fire way to make poor food choices, perhaps giving in to temptation in the teachers' lounge (doughnuts and pastries, anyone?), parental offerings, and guaranteeing a day of emotional ups and downs. Often people will say that they are not hungry early in the morning, so they choose to skip breakfast. This could be a result of eating late into the evening. If our food is our fuel, and it is, then why do we consume the bulk of it at the end of the day instead of in the beginning of the day? This requires a behavior change but ideally, either breakfast or lunch should be the largest meal since we have all day to utilize the energy from it. Dinner or supper should be light and easy to digest to allow the digestive track to

rest as we sleep. Challenge your appetite by eating that lighter (and earlier) dinner such as a bean and vegetable soup or a salad with lean protein and see if you do not wake up easier, with more energy, and an appetite.

So besides eating breakfast, eating at regular intervals can keep a steady flow of energy and a stable blood sugar, preventing mood highs and lows. Try different patterns, for example, some people do better eating every three hours. Others do better with the traditional three meals per day. The goal is to fuel up but not to over fuel because you have not eaten in sixteen hours. This is a good place to mention “Intermittent Fasting”, a popular pattern that some people are using for various reasons such as weight management, mental focus, or positive effects on enzyme and hormonal systems. The “Fasting” periods can range from twelve hours (6 pm – 6 am) to fourteen hours (6 pm – 8 am) to 16 hours (6 pm – 10 am). During fasting periods, the body is forced to utilize fat as its primary source of fuel. There are health benefits to this such as reduced insulin levels, cellular repair, gene expression, enhanced resistance to free radical damage, and inflammation reduction.

The potential problems with “Intermittent Fasting” are lightheadedness, low blood sugar, moodiness, and tendency to binge-eat once the fasting period is over. Anyone that has ever had an eating disorder should not experiment with this eating pattern.

Consider some of the best habits and foods to eat to keep a steady level of energy as you begin and move through your day:

- Take in a good stretch early in the morning: Find 3 to 4 stretches that you like and practice them every day until they are a habit. Early morning is also a good time to set an intention for your day. What is your mantra? “I am strong”, “I am happy”, “I am creative”. The mind is powerful so set yours up to create the outcome that you want.
- Bathe yourself in some sunlight: Find out when the sun rises and make it a point to greet the sun every day. Some of your most



creative ideas can be realized when the day is young and the surroundings are quiet. Throughout your day, attempt to step outside if for only a few minutes. If you are fortunate to have classes in various buildings, moving from one to another allows you to add steps to your day and the opportunity to immerse briefly in the sunlight. Sunlight improves mood, helps the body make its own vitamin D, and assists with a good night's sleep.

- Consume a breakfast that includes protein, proper hydration with water throughout the day, and a midday meal approximately 3-4 hours following breakfast.

Tip 3: Immune Boosters

Besides washing your hands with soap and water, you can keep your immune system strong to fight off those pesky viruses that students are more than willing to share with this nutrition tip:

Protein: The body cannot make protein, so it must come from food. We take for granted that protein from food provides the amino acids needed for antibodies, a component of the immune system. So, where does protein come from?



The following table lists a few protein sources:

Animal based Protein	Plant-based Protein
Beef, Pork, Lamb	Soy: tofu, tempeh
Poultry: chicken, turkey	Gluten
Fin Fish: salmon, tuna, Mahi	Hemp
Shellfish: crab, shrimp, lobster	Nuts/Seeds
Dairy products: cow milk, yogurt, cheese	Grains (wheat, corn)
Goat milk products	Vegetables
Nut butters	Legumes/beans

In general, due to the popularity of high protein diets, “Keto” diets, and other fad diets, many people consume adequate amounts of protein but there are also many who do not. If you are a breakfast skipper or exclude protein from your first meal of the day, you could be at risk. If adequate protein is not consumed in the diet on a regular basis, the body will take what it needs from your muscle, leaving you weakened, and not strengthened. As earlier mentioned, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics position paper <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26920240> outlining carbohydrate requirements based upon time spent in activity, it also provides guidance regarding our protein needs.

Each person’s protein need will vary based upon age, gender, physical activity, and fitness goals. Animal protein foods tend to be more expensive than carbohydrate foods so in addition to the lack of health benefits by consuming too much, it can be costly.

Tip 4: Vitamins A, C, & E from Food

ACE is easy to remember. These are antioxidants that fight free radical damage and keep the immune system strong. Try to consume these foods on a regular basis. Another way to recognize them is by color. “Eat the Rainbow”, including a variety of colors throughout the day.



Vitamin A	Vitamin C	Vitamin E
Dark, leafy greens	Oranges, Grapefruits	Nuts and seeds
Tomatoes	Strawberries	Vegetable oils
Carrots	Kiwi	Whole grains
Sweet Potatoes	Broccoli	Spinach
Eggs	Potatoes	Avocado
Fortified dairy	Cantaloupe	Apricots
Sweet peppers	Watermelon	Turnip greens

Tip 5: Adequate Iron Intake: Who Might Be at Risk?

Iron deficiency anemia is common worldwide. In the United States, approximately ten million people are iron deficient and half of those have iron deficiency anemia <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3685880/>. This can be prevented with adequate iron intake. Symptoms of low iron levels include fatigue, weakness, headache, dizziness, cold hands and feet. Women are at higher risk than men due to typically a lower caloric intake and monthly iron losses due to menstruation.

There are two types of iron in food: heme and non-heme. Heme iron is the iron found in animal foods and it is typically well absorbed by the body. Plant sourced iron or non-heme iron is less well absorbed. Therefore, someone following a plant-based diet may possibly consume adequate iron but not be efficient at absorbing it. There are also other factors to take into consideration such as fiber which can impede iron absorption. A well-planned plant-based diet is typically high in fiber due to consumption of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits. One way to enhance iron absorption from food is to include vitamin C rich foods with meals that have a good iron source. The following list is iron rich food from most to least:

Animal-based	Plant-based
Beef	Iron-enriched breakfast cereals, breads
Chicken livers	Cooked beans
Clams, mussels, oysters	Tofu
Sardines	Baked potato
Chicken, Turkey, Lamb, Veal	Split peas
	Nuts/seeds

Tip 6: Vitamin B-12 from Food or Supplements: Who Might Be at Risk?

Adequate vitamin B-12 levels are essential to prevent megaloblastic anemia. This condition is characterized by irritability, fatigue, weakness, and trouble walking. In some cases, people may not feel any symptoms so in addition to regular yearly physical measurements of iron, vitamin B12 would also be a good one to check. Prolonged deficiency can cause permanent neurological damage.

Vitamin B12 is found only in animal foods and dietary supplements. Someone following a vegan diet (no animal foods) or even a vegetarian diet that includes milk or egg could be at risk. Also, people who have had surgery on the digestive tract could be at risk. Vitamin B12 is a supplement that is water soluble so the body should take what it needs and excrete the rest through urination. In some cases, oral vitamin B12 supplementation is not absorbed so an intramuscular injection is required on a monthly basis. The following table lists food sources of vitamin B12:

Animal-based	Plant-based
Milk from animals, cheese, yogurt	Fortified cereals
Eggs	Nutritional yeast
All meats	Fortified soy, rice, hemp, almond milks
Poultry	Yeast extracts
Fish and Seafood	Fortified vegetarian burgers/meat analogues

Tip 7: Mood Lifters: Everyone has a bad day, but did you know your food can contribute to that?

One of the best ways to ensure a good mood is to have gotten a restful night's sleep for a duration of seven to nine hours. Some people thrive on more or less but everyone needs to rest their physical body and their brain. Sleep is the time when the body's clean-up crew comes out and "empties the trash" both physically and mentally. Our body can rejuvenate but it must be given these restful periods where there is no stimulation, visually or auditorily, and the digestive track is not busy breaking down, transporting, assimilating, or storing nutrients. There is evidence that lack of sleep

contributes to weight gain; that alone should encourage us to get a good night's rest.

Second to a good night's sleep is the habit of eating at regular intervals. Our brain's preferred source of fuel is glucose. Glucose is the breakdown of carbohydrates which are primarily found in grains, fruits, dairy, and lesser amounts in vegetables. The first meal of the day should include complex carbohydrates such as oatmeal, barley, a minimally processed bread, or fresh fruit with a fibrous skin. Some of the popular "Smoothie" bars serve highly processed, added sugar, high carbohydrate drinks which can be a morning "pick me up" but also lead to a crash within an hour.



Eating at regular intervals means allowing the body to fully digest the meal that was consumed and additional time before the next meal. Depending on the size of the meal, usually eating every three to five hours. You can also plan your meals in a way that they keep you satisfied longer. For example, a meal that consists of two eggs, a piece of whole grain toast,

avocado, and sliced tomato will keep someone satiated much longer than a commercial fruited yogurt. You may have guessed why; the protein and the small amount of fat from the egg yolk and avocado take longer to digest thus contributing to satiety and an overall sense of wellbeing.

Our mood can also be linked to the amount of Omega 3 fatty acids in our diet. Omega 3 fatty acids are found in fish, flax, walnuts, fortified eggs, and other fortified foods. Low vitamin D levels have been linked to depression. If you do not know your vitamin D status, ask your physician to order this blood test. Vitamin D from food can be found in the fattier fish such as salmon and mackerel or fortified foods such as orange juice and milk. We can also make our own vitamin D from adequate sun exposure but this is tricky due to many factors such as the latitude where we reside, the pigment of our skin (darker skins have a harder time synthesizing vitamin D), amount of time spent outdoors, and the use of sunscreen products. In many cases, a vitamin D supplement is required.

Tip 8: Drag Me Down Foods and Beverages

This discussion would be incomplete without attention given to foods which sometimes appear to pick us up but leave us feeling down.

Caffeine is one of the most studied compounds. It stimulates the central nervous system, increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and alertness. When exercising, it reduces the perception of effort so we may work harder and longer. Under the fasted state, it increases the breakdown of stored fat to be used as an energy source during moderate intensity exercise thus preserving glucose and stored carbohydrates for that last burst of energy across the finish line.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has established a guideline for safe caffeine intake for adults which is 400 mg per day. This is where it gets interesting because a Starbucks Grande has 330 mg and a Venti 415 mg. Consider all the possible sources of caffeine in your diet: coffee, tea, soda, and energy drinks. It is easy to see how someone may exceed the safe limit. Excess caffeine can exacerbate health conditions such as anxiety, high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, and insomnia.

Caffeine sourced from coffee has been shown to have health benefits such as reduced risk of type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer's disease and protection against cirrhosis of the liver and Parkinson's disease. Some of the health benefits of coffee and caffeine are lost when the coffee is consumed in "dessert" form. Yes, your dressed-up morning "Joe" can have all the calories, sugar, and fat of a serving of cake. Consumed in its simple form, unadulterated, in the appropriate amounts, coffee can be a health benefit.

Besides the elaborate coffee concoctions, sweetened teas can not only be a source of caffeine but also simple sugars. Your best bet is to read the product label or look up the nutritional information online if you are purchasing tea from a food or beverage chain. Caffeinated tea, whether it is green or black, offers health benefits, so its consumption is desirable. With all the herbal teas available, it is easy to try many different flavors, most of which have a naturally sweet taste, so no additional sweeteners are required.

Being a teacher is a high-risk job from a nutritional perspective due to well-intentioned students and parents who give gifts of candy, cookies, muffins, doughnuts, and pastries. These may be easy to accept and consume in moderation when you are well rested and fed, but when you are lacking sleep and hungry (a bad combination), it is much more difficult to resist. These foods besides being high in total calories, saturated fat, preservatives,

and simple sugars, are also devoid of many nutrients thus robbing you of optimal health. Your best bet is to have a strategy for food gifts. What is your strategy? Plan it out in advance of the high-risk times such as holidays and end of year events.

Another behavior which will zap your energy midday is the high fat meal at lunch or overeating in general. No matter how healthy the meal, excess volume is going to literally “weigh you down” and make you tired for the second half of your day. Your body’s energy is diverted to the digestive tract to break down, transport, and absorb nutrients. This is not what you want.

Dietary fat slows the rate of gastric emptying and is harder to digest. In small amounts, fat can contribute to satiety and provide fat soluble vitamins such as vitamins A, D, E, and K, so we do need some fat. A good idea to reduce fat consumption is to avoid fried foods; it is that simple. Most school cafeterias offer french fries and chicken fingers but also excessively oil their vegetables, rice, pasta, and potatoes. Again, bringing your own lunch will solve this problem.

Last on the list of “Drag me down” foods and beverages is alcohol. While you may feel like you “deserve” a glass of wine or other alcoholic beverage after a hard day of work, using “wine to unwind” can be counterproductive because alcohol depresses the central nervous system. It can leave you feeling tired and sad. Alcohol provides additional calories to the diet without providing any essential nutrients. Often alcohol can enhance the appetite resulting in the consumption of larger portions of food.

Chronic alcohol intake can deplete certain nutrients such as thiamin, vitamin B12, folic acid, and zinc. There are a few documented benefits to alcohol consumption such as an elevation in the high-density lipoprotein fraction of cholesterol, but the detriment list is much longer. Create a list of healthier ways to unwind from your day: a walk outside, a good stretch, or a yoga class.

Tip 9 Barriers to good nutrition

We all have our excuses as to why we do not eat better. Often, we have the knowledge but have not put it into practice. My suggestion is to start simple. Identify one or two key changes that you wish to make in the week ahead, for example: “I will bring my lunch to work on Monday and Wednesday this week” or “I will shop for healthy snacks on Sunday to stock up for the

work week”. Follow through with your plan and then reevaluate and modify as needed. I am also an educator and find that bringing my own lunch to work and having healthy snacks available contributes to health, energy, and a positive mood throughout the day. Below are some quick tips for removing barriers to good nutrition:

- **Time Savers:** pre-cut fruit and vegetables; healthy versions of frozen meals; home delivered recipe items that only require “assembly”; leftovers from a previous meal.
- **Interest:** Some people have no interest in food shopping or preparation so lucky for them we live in the era of home delivered meal service which can be a time saver and nutritious too. Many of the companies provide specialty meals such as gluten free, dairy free, calorie controlled, high protein, etc.
- **Knowledge:** We might take for granted that everyone knows how to cook but my experience in the collegiate setting reminds me that education in this area is required beginning with a basic nutrition course. What could be more important than knowing how to feed yourself properly and the physiology of how the nutrients in our food interact with our genes?
- **Cooking skills:** As cooking shows have popularized cooking but traditional cooking schools are closing their doors, you can rely on the internet, YouTube, and other social media outlets to learn how to use a knife, spiralizer, sauté, roast, or broil. You can learn in your own space and at your convenience. If teaching yourself does not excite you, some grocery chains have started their own cooking classes. Many of these classes have “themes” so you can choose the level and the topic of focus.

Tip 10: Support Systems for Healthy Eating

Support system at work and/or at home: multi-tasking has become the norm, and everyone needs a little help sometimes. Consider who in your life you could ask for assistance with meal prep? Children love to create in the kitchen so consider giving them small tasks that are age appropriate. Meal sharing can also be done among neighbors and work colleagues. Imagine setting up a meal sharing group at work; all you need is 5 members that commit to bringing a nutritious lunch for the group one day per week. You only plan 1 meal but enjoy a home prepared meal 5 days that week!

Stress Eating/Mindless Eating: Oh dear— “stress”; it is a condition that many people experience all too frequently. Stress can spur us to needed action and motivate us to perform at our highest level, but chronic stress can wear you down and lead to health problems. Since chronic stress usually makes us feel bad, we search for something that makes us feel good: food. Even the healthiest food eaten under stressful conditions can negatively impact our health. Stress-eating can be mind-less eating; we are searching to feel better, to alleviate the thoughts that are racing through our brain and a repetitive act such as chewing can temporarily do that. The downside of this habit is typically unwanted weight gain.

The opposite of this is “Mindful Eating”. Eating with attention, noticing the flavor, texture, color, and temperature of a food while also paying attention to the body’s signal that enough has been consumed to keep the person sated until the next eating occasion. This is one area where multi-tasking can be detrimental. When we eat and do anything else, we divert attention from the food and our natural ability to determine when we have had enough to eat. Try eating as a solitary activity, take your time and thoroughly enjoy your meal. Take frequent pauses to “check-in” to see if you have had enough to satisfy but not too much that is going to weigh you down and make you lethargic. Just becoming a more “Mindful Eater” can resolve stomach issues, weight issues, and improve your overall nutrition status.

- Food gifts: Teaching is a noble profession and certainly “gifts” are appreciated but excess intake of cookies, cupcakes, muffins, candy, and other sweet treats can become a health hazard. Teachers need a strategy in this area. You certainly have the option to have “just a bite”, “save for later”, or say “No thank you”. One of the best strategies to resist the temptation is to be well fed, you have eaten a good breakfast, a satisfying lunch, so it becomes much easier to put the sweet treat on the back burner. It may be possible, depending on the educational setting, to enable a “No Food Gifts” policy. Instead of honoring and thanking the teacher with food, the same expense could be added to a gift card. Then, the teacher can choose a gift they would like.

To sum it up, teachers need to plan their nutrition strategy in the same thoughtful way that they develop a lesson plan for the classroom. Science points to the plant-based eating pattern and the Mediterranean way of eating as being the healthiest so we know what to eat. Now take that information and make your next move toward healthier eating, whether it is choosing a mood lifting lunch or energizing snack. The choice is yours!

CHAPTER 2

YOGA AND MEDITATION

CAITLIN MORRIS

As mentioned throughout this book, it is vital to the livelihood of teachers to make a conscious effort for self-care. Throughout this chapter, I will outline nine separate yoga poses in detail that you can do individually, or together as a small flow. This is a sure way to connect more with yourself, therefore allowing you to connect more deeply to your students. There is a lot to be said about the interrelation of yoga and science, and the meeting of eastern ideology and western science.

Yoga is meditation in movement, so with consistent practice, you begin to change from the inside out. Yoga helps reduce the symptoms and/or risk of stress, insomnia, anxiety, depression, aches and pains, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, cancer and so much more. It improves balance, flexibility, the immune system, and your overall well-being.

I have seen this first-hand growing up, when my grandmother was diagnosed with breast cancer, not once, but twice. I am forever thankful to her for introducing the rest of the family to yoga. She overcame the cancer both times and gives many thanks to her practice. I remember after she recovered, she gave me a book called the *Unconditional Life* by Deepak Chopra where he told many stories of the power of the mind as it relates to physical health. Watching her heal her mind and body while staying consistent in yoga and meditation has been a true testimony to us all. I am not saying that yoga can singlehandedly cure disease but adding it to your self-care routine can certainly assist with preventing/healing things such as disease that are holding you back.

In yoga everything is about balance, as with life. Let's start with the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS). The SNS is like your flight or fight response. On the opposing side, you have your Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS), which provides your body recovery after a stressful

situation. I teach vinyasa yoga, in which I need to create a flow that provides a balance between these two. Two is better than one and finding a balance between the two provides many more benefits. As the asanas, or poses, can become challenging (especially after a few breaths), you begin to see the importance of your inner dialogue. There is a yoga sutra that reads Sat Chit Ananda: “your inner dialogue reflects the fire of your soul.” I always like to remind my students to “remember who you are” after reading this sutra. Repeated thoughts or actions can begin to rewire your brain. This is why consistency in your practice will become addicting. I guarantee you will start to feel this shift and want to spread the same feeling to your students. Each pose is illustrated by an image of me and is a tip for better self-care.

Pose 1: Child’s Pose



Make your way into your child’s pose, or *balasana*, by following my cues. If available, lay down a mat or towel to make your practice a little bit more comfortable. Take your big toes to touch toward the back of your space, take your knees out wide and start to walk your hands toward the top of your space. From here, start to melt your hips back to your heels and let your belly drop between your thighs. Close the eyes and take five deep rounds of breath. On your inhales count slowly to four and exhale a little bit slower to the count of four. Keep counting until the breath comes naturally to you. Don’t think too much about the logistics, just relax and let the pose do the work. After five rounds of breath, see if you feel any different, and stay as long as you want.

Often, this is the first pose in a flow. Also, a great pose to pause in when the practice gets difficult or you need a break. The great thing about yoga, is that it is completely your practice. As we all have different bodies, yoga is less about right or wrong and more about what feels best in your body. So

play around with the poses, shift your eye gaze, hand and feet placement until you find your sweet spot. If you wish to activate your child's pose and invite more energy in, pick up your elbows, come onto your fingertips and continue reaching your hands toward the top of your space. From there, you can add a lateral stretch, walking your hands and torso off the mat to the right and left side. If you want to relax more, take your hands to cup your heels and tuck your chin in towards your chest as you let your shoulders round.

This is a great pose to play around with where you are sending your breath. If you make a conscious effort to send the breath to the hips, you will start to feel an expansion of space and therefore a deeper stretch there. I like to tell my students to focus on expanding the ribs and the lungs with every inhale. This is where you can facilitate steady, deep breathing that you can carry with you throughout the rest of your practice. Also, take some time in your child's pose to set an intention. Maybe set an intention for your practice, your day, or make a commitment to send this light energy to someone who may need it more than you. Take a moment to breathe in light and gratitude. This is a great place to stay and meditate as you increasingly let everything else go. Become present on your mat and experience instant relaxation and decompression here.

Balasana is an accessible and meditative pose. Whenever you need to decompress, come to your child's pose. Stay as long as you'd like, and then practice taking your meditative mindset off of your mat and into your day. Once you get used to doing this, you will learn to "take your child's pose" mentally without ever physically getting into the pose.

Pose 2: Downward Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)



From your child's pose, tuck your toes under, lift the knees and work your sits bones toward the sky. Start to press away from your hands, melt your chest back to the thighs and ensure that your head is behind your arms. It is okay if your heels don't touch the mat just yet, because they will eventually. See if it feels better for you to keep your legs straight, or to keep a slight bend in the knees.

Down dog is a pose that may not be easy to hold for an extended amount of time at first. When I first started practicing, I remember feeling weak and tired here. This is where you can start to work on guiding your inner dialogue. Instead of focusing on the fact that you are uncomfortable, take a moment of gratitude that your body can actually allow you to get into this pose. Going back to your SNS "fight or flight" mode, make a commitment to yourself to not run from the pose when it gets difficult. Decide to stay and get stronger. I love to remind my students (and myself) that you can do anything for a certain amount of seconds. Everything is temporary. As we know, growth always happens in a state of unease.

If you want to fire up your practice, there are many fun variations to take here. Start by alternating bending each knee as you continue to lift your hips high and melt your chest back. If you are ready for more of a stretch, lift your right leg up and back into one-legged dog. Keep pressing away from your hands and let your lifted knee bend and begin to move organically. Circle out the ankle, the hip, follow your body and stay connected to your breath. Once you are satisfied, do this with your left leg.

This could be a fun pose to practice in a classroom setting. Maybe give your students an opportunity to move the energy around in their body and take a quick down dog stretch! If you really want to have some fun, give balancing down dog a shot! From down dog, lift the right leg up and back to one legged dog. Next, lift your left arm off of the ground. More than likely, this will be very difficult at first, but it is fascinating how much easier it gets each time you try it. Remember here that yoga has an element of lightness to it, so don't take yourself too seriously, especially when trying a more challenging pose.

Pose 3 – Warrior 1 (Virabhadrasana I)



From your downward facing dog, sweep your right leg up and back to one legged dog. Get high on the ball of your left foot, look forward, and take your right knee to your nose (nasasana). Work on getting your thighs up toward your chest and step your right foot through your hands into a right-side lunge. Drop your back foot 45 degrees, and slowly lift your torso and arms up toward the sky. Begin to play around with your alignment. The goal is to square the shoulders toward the front, so feel free to move your right foot out to the right a couple of inches. Try to keep the biceps by the ears, palms facing one another and to keep the energy moving through the fingertips.

Virabhadrasana is a mythological Hindu warrior that was known for being powerful and fierce. In any variation of the warrior poses, you will feel the same. This is a great pose to use to track your progress as you get more consistent with your practice. The squaring of the shoulders will start to come more naturally, the breath will flow more easily and you will eventually find a bit of relaxation here. It always helps me foundationally to press into the outer blade of the back foot as to lift the inner arch. Just like your foundation is a vital part of your poses, self-care is a vital part of your career. Make a commitment here to make self-care part of your foundation.

In the final variation of this pose, the shoulders and hips will be square to the front. There is absolutely no pressure to get to the “perfect” alignment of any of the poses, but it is important to know where you are going and to set goals for yourself. Just like we teach our students not to stay stagnant, part of our self-care is to keep growing individually as well. One of my favorite quotes used in yoga is to “live on the mat the way you wish to live

off of the mat.” Be adventurous, have fun, try new things, and don’t take yourself too seriously.

Pose 4 – Warrior 3 (Virabhadrasana III)



From Warrior 1, start by bringing your hands together to heart center. Shift all of your weight into your front foot and reach the crown of the head forward as you pick up your back leg and extend it behind you. See if you can keep your back leg active, inner flexing the foot, and think of coming into a “capital T” position.

This is your first balancing pose- fun! Be patient with yourself. Remember how important foundation is and work on pressing into the 3 main areas of your standing foot. Press into the big toe mound, the root of your pinky toe and the heel of the foot. Just imagine pressing down into these areas to lift your arch upward. Ground force reaction is big at play here, press down to lift up! Now focus on your breathing and see if it is helping or hurting your practice. One of the many functions of your breath in yoga is to help clear your mind, which helps tremendously in balancing postures. In all of the asanas (yoga postures), there is much emphasis on the importance of full body integration.

If you want to play with more arm variations, try extending your arms out in front of you with palms facing one another. See if you can extend your arms forward at the same time, extending your lifted leg behind you. If you fall, get right back up and try it again! Consistency is key as it is with anything in life. Yoga is a very humbling and empowering experience all in one and will show you how strong you truly are. In my opinion, this shows up even more mentally than physically.