

Six Keys to Optimizing Your Health, Longevity and Well-Being

It's pretty safe to say that everyone wants to experience optimal health. It's also pretty safe to say that most of us know the steps we should be taking to enjoy those benefits—but that we too often don't bother.

Enter Shawn Wells, a leading nutritional biochemist and dietitian. His book, *The Energy Formula*, lays out six critical steps that can potentially help people gain focus, be more productive and unleash their full potential. He's even framed his advice in a way that makes it easier to remember and implement:

Experiment • Nutrition • Exercise • Routine • Growth • Your Tribe

Experiment. Until you scientifically track something, it's very difficult to know how you are doing and whether any changes you make are providing positive results. So begin with a series of lab tests to assess your mitochondria. Wells notes that nearly every disease and perhaps even aging itself is tied to mitochondrial health and function. Additionally, Wells suggests two lab tests that can help you get a strong general baseline to gauge future progress:

- *Vitamin D*, which not only supports the immune system and prevents infection but also is related to many other body functions
- *Lipoprotein(a)*, which is correlated to cardiovascular disease risk and is superior to other heart-related tests like those for HDL, LDL and total cholesterol

Next, use a "wearable" that tracks your sleep quality, heart rate variability and other important data points. The best of these devices will not only provide you a baseline of important metrics but can also track the duration and quality of your sleep. The result: cumulative data and specific readouts of exactly where you currently stand.

Nutrition. Keep things simple here. The best diet is one focused on whole foods with as little processing and as few additives as possible. Armed with this foundational view, your own bio-individuality and preferences can help point to which kind of whole-foods-based lifestyle diet is best for you. Three options to consider are:

- The ketogenesis (or "keto") diet, which is 0-10 percent carbohydrates, 20-25 percent protein, and 65-75 percent fats
- The Mediterranean diet, which is 10 percent meats and sweets, 10 percent poultry and eggs, 10 percent seafood, and 70 percent vegetables and fats
- The Paleolithic (or "paleo") diet, which is 15 percent nuts and berries, 15 percent fruits with a low glycemic index (ones that don't spike blood sugar), 30 percent meat and seafood, and 40 percent vegetables

Finally, Wells is a proponent of the supplement *berberine*, which helps lower glucose levels.

FOUR MORE ASPECTS OF ENERGY

Exercise. Wells notes that each additional hour of daily sitting increases all-cause mortality rates by about 2 percent. One solution is movement breaks and “exercise snacks.” The idea is that if you have only one hour a day to dedicate to movement and exercise, you are better off breaking that up into 12 five-minute segments than doing it all at once. You can walk or run inside or outside, do air squats, do planks, climb stairs, bounce on a mini-trampoline, jump rope or do anything else that is fun and at least moderately raises your heart rate.

Routine. Seek to align your body with your circadian rhythm and do whatever else is necessary to get sufficient sleep. Health, healing, exercise, mood, performance, disease resistance and longevity itself have all been shown to be directly related to sleep.

The second routine focus is starting our days the right way to set ourselves up for success—not stagnation. Wells recommends waking up 30 minutes earlier than you normally do so you can take your time and engage in the following types of activities:

- Take in bright light early in the day.
- Meditate, or do a mindfulness or breathwork practice—such as deep breathing through the nose with slow exhales.
- Stretch and take a short walk.
- Hydrate and eat a high-quality breakfast.

Growth. Growth refers to having a growth mindset—whether it is with regard to your body, your mind, your business or career, or your inner emotional and spiritual life. For example, to get your body to the next step, one very powerful and increasingly popular tool is intermittent fasting. Likewise, for developing our inner lives, Wells suggests considering the Japanese concept of “ikigai,” which translates to “reason for being”—or, as Wells puts it, your “reason to jump out of bed in the morning.” A sense of purpose and a growth mindset go hand in hand. To be fully energized, we have to discover for ourselves what works at every level of our bio-individuality, from the physical to the spiritual.

Your tribe. A 75-year Harvard study looked at many factors (such as money, race and occupation) to see what was most important for healthy aging. Ultimately, the most critical factor for leading a healthy, happy and long life was the quality of our close relationships.

The key, however, is not necessarily having a lot of friends or even being in a long-term relationship. What really matters is whether there are others in your life with whom you can be vulnerable and authentic. Knowing we can rely on others relaxes the nervous system, helps keep the brain healthy, and reduces both physical and emotional pain.

Conclusion

Some of this advice may be new and surprising to you, and some of it you may have already known for a long time. But by having it put together in an organized way that connects the dots, you may find it easier to turn insights into action steps that bring you closer to living your best life.