



# MY DECADE LIVING WITH IBS-D

---

The slow journey to regaining my health

REBECCA ROSE THERING

# Introduction

Hi there! I'm Rebecca, and for most of my 20s I suffered from IBS-D: Irritable Bowel Syndrome - Diarrhea. It sounds a lot better as an acronym, doesn't it? I'd often use those four letters or simply tell people I have a "digestive disorder" to avoid saying "irritable," "bowel," or "diarrhea."

But that's the truth: I had diarrhea every day for nearly a decade. "Every day" is certainly a shocker, but the word that jumps out to me now is "had." That's right, I don't have IBS any more! I'm grateful to have regular bowel movements like I did as a child. It was a long journey, though.

During the earlier part of my time with IBS, I did have hope that I could change my health around. I would bring it into focus, day after day, but soon another year would go by with daily diarrhea. And another. And another. It got to the point where I could no longer imagine myself without this condition. Was this going to be my reality forever?

In the pages to follow you'll read my story—from being a midwestern kid in the '90s to spending some of my 20s living abroad in Spain, South Korea, and France—through the lens of my digestive health.

I'm sharing this journey freely and publicly in the hopes that you will feel less alone, be encouraged to advocate for yourself when interacting with health professionals, perhaps discover some new ideas to try, and see that big transformation happens one day at a time.

Before we dive in, here's a quick disclaimer just so it's super clear: I am not a medical professional and the information in this e-book is not meant to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Sound good? Okay, here we go!

# Contents

## *Part One: The Beginning*..... 4

Childhood Diet.....	4
Bagels and Cream Cheese.....	5
Eating in College.....	5
Spain.....	7
Senior Year: Enough Is Enough.....	8
Meeting the Gastroenterologist.....	9
Taking on IBS.....	10
Eastern Medicine in Korea.....	11

## *Part Two: Have Your Health*..... 12

The 4-Hour Body.....	12
Unexpected Inspiration to Overcome My IBS.....	15
What Does It Mean to Be Healthy?.....	16
Gradually Eating "New" Foods.....	19
Taking Probiotics Daily.....	21
Whole Foods: Reductionism vs. Wholeism.....	23
Struggles of Eating WFPB with Friends Who Don't.....	24
Health Supplements: Take Them or Not?.....	25
IBS-D Troubles While Traveling.....	28
Why I Stopped Taking Probiotics.....	29
Living Without a Microwave.....	31
Prebiotics.....	33
Cultivate Gratitude: Living Without.....	36
Health Checkpoint: Rebecca, June 2014.....	38
Eating for IBS.....	40
The Low FODMAP Diet.....	44
Korean Eastern Medicine Experience.....	48
Food Over Medicine: The Conversation That Could Change Your Life.....	51
During Low Times, Find One Positive.....	57

November Health Updates .....	58
James Clear: 18 Superb Posts for Better Health .....	60
Where Do Vegetarians and Vegans Get Their Protein? .....	62
The Importance of Gratitude .....	64
Swanson Soil-Based Organisms: A Worthy Supplement? .....	65
Fed Up: It's Time to Get Real About Our Food .....	68
The Omnivore's Dilemma.....	72
Sticking with Dietary Restrictions Over the Holidays .....	76
2015 Health Resolutions .....	79

## *Part Three: The Recovery*

Closing <i>Have Your Health</i> and Moving to France .....	81
Personal Sabbatical.....	82
Conservation Corps.....	83
Going (Almost) Vegan .....	84

*Conclusion.....* 86

*Health Journey Influences.....* 88

*Update: August 2022.....* 89

*About the Author.....* 95



# *Part One: The Beginning*

## *Childhood Diet*

I grew up in a family of six and we ate typical American food. Fridays were TV-dinner nights, and we kids would always be so excited to pick out our blue children's TV dinners from the grocery store. If mine had a chocolate brownie in one of the smaller three compartments, that was the best! Saturday mornings were "Donut Days," and the first kid to wake up had their pick of donut for Saturday morning cartoons.

My mom made "casserole with the funny noodles" a lot (rice with a can of Campbell's cream of mushroom/chicken, topped with crunchy La Choy chow mein noodles), along with macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes, and spaghetti. It wasn't out of the norm for my parents to order pizza for delivery, or to go to McDonald's, Arby's, or Subway if we were out and about in the van. Cold lunch for school was always a PB&J with carrot sticks (packed ourselves) and on Tuesdays we'd also get to bring along a "Tuesday Treat" (a Little Debbie/Hostess snack). The fruits/veggies I was regularly exposed to as a child were carrots, apples, bananas, corn, potatoes, and broccoli.



## *Bagels and Cream Cheese*

In high school I ate hot lunch more often than not, which would usually be french fries and pizza. My freshman year (2004) I was still a cello player in my state's youth symphony orchestra. Every Saturday morning on our way to rehearsal we stopped at Kwik-Trip for bagels, as I had the three previous years I was in this orchestra with my sister. I either ate my bagel in the van on the way to rehearsal, or spread on the cream cheese and dug in once I got there. My sister's rehearsal began an hour before mine, so I would always have some time to hang out and eat my bagel breakfast.

At some point that year my stomach started feeling upset before my rehearsals, which sent me to the bathroom. Soon I was spending much of that pre-rehearsal hour in the bathroom—in discomfort. This continued for weeks. I must have shared this information with my mother, because she suggested that perhaps I was becoming lactose intolerant, and the cream cheese was upsetting my stomach. I researched this and found out many people do become lactose intolerant later in life, as the ability to digest lactose is actually a mutation from "the norm."

I ditched the cream cheese and things were all right as far as I can remember. When I had a physical that summer (or it could have been years later when I joined cross country my senior year, who knows), I mentioned to my doctor that we thought I might be lactose intolerant. So my doctor printed out a two-page informational handout about lactose intolerance—information I'd already found myself on the internet—and sent me on my way. No test, nothing.

For a period of time I took Lactaid chewable tablets when eating dairy, but eventually I switched to soy milk and stopped eating ice cream—though pizza was something I still ate.

## *Eating in College*

Freshman year of college I began an office job in a department of the university. One of my coworkers kept a candy dish full of jolly ranchers in our office. One of my first days of work, I ate one. Immediately afterwards I didn't feel so well in my stomach and subsequently spent some time in the bathroom. Another afternoon or two the same thing happened after eating a jolly rancher in the office, so I attributed it to the hard candy and stopped eating it.

During those first two years of college, many more foods began to upset my stomach. Peanut

butter and jelly sandwiches made me feel a certain way. If I had any candy with milk chocolate, I was instantly in the bathroom with diarrhea. Tortilla chips. Plain noodles with butter and parmesan at Noodles and Company. The list goes on.

So I began to drink Pepto Bismol. I had it so often that I would drink straight from the bottle, and kept a stock of extra bottles in my dorm-room closet. This was how I thought the system worked: If you have an ailment (diarrhea), you take a medicine (like Pepto Bismol) to get rid of the symptoms.

While living in the dorms I would sometimes eat canned food (like Spaghettios) microwaved in my room, otherwise I was at the dining hall, which I thought had a nice variety of good meals. When I lived off campus my sophomore year, my cupboards were usually stocked with cans, and my freezer with pre-made meals. These were the same habits of my roommate; I hadn't been exposed to any other way of grocery shopping and cooking.



By this time I was completely used to needing to rush to bathrooms during the day. I spent so much time making uncomfortable noises in stalls, that I would often think about how all bathrooms should have background music. I would curse the silence whenever someone else was in another stall at the same time as me, trying to hold back until they left, but I usually wasn't in control. On the flip side, I would be so grateful and relieved when I'd hear a sink or hand dryer turn on, or when the bathroom had loud music playing. I would praise any background buzz and try to quickly make all of the noises I needed to make.

A final notable happening from this period involved a good friend from high school, John, who was dealing with his own health issues at the time. One day at his house I noticed a notecard on their family fridge, written in his mom's handwriting. It said:

***With every food choice you make, you're either investing in your wellness or subsidizing your illness.***

I took a picture of the quote and set it as my phone background. Now whenever I checked the time on my phone, I was reminded that every food choice mattered if I wanted to be well. My actions certainly weren't aligned with this attitude at that point, but I would return to this mantra years later when my digestive health returned to the top of my focus.

## *Spain*

I spent my junior year of college living and studying in Madrid, Spain. Things were better for a little upon arrival, but then it all came back: the urgency, the noises, the discomfort. Most foods set it off, most of the year. There aren't very many public restrooms in Madrid, so I would have to plan ahead each time I met up with friends in the city center, knowing where the closest McDonald's was, for example.

The hardest food for me to cut out was chocolate. Especially when fresh *napolitanas* were available all over Madrid! In January of that year, I finally decided to actively try not to eat chocolate. I made it 15 days before I bought a Twix bar at a grocery store prior to going to a movie. My thoughts through most of the year followed this pattern: I have diarrhea when I don't eat chocolate, so why not eat it anyway and at least I get the pleasure from the taste. If I don't see any improvement when I stop eating it, why shouldn't I eat it?

The big change this year, however, was my diet. A good friend in my study abroad program, Izzy, was a vegetarian who knew how to cook. She came over to my apartment one day and we roasted red peppers and eggplant in the oven, and then used them as toppings on mini-pizzas. I don't think I'd ever knowingly eaten eggplant before that day, and I certainly hadn't ever bought one from a supermarket.

Another day, while lounging at Retiro Park, she offered me some pomegranate seeds. "No thanks," I said, uninterested in this unfamiliar food. "Have you ever even *had* pomegranate seeds?" she challenged. "Uh, okay, I'll try one." They were so good! I also started snacking on clementines and



oranges in class, thanks to Izzy eating and offering them to me. Two more fruits I'd never previously eaten or bought!

So although my digestion issues were the same, this is the year my taste buds began expanding, as I started to branch out little by little, eating new fruits and vegetables.

## *Senior Year: Enough Is Enough*

I returned to Wisconsin for my senior year of college, and still couldn't tell a difference with my digestion. In February of 2011, I blogged:

*It seems to be getting worse. The other week I made a veggie roast with pork. We're talking potatoes, onions, carrots, and pork. Olive oil on top. And some spices. Made me so sick so sick so sick. And a frozen Thai meal I tried from Trader Joe's one day. Not a single dairy ingredient at all, and I was so sick so sick so sick. I had gotten so used to the daily bathroom trips. Stopping in during my breaks, while everyone else was in class. Waiting until public bathrooms were empty before making my uncomfortable noises and letting my achy stomach unload.*

*Finally I decided enough was enough, I want to be tested for every food allergy possible and find out what the heck I'm allergic to. I couldn't piece it together because the most random foods would set me off. I had that first appointment yesterday.*

The doctor did some sort of skin-prick test, which tested for allergies to 12 different ingredients. I sat nervously. This was the first time I'd gone to a doctor after a solid four years of diarrhea and digestive problems.

He came back a few minutes later with the results: I'm not allergic to milk.

I'M NOT ALLERGIC TO MILK! After nearly seven years thinking I was lactose intolerant! Suddenly I felt a lump rise from my gut into my throat, and I began to cry right then and there. I couldn't hold it in. My upper-aged male doctor was visibly uncomfortable and didn't know what to do. "Why are you crying?" he asked, which only made it worse.

Why was I crying? Because I was expecting answers. Because I wanted help. Because I wanted to fix this. Because I'd spent four years with this every single day, always needing to know where the nearest restroom was, experiencing uncomfortable feelings and explosions in the bathroom, cleaning up the toilet every time, making embarrassing loud noises, and I was so tired of it. If I

don't have a single food allergy, what could it possibly be? How can I ever be "normal" again? Will I ever be "normal" again?

But instead of answers, the information I heard was that I'm not allergic to milk. Also not allergic to wheat. Not allergic to eggs. Tomatoes. Fish. And seven other ingredients.

So they took a sample of my blood and sent it to Mayo Clinic to double check. Meanwhile they had me set up an appointment with a gastroenterologist. Here's how I closed my blog entry that day:

*I had always just assumed I was allergic to certain foods - because still today I can tell you with 100% confidence certain foods that will set it off. And others won't. But I had never entertained the idea of troubles in the stomach, intestines, something like that. My first doc thought I had some type of illness or business in that area.*

*The appointment is in 2.5 weeks. I'm afraid they won't find anything to diagnose, and this will be my experience with food forever.*

## *Meeting the Gastroenterologist*

To prepare for my appointment, I made a list of all the foods that set off my diarrhea/stomach problems immediately. These were things I'd stopped eating in the past four years, but included the aforementioned jolly ranchers, milk chocolate, PB&J, and pop tarts, for example.

My gastroenterologist spent less than five minutes talking with me about my problems, and didn't take much interest in the food list I'd brought along. She said I have IBS: Irritable Bowel Syndrome, which has no one-size-fits-all "cure," and prescribed me dicyclomine (Bentyl). She told me to eat more fiber and then come back in a month to see how things were going.

I took the medicine—because a doctor had told me to—and also researched online what to eat for more fiber. From the internet I learned that there are two types of fibers: insoluble fiber and soluble fiber. Soluble fiber attracts water, and thus can help with diarrhea, whereas insoluble fiber does not dissolve in water and can be beneficial for those with constipation. I presumed that should be upping my soluble fiber, then, but why the heck didn't my gastroenterologist explain this difference to me? All she said was to eat more fiber.

When I went for my check-in appointment a month later, I told her that I hadn't noticed any difference. So this time she prescribed clidinium-chlordiazepoxide (Librax) as well. She

mentioned that if this didn't work, we might have to do a colonoscopy to see what was going on inside my digestive tract. I was 21 years old, hell no.

I did pick up my new prescription from the pharmacy, but after googling both meds and reading about their scary withdrawal effects, I decided to stop taking them. I couldn't tell a difference with or without, so why would I put these chemicals into my body, chemicals which cause side effects and withdrawal?

## *Taking on IBS*

Instead, now that I had a name for my ailment, IBS, I put six IBS books on hold at the local library and read them all. I read about probiotics and started taking them in May of 2011. I also completely cut out dairy and picked up rice protein powder and glutamine, as I'd read they help IBS sufferers. The more I learned about IBS and digestion, the more I was shocked my gastroenterologist hadn't acted differently.

Why hadn't she explained the cause of IBS to me, or told me about the trigger foods to avoid, or told me about supplements and probiotics which help to rebuild a healthy digestive system? No, she just prescribed a pill and went on with her day. This was the first that my view of health and medical systems began to change. It was also my first lesson in advocating for myself. I learned that I'm in charge of my health, and I need to ask questions and research on my own until I find doctors who are willing to listen and help.

There was one more notable "first" that happened at this time: I made a connection between [the spinal fusion I had at age 16](#) and these current digestive problems. The books I was reading said that antibiotics can wipe out the good bacteria in your gut flora, and I'd surely had plenty of antibiotics and other drugs pumped through me during my spinal operation years earlier. But the doctors hadn't mentioned any of this to me at that time—none of it. Could this have been the cause of it all? I thought it was a likely contributor.

After graduating from college I ended up returning to Spain that fall to teach English in Madrid. I brought packs of probiotics along with me, but didn't notice any major differences during the year. Slowly there became less urgency with my bowel movements, but they were still completely loose and liquid. The toilet in my apartment didn't clear everything off the bowl when I flushed, so I put a cup by the sink and used it to dump water on the sides of the toilet bowl before flushing, to leave it clean. This was simply another small effect of living with IBS, which hardly seemed strange to me because it was such a part of my daily "normal."



In the fall of 2012 I returned to the states and got a job in Wisconsin. I shared an apartment with three other girls my age, 22. Things continued on as “normal” until one day the following summer when I had some blood in my stool, accompanied by lots of pain around my anus. My mom took me in to urgent care, where the doctor put *something* up my anus to get a look. It hurt so very much and caused more bleeding. The woman couldn’t see what she was looking for, so she put it back up again—provoking even more pain.

She was never able to find what she was looking for, but thought I probably had internal hemorrhoids—which I’d never heard of. That afternoon I soaked my butt in a bathtub, and within a few days or a week the pain eventually went away. But that episode served as another wake-up call to me: Your digestive health is not okay.

## *Eastern Medicine in Korea*

In the fall of 2013 I moved to South Korea to teach English at an elementary school for a year. When the calendar turned to 2014, I decided to focus all of my efforts towards improving my digestive health. I started a blog with my then-boyfriend John called *Have Your Health*. He was dealing with Celiac disease and long-term unidentified skin problems, whereas my focus was obviously on digestion. My goal was to write once a week on any topic—what I was learning, reading, testing, etc.

The following section contains those very blog posts, which capture my thoughts/understanding at the time, as well as their natural shift and evolution over time.



## Part 2: Have Your Health

In this section you'll find all of the blog posts I wrote for my blog *Have Your Health* during 2014, appearing exactly as they were when published. These posts provide an up-close look at slow transformations in my understanding of health concepts—which is as close to sharing my real life in real time as possible after the fact.

Feel free to skip around to topics of interest, though reading the entries in order will create an authentic, progressive experience which most closely mirrors my own.

February 15, 2014

### *The 4-Hour Body*

Last month I finished reading [Tim Ferriss's "The 4-Hour Body: An Uncommon Guide to Rapid Fat-loss, Incredible Sex, and Becoming Superhuman."](#) I should note that I only decided to read it after enjoying his "The 4-Hour Workweek" and learning that he's written two other books: this one and "The 4-Hour Chef."

"The 4-Hour Body" spans so many topics, I'd almost say it was too lengthy. However, Ferriss does say at the start that the book is not meant to be read cover to cover; skip around and read what interests you.

Here's a sample of chapter topics so you can see the variety: How to lose weight without exercising, six-minute abs, the 15-minute female orgasm, creating the perfect night's sleep, and jumping higher. Although I'm not interested in weight loss or amazing muscle gain, I wanted to give the book a read anyway, and any information that I could apply to my life would be a bonus.

#### **My Takeaways from "The 4-Hour Body"**

There were many of these bonuses as I made my way through the book, things I never expected to learn while reading:

### ***Photo food journal***

The concept of a "food journal" is nothing new, and I have tried to keep one before when searching for my IBS triggers. I didn't always write immediately after eating; I usually found myself at the end of the day trying to recall what I'd eaten earlier.

Ferriss writes about keeping a photo food journal, something I had never thought about before. That's probably due to the fact that I never owned a smartphone until I moved to Korea this past fall, so it wouldn't have been easy to photograph everything I ate. But if you do have a smartphone, taking a picture of everything you eat for a few consecutive days would really help you make better eating choices. I'll probably make this an action item for myself this month or next.

### ***Healthytoes toe stretchers***

In one chapter Ferriss briefly mentions toe stretchers. I never even knew such a thing existed! Over time, constricting shoes have changed the shape of our toes so that the two outside toes point inwards. I've always said that if there was one thing I could change about my appearance it would be my toes. I have a hammertoe on each foot, which causes the surrounding toes to be a bit crooked as well. And I always thought this is how I am, nothing can be changed.

But toe straighteners exist! And toe stretchers too, which put a little space between the toes. If this could bring my feet back to their natural state, before 25 years of socks and shoes, how incredible. So I bought a pair of "happy feet" socks (toe stretcher) and two toe straighteners. They just arrived in the mail this week, so I'll post an update in a month or so.

### ***Active Release Technique (ART)***

Using Wikipedia's current definition, Active Release Technique (ART) is "a soft tissue system/movement-based technique developed and patented by P. Michael Leahy, DC, CCSP. It is used to treat problems with muscles, tendons, ligaments, fascia and nerves."

After Ferriss had one short ART session, he regained so much internal shoulder rotation movement (the before and after pictures show just how much—it's incredible). It would take just three or four more sessions to completely restore both shoulders. ART prevents many surgeries, and fixes problems that folks have had for years. I hope I won't ever need to seek out an ART practitioner myself, but I'm glad to be aware that this option exists for muscle problems.

### ***Total Immersion Swimming***

I have never been good at swimming. At this point in my life, if I needed to get from point A to point B (and the two points weren't too far apart), I could swim there. I would like to improve my swimming ability, but it has never been a priority, nor did I know how to go about doing so. Ferriss talks about his experience learning the "[Total Immersion Swimming](#)" method, which sounds perfect for me.

By learning this method (watching the DVD and then reading the book), in 10 days he went from being able to swim a maximum of 40 yards (2 pool lengths) to over 40 pool lengths. And when I do pursue this swimming method, apparently Aqua Sphere Kaiman goggles are the best goggles out there, so I made note of the name.

### ***Eggs***

I've been eating so many more eggs during the month after reading this book. I don't dislike eggs, I would just never buy them. And if I would happen to buy them I wouldn't eat them, so I usually just didn't buy them. (I bought a dozen eggs earlier this fall and they sat in my fridge untouched for so long I had to throw them out. I wasn't purposefully avoiding them, I just ate other things and never had the desire to make eggs.)

Ferriss includes eggs or egg whites in many of his muscle-gain or weight-loss diets. Reading about eggs so often caused me to buy a dozen when I walked past them the next week in the grocery store. And I added some scrambled eggs to many of my rice/pasta creations, and now I've been dropping some into soups—delicious!

### ***Comprehensive stool analysis and parasitology***

The more reading that I do, I know a stool analysis would probably provide me with valuable information. Ferriss recommends the "Comprehensive Stool Analysis and Parasitology" from MetaMetrix (Doctor's Data, Genova), which costs \$245. Again, I copied the information down for when I'm back in the states next fall.

The other test Ferriss recommended that I jotted down was "[SpectraCell Nutrient Testing](#)," which for \$364 pinpoints vitamin and micronutrient deficiencies, something else I've been curious about.

### **Quotes from "The 4-Hour Body"**

Here are some quotes I highlighted while reading:

*It's up to you—not your doctor, not the newspaper—to learn what you best respond to.*

*The benefits go far beyond the physical.*

*The decent method you follow is better than the perfect method you quit.*

*The fastest way to correct behavior is to be aware of it in real time, not after-the-fact.*

*Seeing progress in changing numbers makes the repetitive fascinating and creates a positive feedback loop.*

*Once again, the act of measuring is often more important than what you measure.*

## **Self-Experimentation**

And finally the most important message I took away from this book is the importance of experimenting on yourself. Ferriss constantly takes matters into his own hands, experimenting, and sharing the results with the world.

To find out what will work best for you and your body, you've got to test out various methods and track results yourself. Dr. Seth Roberts, Professor Emeritus of Psychology at University of California Berkeley, writes in the book's final chapter:

***The accumulated knowledge of our time is more accessible than ever before. Self-experimenters, with total freedom, plenty of time, and easy access to empirical tests, are in a great position to take advantage of it.***

---

February 20, 2014

## *Unexpected Inspiration to Overcome My IBS*

While writing my health history post, I looked through old emails and blog posts to piece my story together with as much accuracy as possible. I never expected that digging through old journals and blogs would give me hope and encouragement, which is what happened when I re-read this post concerning my IBS that I wrote on May 29, 2011:



*The probiotics I started two weeks ago are working wonders on my IBS issues. They aren't the sole factor, however; cutting out dairy and other IBS-no-no's has made a huge difference. The other day I picked up some rice protein powder and glutamine at Whole Foods to take daily as well. I have been thinking seriously about writing a letter to my gastroenterologist I saw twice before I canceled my third appointment. The Dr. that put me on meds right after her IBS diagnosis, without even mentioning diet change or probiotics. Meds that do not address the cause of my IBS in the first place, but rather, unsuccessfully attempt to cover up the symptoms. And meds that are addictive. I stopped taking the pills after a week or two of no change. And online research. Then I read about 6 books from the library about IBS. That's the best thing I could have done for my health. Never underestimate the value of a public library! If your doctors won't tell you anything, you must learn for yourself. Research. Read. Ask. Be your own advocate. Anyway, the letter would express my astonishment and disappointment that GI-specialist-Dr. didn't explain the cause of IBS to me, nor inform me of trigger foods to avoid or supplements that help rebuild a healthy digestive system. I would spin it to have a positive tone. Your meds didn't work, but look what is working for me. I hope you share these known dietary changes and supplements with your IBS patients...*

I never did write that letter to my former gastroenterologist. But this old post was great to revisit. I'd completely forgotten about the progress I clearly had made that summer. Things fell back to "normal" because I moved back to Spain a few months later. The glutamine, protein powder, and probiotics did not make their way into my suitcase, and my diet completely changed when I moved.

It's been nearly three years without signs of improvement, so this gives me hope that with more research and experimentation I can distance myself from this IBS once again. But this time for good.

---

**March 14, 2014**

## *What Does It Mean to Be Healthy?*

My aim in creating *Have Your Health* with John was to first become healthy myself, while sharing knowledge gained along the way, and then to help others obtain their health—through simple steps.

I've felt stuck because I don't have a health plan; I'm not sure what I should try changing first. Where should I start? But [this blog post by James Clear about the power of imperfect starts](#) gave me the push I needed to just begin. It doesn't need to be perfect and I don't have to have the optimal plan, or any plan at all for that matter. I just need to explore topics, make small changes, and write about it.

And so I'll begin with a basic question: What does it mean to be healthy?

For me, my main health goal right now is to have solid BMs. That would be a gigantic leap towards overcoming my IBS-D, though there are other areas in which I'd like to improve as well. But not everyone struggles with digestion, and good health is made up of many components.

These are the first areas that came to mind when thinking about what creates a healthy body. Perhaps I'll come back to this list periodically to check-in; it can be a health progress report of sorts.

## Components of Health

### *1. Food*

Reading [Michael Pollan's "In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto"](#) this past January was absolutely crucial for my health journey. Why hadn't I read this book earlier?

Completely cutting out processed foods is a long-term goal, though my current consumption is really low, compared to that of other years in my life. I need to identify my remaining trigger foods that I haven't yet eliminated, and stop eating those I know about. (Like chocolate! Ack!)

I know John feels that wheat is detrimental to my health, but I need to read/learn about it (at least one full book) before I make any changes. The knowledge will give me motivation and reason to make the diet changes, should it be compelling for me. I do eat much less wheat here in Korea than I did when I lived in the states (bread and sandwiches aren't common here; rice is where it's at), but I'd like to learn about the benefits of cutting it all out.

### *2. Water*

I definitely do not drink the recommended eight glasses, but I have consciously tried to drink more water at school. I have two water bottles that I fill every day. One stays on my desk at school, and the other I take home every day for my probiotic in the evening (I can't drink the tap water here, so that's why I fill up from the school's drinking fountains).

I also drink tea, usually at least a cup a day, if not more. So right now I drink about two water bottles and a cup of tea per day. As the weather warms up I know I'll drink more; when I arrived last fall I would easily drink two liters of water each day because of the heat.

### **3. Sleep**

My body needs at least eight good hours of sleep a night, so I'm sure to get them (and usually more). I know the importance of a good night's sleep based on how my body feels after a night without enough sleep. Thus it's a huge priority of mine to get at least eight hours of sleep each night.

### **4. Exercise**

I barely got any exercise over the winter; this category needs major improvement. Before coming to Korea I regularly played and practiced on an ultimate frisbee team, and would go for a run every now and then.

I'm currently trying to develop the habit of practicing yoga on Wednesdays, and when the weather warms up I'd like to run regularly and take advantage of the great hiking opportunities here.

### **5. Mental health**

I know the power of thought and the importance of gratitude and positive thinking. The area I need to work on the most is worry. I worry too much, and I have an inkling that it could be negatively impacting my digestion to some extent.

I should reread Dale Carnegie's "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living," and I'd also like to read more about the mind-gut connection.

### **6. Supplements**

I'd never questioned this aspect of health until recently, after reading a few of Michael Pollan's books. He thinks that you should aim to be the type of person who *takes* supplements (as in, consciously making healthy choices and living a healthy lifestyle), but to save yourself the money and not actually buy them. He feels they have little effect and aren't worth the cost.

Right now I take probiotics and glutamine every day. I also have Vitamin C chewable tablets that I take every couple of days (no set schedule). I bought some digestive enzymes the other month from iHerb, but the taste was so bad I haven't had them again since. Any recommendations?

Before I add anything else to the mix, I want to do more reading about the effectiveness of supplements. I think getting required nutrients from whole foods is best, but can't supplements help?

---

March 28, 2014

## *Gradually Eating "New" Foods*

Over the last few months I've slowly introduced some "new" foods into my diet here in South Korea. I use quotation marks because they're not new at all, but I wasn't eating them last fall.

### **"New" Foods of Late**

#### ***Oatmeal***

After discovering [iHerb, which ships to Korea from California for \\$4](#), I purchased and have regularly been eating oatmeal. On the weekends I make steel-cut oats and add some brown sugar and a spoonful of peanut butter to my bowl.

I do have some instant packs of oatmeal for weekdays when I have less time. However I don't use a microwave to make them; I add boiling water using my kettle.

#### ***Eggs***

Next I started to eat eggs, which happened as a result of reading about them so often in Tim Ferriss's "The Four-Hour Body." I added eggs to whatever I was making that day: soup (egg-drop), rice, rice pasta with tuna. Now they're a regular item I always have in my fridge.

#### ***Raisins***

When I was a child, I remember we had this big, round yellow tupperware filled with raisins in the kitchen. We'd always snack on them, just reaching our little hands in and eating. I have no idea when that container left our house—perhaps it was when we moved—but without the raisins around I stopped eating them. I never purchased them living on my own post-high school.

I saw some small boxes on iHerb, so I ordered a pack of six. What a great little snack! I have a box in my desk at work in case I get hungry or forget to eat breakfast some morning.



## ***Bananas***

Just the other week on some IBS forums I read about bananas being a good fruit for IBS sufferers. I hadn't bought bananas because I'd only seen big packs at my grocery store (10+ bananas), and I wouldn't be able to eat them all before they'd go bad. So I just never bought any in the first place. A few weeks ago my Korean friend told me that he's now eating 10 bananas a day. While I wasn't going to try to reach that extreme, our conversation put bananas back on my radar.

On my next trip to the grocery store I happened to see a smaller pack mixed in with the rest: five bananas. Perfect! In the past week and a half since, I've purchased more bunches, and now eat a banana in the morning for breakfast and another when I get home from work.

Last week I even mushed up a banana and mixed it with some eggs, cooking a sort of banana pancake!

## **Gradual Changes**

These are very simple, basic foods to have added to my diet. I'd like to stress how the changes happened, though: gradually. Over the course of many months. The "new" product was usually initiated by exposure: in books, blogs, websites, and conversation. These food items have completely replaced the processed "treats" and "snacks" I had been purchasing in convenience stores, which can be found on every Korean street.

Heck, I've been gradually changing my diet for years. Comparing what I eat now to what I ate six years ago is a night and day difference. And I'm still working on it, slowly but surely.

It's a lot easier to focus on just one food item than to change all your eating habits at once. So start small, and over time that one food will become something you don't even think about. You'll regularly buy it and eat it. And then you can focus your energies on another food item to introduce into your life. Just take it one at a time, and little by little you'll replace old shopping/eating habits with new ones.

What food should I start eating next?

---

April 8, 2014

## *Taking Probiotics Daily*

I've had an on-again-off-again relationship with [Dr. Mercola's Probiotic Packs](#) for many years. John introduced them to me when I was first learning about IBS, since I couldn't swallow the big probiotic capsules.

When I lived in Spain after college I stopped ordering and taking the probiotics, but then I took them every now and then when I was back in the states last year. See what I mean? On again, off again! I brought a few boxes of probiotic packs with me to Korea when I moved here this past fall, and last October I started to keep track of how many I had each month.

Even though I'd decided my goal was to have a probiotic pack every day, my monthly totals for October and November were 10 and 15, respectively. Probiotics on only a third and then half of the days each month.

But ever since January 2014, I've taken a probiotic pack every day. It's been over three months of daily probiotics! How did the change happen?

### **1. Decide**

Although I'd written that I wanted to take a probiotic every day last fall, it wasn't until January that I became serious about it. Something clicked in my mind and I made it a priority instead of something that would be nice if it happened.

I wanted to improve my digestive health, and probiotics would surely boost it. Probiotics were now center stage in my mind, so my conscious helped me make sure I took them every day.

### **2. Make a Routine**

I can't drink my tap water here, so I had been buying 2-gallon water bottles from my grocery store every now and then. (Now I boil the tap water and let it cool—duh!) It was a bit of a hassle these last seven months because I could only get one bottle at a time due to weight and the fact that I was carrying it on my walk home with whatever else I had purchased at the grocery store. Then I'd pour some of that water into a plastic cup at home, dump in a probiotic pack, and use a chopstick to mix it together. The point of these details is that in the back of my mind, it was a bit of a hassle to drink water at home, because that meant more frequent trips to buy the 2-liter

bottles at the grocery store. And I do think this affected how often I was taking my probiotics last fall.

Now, I have a water bottle solely used for taking my probiotic pack and glutamine each day. I take this empty water bottle to school every morning and fill it up with water from the school's drinking fountain during the day. Right when I get home from school I take the bottle out of my bag and dump in a tablespoon of glutamine and a Dr. Mercola Probiotic Pack, close the cap, and shake the bottle. I carry it around with me for the rest of the night, drinking from the bottle until it's gone.

When empty, I put the empty bottle back in my bag so it's ready to come to school with me the following day. This routine has really helped me form the probiotic habit. It developed over time without me realizing it, but I can now recognize that these daily actions are exactly what helped the habit to stick.

I doubt anyone's routine will look like mine, but the takeaway is to pair your new habit with something you already do every day.

### **3. Have a Visual Reminder**

I keep the probiotic packs in a bowl out on my kitchen counter. I keep the wrappers on the kitchen counter and clear them off at the end of each month. I always see the probiotics, so that really helped me form the habit at the beginning of the year, too. Now it's just a part of my daily routine, like brushing my teeth and getting dressed.

This idea can be applied to many other habits. If you want to write in your journal every day, leave the journal on your bed. If you want to do yoga every day, leave your mat out on the floor. Make it easy and accessible.

And that's my analysis of how I developed the habit of taking probiotic packs every day. If there's a habit you'd like to form, I highly recommend reading [James Clear's "Transform Your Habits" \(pdf\)](#) as a starting point. ("[The Power of Habit](#)" by Charles Duhigg is also recommended, though "Transform Your Habits" is a fraction of the length with just as important information, if you're not a big reader.)

---

April 16, 2014

## *Whole Foods: Reductionism vs. Wholeism*

I'm currently about 40% through Dr. T. Colin Campbell's ["Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition."](#) Already my eating habits are being affected by the book's argument for a whole foods plant-based (WFPB) diet. I'll address the grand benefits of such a diet in a later post, but first I'd like to write about my biggest shift in thinking regarding nutrition: looking at it from the perspective of a wholeist rather than a reductionist.

When I read Michael Pollan's "In Defense of Food" earlier this year, that was the first time I heard nutrition described from the "wholeism" viewpoint. Prior to that book, I'd always thought of nutrition just as I'd been taught in school and see in society: Each food item in the grocery store is composed of different parts (i.e. carbohydrates, sugars, sodium, vitamins, etc.), which are all listed on the side of the package. If you're not getting enough vitamin C, you can take a vitamin C supplement. If the product you're buying is fortified with extra iron, great! This is the reductionist view of nutrition, and it's actually not so great.

Well, how else could you possibly look at nutrition? Wholeism applied to nutrition means that an orange, for example, is not equal to the sum of its parts. Eating an orange is far more beneficial to your body than taking pills of all the known nutrients in an orange. There's something about the naturally made, photosynthesized energy of a whole plant, for example, that cannot be replicated/replaced by a lab-made nutrient.

But the media, government-dictated pyramids and food labels have us thinking otherwise. I was always taught that it's the nutrients inside of a food that make it healthy, not the whole food itself—which is so backwards. So this "whole" nutrients idea was completely new to me, but makes a lot of sense once you look into it more.

To further challenge what I thought I knew about nutrition, Dr. Campbell states that "The food we put in our mouths doesn't control our nutrition—not entirely. What our bodies do with that food does."

Huh? Luckily he illustrates the statement with an example. Say you consume 100 mg of vitamin C at one meal, and later 400 mg at a second meal. So your body absorbs four times as much vitamin C during the second meal, right? Wrong!

Thanks to the fascinating wonder that is our bodies, this is not the case. Our bodies will only absorb and use however much of a specific nutrient that it needs at that particular moment in time. Incredible!

Dr. Campbell rightfully reminds the reader that "Our bodies have evolved to eat whole foods, and can therefore deal with the combinations and interactions of nutrients contained in those foods. Give a body 10,000 mg of vitamin C, however, and all bets are off."

And all this time I had thought products with extra vitamins, iron, potassium, etc. were better for me! Turns out whole foods (mostly plants) is the answer so many of us need.

---

April 22, 2014

## *Struggles of Eating WFPB with Friends Who Don't*

I'm now over halfway through "Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition," and having it on my mind has changed what I've been eating these last two weeks. I also had a glimpse two weekends ago of what it's like to have a diet different from your friends.

I met up with three friends in the city to walk through Seoul Forest that Saturday. One of our first stops inside the park was a convenience store to get a snack. One friend got hot chicken-flavored chips and offered some to all of us. I had to politely decline, as I couldn't even imagine letting those chemicals become a part of my body. My other two friends got hot ham and cheese sandwiches, which looked good, but I wanted to avoid the bread, processed cheese, and ham. So I got some odaeng (Korean "fish cake" with broth), a tasty warm eat for the cloudy day (although now that I think about it, I have no idea what odaeng is made of, and if I should be eating it at all).

That evening when it came time to look for somewhere to eat dinner, someone saw a Pizza Hut in the distance and excitedly suggested it. Now when you're an expat, it can be comforting and a real treat to eat something familiar from home after so much time without it. I had bitten my tongue and grudgingly eaten at a Pizza Hut once earlier last fall with a group of friends. But after what I'd been reading lately, and my attempts to cut out breads: no way. So I spoke up right away and turned it down, to the group's disappointment.

We ended up having a delicious Korean dinner—I had kimchi stew, and did not eat the ramen noodles that they mixed in. Lots of vegetable side dishes to munch on, too. No alcohol.

After dinner on our way back to the subway, we passed another convenience store and the group decided to go in for a sweet treat. Had it been even two months ago, I probably would have bought a chocolate bar or something, but that night I bought a small glass bottle of soy milk. It was difficult to have to face what I used to purchase and not eat it, while friends were diving in right next to me. When I'm on my own during the week in my small town, I simply don't go into the convenience stores anymore. Don't see it, don't buy it. But that night I had to see the chocolate shelf up close and personal.

So although I felt good about what I'd put in my body that day, I knew the hesitation and difficulties I'd experienced eating out with friends was only a small taste of what's to come.

Although I've gone without dairy and have given up some foods during my years-long IBS journey, the diet changes I see myself making now (eating WFPB) will be much harder to live with socially when I'm around family and friends back in the states this fall. John has been living without eating gluten for some time now, so he has a much better idea of the types of struggles I'll face. But I know that together, we'll come up with strategies to keep eating right without giving up our social lives.

---

April 29, 2014

## *Health Supplements: Take Them or Not?*

Not only did reading "Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition" change my view of health from reductionist to wholeist, but it also gave me doubts about health supplements. The first time I'd heard a healthy eater suggest that people not take health supplements was in Michael Pollan's "In Defense of Food" that I read earlier this year. He said that people should live like those who take supplements (since health supplement takers tend to have healthier habits), but skip the supplements.

Without going into detail, Pollan said that there isn't strong enough evidence to show that supplements positively affect our health, and that we should save the money for something else. It wasn't an overly convincing argument for someone who has been living in a pro-health

supplement culture their whole life, so I kept on taking my probiotics, vitamin C tablets, glutamine, and the occasional protein powder scoop with my oatmeal.

But the ideas suggested in "Whole" made me think again. If an apple is indeed not the sum of its parts, then nutrients obtained through a tablet are not the same as nutrients obtained through whole foods. Whole foods (plants) are much better. Why?

## **The Power of Whole Foods**

Well, I'm learning that whole foods are fascinating. The amount of nutrients they deliver to your body depends on what nutrients your body currently has and lacks. Incredible! Also, whole foods contain a combination of nutrients and ingredients, made by nature and the sun, that work together in that special arrangement to nurture our bodies.

We can digest and healthily nurture ourselves with whole foods, but what about supplements? It seems to me the manufactured dosage and contents of a supplement could throw your body for a loop, and who knows what the consequences could be. Why not stick to whole foods instead?

Personally, I like to take a natural view to answer questions like these, without looking at detailed research and experiments. Feel free to disagree with my method, but it works for me and I'm satisfied with the results. For example, just think about it: What do other living creatures eat? Do they eat health supplements or whole foods? Do the people in Okinawa, Japan—with one of the healthiest human populations on the planet—take health supplements? Do healthy bonobos and chimpanzees eat health supplements? No! They eat whole foods.

## **The Health Supplement Business Makes Money**

The other factor to look at is money. Like pharmaceuticals, the health supplement is a money-making business. [This editorial in The Ledger from February of 2014 states that Americans now spend about \\$32 billion on vitamins and dietary supplements each year.](#) The more I read about the history of health supplement politics, the inconclusiveness of studies, and the money made from these corporations, the more it becomes obvious that supplements aren't a good idea.

## **Eat Whole Foods, Not Health Supplements**

I'll close by responding to two alarming statements I read on a [WeightTraining.com post about supplements and vitamins](#), though I'm sure the ideas are shared elsewhere. Heck, it's how I thought just a few short months ago!



*Because the average person over the age of 18 does not eat enough fruits and vegetables, supplements should be taken to aid digestion and improve overall health.*

No! So wrong! If the problem is that adults aren't eating enough fruits and vegetables, let's fix the problem directly: Eat more fruits and vegetables! Change the country's food pyramid to include more fruits and vegetables, educate both children and adults, have doctors talk about eating fruits and vegetables with their patients, make fruits and veggies the more prominent section of grocery stores, help farmers that grow fruits and vegetables through legislation, get more farmers markets up and running, etc.

Here's the worst:

*Multivitamins should be taken if you have a diet that is heavy in processed and fast foods.*

Whaa?! Again, no!! The logic is so backwards! If you have a diet that is heavy in processed and fast foods, you need to change your diet. Gradually introduce whole foods into your diet until you can completely cut out processed and fast foods. ([100 Days of Real Food has a great, free "14-weeks of 'real food' mini-pledges" program shared on their site](#) if you're not sure how to start changing your diet.)

As I've touched on in other posts, our society/government needs to make a lot of changes too, since the norm today is that Americans eat processed and fast foods without a second thought. But we can't wait for the majority to catch on before we change our eating habits—have your health now by eating whole foods, mostly plants. Take care of your health, no supplements needed.

Since reading "Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition," I haven't been taking my daily probiotics, glutamine, or vitamin C. It wasn't a conscious decision, "I'm going to stop taking them forever!" Rather, it just sort of happened as I read more about the ineffectiveness and possible dangers of supplements.

---

May 6, 2014

## *IBS-D Troubles While Traveling*

This past weekend I went to a national park here in Korea with a tour group. While there were absolutely gorgeous hikes over the weekend, I was unable to enjoy some of the best views. Why? My lovely stomach and IBS issues. I haven't researched much yet into the mind-gut connection, but I definitely know the two are connected.

Part of my stomach troubles this weekend probably came from the fact that I knew we would be on someone else's schedule, and that for many long stretches each day we wouldn't be around bathrooms. I'd also have to share a bathroom with my motel roommate that weekend—a bathroom that didn't have a vent to cover up sounds or odor. Meals would have to be agreed upon with the three others I would be with, or purchased at rest stops on the travel days.

I did try to make it easier by bringing along snacks of almonds, raisins, bananas, instant oatmeal, and gluten-free bars. But I did still eat toast and yogurt one morning for breakfast (provided). I did some good, some bad. I chose to have some alcohol on the beach one afternoon, but when my friends bought beers I did not (gluten). I stopped at a convenience store later for a mixed drink instead. The lesser of two evils? But Rebecca, you must be thinking, there was gluten in that toast you ate one morning! I know, I know. Some good, some bad, remember?

I had to strategically leave the motel room and sneak away down to the lobby bathroom a few times in the mornings and evenings. (I didn't want to explain why I was leaving to use the bathroom when we had one right there in our room!) I got nervous when I knew there wouldn't be time for a bathroom stop (like when a friend and I were making our way back down a mountain to the bus that was supposed to leave at 6 p.m. We were nearly a half hour late in getting back to the bus, so there was no way I could stop and take my time in a bathroom. That was no fun.)

That was one of two moments that really stood out to me over the weekend. Both were on beautiful hikes. And my mind was elsewhere for most of each, wondering if I should leave my group and search for a restroom.

Skipping those details, the weekend served as a wake-up call. I need to make more changes to improve/get rid of my IBS. I want to enjoy the beautiful hikes! I want to be comfortable on trips where a bathroom is shared in a hostel or hotel room! I want to soak in this view in the moment, with no other thoughts or concerns on my mind!

May 13, 2014

## *Why I Stopped Taking Probiotics*

The book "Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition" completely changed my mind about health supplements and vitamins; I do not see myself buying (or taking) them from this point on. "But what about probiotics?" I found myself asking. Surely those must be in some magical category separate from health supplements, right?

I'd been so proud of the fact that since January 2014 I was taking them daily. Heck, I even wrote a post in April titled "Taking Probiotics Daily", in which I shared how I developed the habit of taking a probiotic pack every day. Also, probiotics are recommended in nearly every IBS article that I've read, so why should I doubt them?

The skepticism lingered on in my mind, and I subconsciously stopped taking my daily probiotics! I let myself experiment, wondering if I was better off without them. It's almost been a month now, and I haven't noticed a difference (Though they never seemed to improve my digestion in the first place). But that's not why I'm not ordering any more probiotic packs after I finish my existing two boxes in the cupboard.

### **Fermented Foods > Probiotics**

In short, my simplistic natural approach is at it again. If you can get vitamin C through a whole food, eat the whole food and not the tablet. So if you can get probiotics through fermented foods, why am I taking a manufactured powder?

Here are some of the blog posts that offer reasons not to take probiotics, some of which I'll discuss further below. These posts helped to shift my view about the supplements:

- [Three Reasons You Should Stop Taking Probiotics - Fearless Eating](#)
- [Why I Don't Take Probiotic Supplements - OmegaVia](#)
- [Should You Take a Probiotic? - Mother Jones](#)

I do not think that probiotics are inherently bad. If you absolutely must take an antibiotic, then definitely take probiotic supplements before, during, and after—to do the least amount of damage as possible to your flora.

But for someone wanting to improve and sustain all of the micro-life in the gut, it's important to note that fermented foods have a much greater variety of microorganisms than probiotic supplements that are sold on the shelves. And variety seems to matter. [A healthy gut has about 1,000 species or strains of bacteria](#) inside, [but people with IBS have 25% fewer types of bacteria](#) than healthy people. One's variety of bacteria is obviously affected by what is consumed and introduced into the gut.

## Probiotics Are Not Enough

I had been missing the big picture all of these years: You can't just take probiotic supplements, you must also change your diet and lifestyle. How can the "good bacteria" survive if it's outnumbered by the bad? How can the helpful bacteria thrive if the food you're eating is actually feeding the harmful guys? How can the micro-organisms inside of you evolve and keep up with the changing micro-world if you stay in a highly sterilized indoor place most of the time?

Taking a daily probiotic supplement and calling it a day just doesn't cut it. [Eating foods that are rich in soluble fiber](#) (like brussel sprouts, yams, potatoes, sweet potatoes, nuts, oatmeal, oranges, apples, avocado, and broccoli), is a great way to help the bacteria in your gut. Also, don't be afraid to come into contact with bacteria and spend some quality time with nature.

## Potential Probiotic Lies

One final swing at probiotic supplements is that their statements are not verified by the U.S. FDA. I've read about studies where probiotic supplements were tested and had up to 50% less live microorganisms than advertised.

Relatedly, the probiotic packs I have been purchasing and consuming (Dr. Mercola's Probiotic Packs) do not need to be refrigerated. I have seen again and again that if you don't need to refrigerate it, you're not getting many live cultures (or something like that). I don't know what the right "answer" is, if these non-refrigerated packs have any positive effect or not, but I just wanted to share this final doubt about my probiotic packs.

## Moving Forward (Without Probiotics)

Regardless of the truthfulness of claims on probiotic packaging, or whether or not they require refrigeration, taking a probiotic supplement is not the path to a healthy gut. Digestion is best

when there is a large variety of micro-organisms inside, which can't be obtained from probiotic supplements containing only single-digit numbers of different bacteria strains.

While probiotics can certainly be beneficial if you're forced to take antibiotics, eating fermented foods and maintaining a diet favorable for the "good" bacteria is a much better route to digestive health.

All of this new information has me asking even more questions: What are prebiotics? What strains of micro-organisms are currently in my digestive tract? Which bacteria would improve my digestion and how can I introduce them into my body? What should I eat and avoid eating to sustain the helpful bacteria?

So I have lots to read, learn, and investigate yet in order to have more of my health. I'll share the journey here, of course!

*I'd love to hear about your thoughts and experiences with probiotics! Do you take probiotic supplements? Have probiotics helped reduce IBS symptoms? Will you continue to take probiotic supplements?*

---

May 20, 2014

## *Living Without a Microwave*

Many months ago, maybe it was in January, I unplugged my apartment's microwave and put it down in a cupboard. It's stayed there ever since. John's family hasn't owned a microwave in years, since his mother is very health conscious. But most Americans do own and regularly use a microwave.

### **Questioning Well-Established Points of View**

If you would have questioned my microwave usage a few years ago, I would have told you that you're crazy; microwaving is absolutely safe. Younger me probably would have also said something along the lines of: "You have no science to back that up! Show me the proof!"

Ever since I was born, there's been a microwave in the house I lived in. When you grow up with something that's so commonplace among homes in society, it's hard to imagine a time without

it—let alone that it could be harmful. I really had to break some deep assumptions and change the way I looked at the world in order to question my microwave usage.

(Side note: My entire perspective changed when I slowly went from a believing Catholic to an atheist many years ago, and again when I lived abroad for the first time in Spain. It was altered yet again when I moved here to South Korea, and also many times while learning about health. The more I'm in situations where my view is forced to change due to new knowledge/experiences, it becomes a bit easier to question everything in future situations that I thought I knew. But if this is your first time, I know that it's very difficult to hear a belief challenged, something you had been 100% certain of. End side note.)

## Why to Not Use a Microwave

The main reason that I stopped using a microwave comes from my "Is it natural?" question that I seem to keep turning to. Since that won't be enough "proof" for most people (nor my past self!), before I get into my thought process I'll first share the best blog post I've read that includes some of my microwave concerns while citing numerous studies:

["Why We Don't Use a Microwave" - Wellness Mama](#)

You might also want to take a look at this article from Dr. Mercola's site:

["Why Did The Russians Ban an Appliance Found in 90% of American Homes?" - Mercola.com](#)

## Microwaves Are Not Natural

Okay, and now back to me. So take every other living creature on this earth. Do they eat food that has been heated by forcefully sending electromagnetic waves through it in order to heat it up? Negative. In fact, we're unique in the fact that we cook any of our food at all. Nearly all other organisms eat raw, and look at how healthy they are (excluding, of course, creatures that have been harmed by human pollution/existence and human destruction of their habitats/food sources. Arg.)

In America, food has become troublingly disassociated from what it actually is. The other week I was on a group trip, and overheard an American girl at the neighboring lunch table saying that she had been served a full fish the other week at her school—head and all. "I don't want to see that! I mean, come on, get that off my plate!" she squealed, as her lunch mates nodded in agreement. Woah, everything you eat was alive at one point! Well, unless it was created in a factory, in which case that's not food, so please don't put that in your body.

Convenience and busyness have dangerously damaged what meals mean to people these days. Now food is often something you cram in your mouth while driving, perhaps after leaving a

drive-thru, or something eaten while spending time online, focusing on other tasks. Eating has become thoughtless, just like microwaving. Food, composed of nutrients from the sun and earth, fuels our bodies through a complex, interconnected system. I am what I eat, and you are what you eat. There's a reason why microwaved food doesn't taste as good, and why [blood warmed in a microwave killed the patient into whom it was transfused](#).

I cannot pinpoint exactly what molecular reactions/alterations are taking place, but I don't need to. I don't need that information; I've made the decision based on my thought process above. The choice seems obvious to me now. And this isn't the type of choice or issue that requires specific scientific evidence, either. I'm not pushing it on anyone else, and the effects of not using a microwave to warm food are only beneficial to my health, if anything.

## Living Without a Microwave

Most things that come with microwave instructions probably aren't real food in the first place, so without a microwave you'll easily avoid them. I have a kettle for hot water, which is perfect for making tea or instant oatmeal. I also have a toaster oven in this apartment, which I use to bake vegetables (hello sweet potato!) or to make oatmeal/banana cookies (read: blobs). To reheat leftovers, I simply do so in a pan on the stovetop.

*I'm curious—Do you use a microwave? Have you ever thought twice about its effect on your health?*

---

May 27, 2014

## Prebiotics

While reading some articles for my post about why I stopped taking probiotics, I was introduced to the concept of prebiotics. My stance is that taking a probiotic supplement isn't enough, and the necessity of prebiotics is one reason why.

## Probiotics vs. Prebiotics

To put it simply, probiotics are live bacteria living in your gut, whereas prebiotics can be thought of as food for your flora. Prebiotics are plant fibers that your body cannot digest. But it doesn't go to waste—these fibers nourish the good bacteria in your large intestine, like a fertilizer. Prebiotics are often called soluble fiber.



## **Foods That Contain Prebiotics**

The following raw foods contain prebiotics that can keep your flora fed and happy. I was unfamiliar with some of these foods, so I've included a few pictures and descriptions.

### ***Jerusalem Artichoke***

The Jerusalem Artichoke is actually a type of sunflower with sunny yellow petals, not an artichoke. The part of the flower that you see below is the "tuber."



*Photo Source: [www.bbcgoodfood.com](http://www.bbcgoodfood.com)*

### ***Chicory Root***

The Chicory flower (common names: blue dandelion, blue daisy) usually has blue flowers, and its leaves are sometimes used in salads.



*Photo Source: <https://lifefromthegroundup.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/chicory1.jpg>*

## ***Acacia Gum***

Acacia Gum, also known as Gum Arabic, is hardened sap taken from two types of acacia trees. Most Acacia Gum is harvested in the African Sahel today, though it was harvested in Arabia and West Asia historically.



*Photo Source: [www.gardatraining.com](http://www.gardatraining.com)*

## ***Common foods***

Prebiotic sources I am familiar with include raw onion, raw garlic, beans, banana, raw leek, and raw asparagus.

## **Eating Enough Prebiotics**

When looking at figures of [how much of these foods you would need to eat in order to reach the recommended daily serving of prebiotics](#), the task seems impossible. Over one pound of bananas? A quarter pound of raw asparagus? Daily?! It makes me question who came up with these recommended daily amounts, if it wasn't a friend of the prebiotic supplement business, perhaps.

I'd also like to point out that you'll ingest the prebiotics when these foods are eaten raw. Cooked onions and cooked garlic, for example, won't provide nearly as many prebiotics. One final warning for any IBSers, eating large quantities of prebiotics may increase gas/bloating/bowel movements immediately after ingesting them. This is probably due to the fact that prebiotics are not common in a typical American diet. I wouldn't let this stop you from eating these foods though, just be aware that it could happen.

## **Prebiotics Help Probiotics**

So you see, probiotics can't (and don't) exist alone in your gut. They need nutrients from prebiotics in order to thrive and keep your flora healthy, which is one reason why just taking a probiotic supplement isn't enough for your interconnected digestive system.

I certainly have not been eating foods on this list, apart from my two daily bananas. Last week I bought a bag of sweet potatoes and started eating those, but I should see if any of these food items are available here in Korea. The reality of the situation though is that with under three months to go in this country, it's not a high priority item for me to figure out what these are called in Korean (or if they even exist here) and go on a wild goose chase to find them.

Moving forward, I'd like to learn what sorts of foods feed the "bad guys," so I can build habits to avoid those foods.

---

June 3, 2014

## *Cultivate Gratitude: Living Without*

There have been many instances in the past few years (especially in the last year) that I've had to go without something that I'd previously taken for granted. Although I'm usually inconvenienced for a limited period of time when this happens, I've found it makes me much more appreciative of the simple things.

### **Things I've Lived Without**

#### ***Tap water***

All year here in Korea I have not been able to drink the tap water, something I very much took for granted while living in Madison and Madrid. It's only a small inconvenience to boil water and let it cool, or to buy 2-liter gallons of water at the supermarket and carry them home, but I'm now much more grateful for tap water that's safe to drink. I've also found that I drink less water when it takes a little bit of work to acquire it.

#### ***Drinking fountain***

During winter break this year, the drinking fountains were disconnected because the school was being repainted. So I couldn't fill up my water bottle with drinking water. As a result, I drank a lot less water during those weeks than I normally did, but I also gained an appreciation for the drinking fountains.

## ***Classroom***

At the start of this school year back in March our English room was lent to a class of second graders while their classroom was under construction. So as the English teachers, we went into each class's homeroom for English class. I had to adjust to each homeroom teacher's classroom set up and technology, with much less set-up time. We had to plan ahead and bring whatever extra materials were necessary for each class. Without a doubt I had taken our classroom for granted before living without one. It's so great to have an English classroom!

## ***Printer***

Also at the beginning of March, my computer was unable to print. Somehow the connection was lost between my computer and the printer, though my co-teacher could still print from his computer to the printer that we shared between us. Until he had time to fix it, I sent him documents via messenger to print whenever I needed to print something (though I held back and printed fewer lesson plans than before). I actually ended up going without a printer until May 22!

## ***Microwave***

When I lived in Madrid, our microwave broke one day. My roommates didn't want to replace it right away, so I simply adjusted and started to reheat things on the stove in a pan. This continued for about a month, until they acquired the microwave of a family member who was moving away. While I now live without a microwave by choice, at that time the situation was forced upon me so I adapted to it and once again gained appreciation through the experience.

## **Takeaways**

While I haven't forced any of these situations upon myself like [Leo Babauta in his "A Year of Living Without" project \(\*Zen Habits\*\)](#), I've still taken away two main realizations from these "without" experiences. First, I've become more grateful for things in my life that I otherwise took for granted. When you spend your time and fill your mind with thoughts appreciating what you have, you're not wasting time or space thinking about what you do not have. Cultivating these positive thoughts is so important for a healthy mind.

Secondly, it's clear to me how much environment affects my actions. When I live in a place without a microwave, I don't eat gross microwaveable meals. When I work somewhere with drinking fountains in the hallways, I drink more water. So if you can change your environment in any way—no matter the size—to support a healthy habit, it'll make it so much easier to develop and practice.

*What have you lived without recently? Was the experience frustrating, or did it build up your gratitude?*

---

June 10, 2014

## *Health Checkpoint: Rebecca, June 2014*

I resolved to focus on my digestive health this year, and this blog was created to help me make improvements. We're just over the halfway through 2014, so it's as good a time as any for a health checkpoint to see where I'm at, using the "good health" categories I wrote about in March.

### **1. Food**

- I've stopped buying convenience store snacks/chocolate as well as bread, and I no longer go to the pizza place in town.
- I now eat a banana every morning, and another when I get home from work in the afternoon.
- Since reading about the whole foods plant-based diet, I consciously try to finish all of my vegetable side dishes at lunch at school, while not being concerned about finishing the meat sides.
- Learning about prebiotics last month prompted me to start eating sweet potatoes, skin and all, hoping to introduce some new strains of bacteria into my gut.
- I stopped using a microwave.

I could still eat less chocolate, though I give into my cravings much less than at the start of the year. I have hopes of eating even healthier once I'm back in a country where I can read the ingredient lists on packages, shop at Whole Foods/Trader Joe's, and have a boyfriend with a juicer.

### **2. Water**

- I have a water bottle at school that I try to finish and re-fill every day at work.

- I started boiling tap water to refill my water supply, so that the inconvenience of buying and carrying home 2-liter bottles of water at the grocery store won't prevent me from drinking water at home.

The summer heat has me drinking more water lately, though I could/should still drink more.

### 3. Sleep

- Sleep has always been a priority for me; my body is wired for 8+ hours every night and I make sure to get it.

To improve sleep even more, I could try adapting a "no technology a half-hour before bed" type of rule.

### 4. Exercise

- I've had a few months of weekly yoga at home, though May and June have not been yoga months for me.
- I began a *Give It 100* project to increase flexibility, with the goal of touching my toes. I'm currently on Day 56, the stretching feels really good, and my flexibility is improving!

I only ran three times this spring, and now it always feels too hot to run (also it simply hasn't been a priority during my free time). In recent years I've played on an ultimate frisbee team and had either practices or games 2+ times a week, so I'm not getting nearly as much exercise as I'd like.

I'm glad I've started stretching, though, as that movement is better than nothing. I should take advantage of any future cool days we may have and go for a run in my town, do a short workout at home, or some dancing!

### 5. Mental Health

- I've been writing a Thankful Thursday post on my personal blog nearly every week, which helps me focus on gratitude.
- I write letters to my friends and family, which often gets me thinking about how much I appreciate them.

- I walk to school every day, taking a street with walls of green on both sides instead of the main street on a busy road. I love walking through the plants and soaking it in every morning and afternoon.

Even though my closest friends are continents away and I spend almost all of my time alone when I'm not at work, my mind has been great this year! I did have a low slump in February, but since then I've been using the alone time to read, stretch, learn about food, write, send snail mail, blog, etc. I'm taking advantage of the time to better myself, rather than feel lonely or sorry for myself. Glad that as people, we can choose how to respond to our situations!

## 6. Supplements

- My supplement intake has nearly stopped since reading "Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition."

I just have two boxes of probiotic packs that I'll gradually finish up before I move from Korea come September.

## 7. Digestion

Finally, I'll talk a bit about where I'm at with my IBS-D, the main focus of my health year. Unfortunately I haven't seen any change or improvement (for nearly the past three years!), even though my diet has changed since living in Korea.

I would like to have a stool sample analyzed to figure out what strains of bacteria are and aren't in my gut, and how many of each. I'd also like to see if I have any fungus overgrowth, like John's Candida overgrowth. I'm looking into having this done in Korea, but the language barrier and other hurdles of navigating a medical system in a foreign culture might force me to wait until I'm stateside in the fall.

---

June 17, 2014

## *Eating for IBS*

I was browsing some posts on Reddit today in the [IBS subreddit /r/ibs](#), and was not too pleased with what I saw. Many newcomers would say that they thought they had IBS, and then ask what they should do to help the symptoms. The most common response? Take such and such a drug. No! Don't turn to medicine first!



Although I'm still working on healing my IBS-D, I know that digestive problems don't just appear out of thin air; there is a cause. That cause could be your diet, or perhaps you have a bacterial overgrowth in your small intestine. Maybe you were on antibiotics that killed the healthy bacteria in your gut, or you could have a gluten sensitivity. Whatever the reason, taking a pill will not stop the source of the IBS. You must be your own advocate and you need to find out what the root problem is.

You may see some doctors along the way, and they could be helpful or not. So know that ultimately it's up to you to research and experiment to identify the cause of your IBS, and then make appropriate diet/lifestyle changes to become healthy again. Diet is usually to blame, especially in the USA where the terrible highly-processed Western diet still thrives. Diet is only a part of the picture though, as IBS takes into account your whole self—but in this post I'll focus on food.

So what foods are common triggers of IBS? And what should you eat to make your gut healthy?

## **What to Eat When You Have IBS**

Everyone has unique triggers, but below is a list of some foods that are commonly hard to digest, as well as foods that usually aid digestion.

### ***Common IBS triggers***

I'll start with some problematic foods that you should really avoid.

#### **Drinks**

- Coffee
- Milk
- Soda
- Alcohol

#### **Foods**

- Dairy (milk, cheese, ice cream, butter)
- [Insoluble fiber](#)
- Raw vegetables
- Whole grains
- Fried foods
- Fatty meats
- Processed foods (ingredient lists longer than 5 items)

- Chocolate
- High fructose corn syrup
- Artificial sweeteners (fructose, sorbitol, malitol, mannitol)

### ***Foods to help IBS-D***

These foods are easier to digest, and can help to calm things down in your digestive tract.

#### **Drinks**

- Water
- Decaffeinated tea (peppermint, especially)

#### **Foods**

- Bananas
- [Soluble fiber](#)
- White rice
- Mashed potatoes (no butter/milk!)
- Applesauce (organic, without additives)
- Steamed chicken
- Blueberries

Here is another great list to refer to when you're eating for IBS, from Foods-Healing-Power.com:

[IBS Foods - Soothing Foods To Heal Your Colon.](#)

## **How to Eat When You Have IBS**

Avoiding common trigger foods is one of the first changes to make, but how you eat can also make a difference when you have IBS. Here are two simple tips:

### ***Eat slowly***

Take your time and eat slowly. Chew more than you regularly do, and pay attention while you eat (Hint: Put down the phone and turn off the TV!). You could even count chews per swallow to stay focused on eating.

### ***Eat many smaller meals***

Rather than two main, larger meals each day, try to eat smaller portions more frequently throughout the day. This one really helps me out, so I make sure to have plenty of snacks on hand when I'm away from home. It's usually bad news when I eat on an empty stomach, so I don't let myself get to that point.

## Find Your Food Triggers

The two food lists above are common food triggers for people with IBS, but you probably have your own set of special sensitivities. Here are two ways to help figure out what your food triggers are.

### *Elimination diet*

Start an elimination diet, of which you can find many samples online. You begin by eliminating all foods that could be wreaking havoc on your digestive system. Stricter elimination diets have you eating only the same few "safe" foods every day at the start. Then, you slowly reintroduce foods into your diet, one at a time every 2-3 days, watching for any reactions. This helps to isolate and pinpoint exactly which foods are causing you problems so you know what to avoid. Here are some elimination diets for IBS, found online:

- [12-Week Elimination Diet for IBS](#)
- [Elimination Diet for IBS and Other Food Sensitivities](#)
- [Extreme Elimination Diet \(for IBS-D\)](#)
- [Elimination Diet](#) (PDF)

### *Food journal*

While on an elimination diet or before you commit to starting one, it could be beneficial to keep a food diary. Write down what you eat every day, right when you're eating it, and also keep track of how you feel afterwards and your bowel movements.

Since it's only helpful if you remember to write down the food you're consuming in the moment (memory often fails us), you could also try a photo food journal. If you use a smartphone, simply snap a photo of everything you eat for a few days.

## Be Your Own Advocate

IBS is a frustrating digestive disorder. I've been suffering for over seven years! Since everyone's bodies and digestive systems are different, you must look out for yourself and put in the time and energy to investigate what causes your IBS to flare up.

I decided to take control of my health at the start of 2014, and while my IBS is still problematic for me (and I have many more changes to make and research to do), the more I read, learn,

share, and experiment, the more determined I am to heal myself. I want to be healthy! Eating right for IBS is the first step towards eliminating IBS struggles.

*What are your IBS trigger foods? How did you find out?*

---

June 24, 2014

## *The Low FODMAP Diet*

When I joined an IBS forum earlier in the year, I kept running into the letters "FODMAP" on various posts. What the heck is a FODMAP, I wondered. So I did some research online, and today I'm sharing my findings.

### **Low FODMAP Diet**

The "low FODMAP diet," as it's called, is specifically meant to reduce IBS symptoms. FODMAP stands for Fermentable Oligo-, Di- and Mono-saccharides, and Polyols; which are all different carbohydrates found in many foods.

Liquid and gas are created in the large and small intestines when foods high in FODMAPs are consumed. This temporary diet was created by researchers in Australia in 2005. It's recommended to adhere to the low FODMAP diet for 2-6 weeks, and then slowly reintroduce foods one at a time—preferably with the help of a dietician.

### **What to Eat on a Low FODMAP Diet**

Since I prefer visuals, I've put together a chart of foods to eat and foods to avoid when you're following a low FODMAP diet.

<b>Low FODMAPs Diet: What to eat and what to avoid</b>		
<i>Compiled by Rebecca Thering @ Have Your Health</i>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Foods to Eat</b>	<b>Food to Avoid</b>
	<b>(Low FODMAPs)</b>	<b>(High FODMAPs)</b>

<b>Fruits</b>	Banana	Apples
	Blueberry	Apricots
	Cantaloupe	Blackberries
	Clementine	Cherries
	Dates	Grapefruit
	Grapes	Mango
	Honeydew melon	Nectarines
	Kiwi	Peaches
	Lemon	Pears
	Lime	Plums, prunes
	Mandarin oranges	Pomegranate
	Olives	Watermelon
	Oranges	Canned fruit, dried fruit, fruit juice
	Papaya	
	Pineapple	
	Raspberry	
	Rhubarb	
	Strawberry	
<b>Grains</b>	Gluten-free products	Barley
	Oats	Bulgur
	Polenta	Cous cous
	Quinoa	Farro
	Rice noodles	Rye
	Spelt products	Semolina
		Wheat
<b>Dairy + Dairy Substitutes</b>	Butter	Almond milk
	Coconut milk	Buttermilk
	Gelato	Cream
	Hard cheese (brie, camembert, mozzarella, parmesan)	Custard
	Lactose-free milk, ice cream, and yogurt	Ice cream

	Rice milk	Margarine
		Milk
		Soft cheese
		Soy milk
		Yogurt (regular and Greek)
<b>Beans and Nuts</b>	Almonds (10 max)	Baked beans
	Brazil nuts	Black-eyed peas
	Hazelnuts (10 max)	Butter beans
	Macadamia nuts	Chickpeas
	Peanuts	Lentils
	Pecan	Kidney beans
	Pine nuts	Lima beans
	Walnuts	Soybeans
		Split peas
<b>Sweeteners</b>	Artificial sweeteners that do not end in -ol	Agave
	Brown sugar	Fructose
	Glucose	High fructose corn syrup
	Maple syrup	Honey
	Powdered sugar	Isomalt
	Sugar (sucrose)	Maltitol
		Mannitol
		Molasses
		Sorbitol
		Xylitol
<b>Vegetables</b>	Arugula	Artichoke
	Bamboo shoots	Asparagus
	Bell peppers	Avocado
	Carrots	Beets
	Celeriac	Broccoli
	Cabbage	Brussel sprouts
	Eggplant	Cauliflower

	Endive	Celery
	Fennel	Corn
	Green beans	Garlic
	Kale	Leeks
	Lettuce	Mushrooms
	Parsley	Okra
	Parsnip	Onions
	Potato	Peas
	Radicchio	Scallions (white part)
	Scallions (green part only)	Shallots
	Spinach (baby)	Sugar snap peas
	Squash	Snow peas
	Sweet potato	
	Tomato	
	Turnip	
	Water chestnut	
	Zucchini	
<b>Seeds</b>	Caraway	
	Chia	
	Pumpkin	
	Sesame	
	Sunflower	
<b>Protein</b>	Beef	
	Chicken	
	Egg	
	Fish	
	Lamb	
	Pork	
	Shellfish	
	Tofu	
	Turkey	



## Low FODMAP Diet Is Worth the Effort

Many people comment that the low FODMAP diet is too strict or difficult to adhere to. The important thing to remember is that it's only a temporary diet. It's not meant for weight loss, but rather to relieve IBS symptoms—and it's the only diet that's had repeated success with IBS patients. Putting in the effort to meal plan and stick to the diet for just six weeks is completely worth the effort if it were to resolve IBS problems, in my opinion. Just take it one day at a time.

Now that it's on my radar, the low FODMAP diet is next on my list of diets to try in order to heal my own IBS-D. Unfortunately, it'll have to wait until I'm no longer in Korea (just two months left, though!). Without going into much detail, the cultural complexities surrounding eating what is offered to you does not give me much control over my daily lunches or snacks that are served at school. Since the social consequences of refusing food are so undesirable in the Korean culture, I'm okay with my decision to wait a few more months until I have total control over my diet.

*Have you tried the low FODMAP diet to treat IBS symptoms? Was it successful?*

---

July 1, 2014

## *Korean Eastern Medicine Experience*

I currently live in South Korea, so last weekend I had a taste of Eastern medicine through the Jin Hanbang Experience in Seoul (Korean Traditional Medical Tourism Experience). There were four main parts to my appointment: hot/cold health survey, aromatherapy, acupuncture, and cupping therapy.

### Hot and Cold Bodies

My Korean guide did tell me that traditional Korean medicine classifies people into four body types, but since foreigners often get confused they simplified it to two: hot and cold. The full four types are greater yang (Tae-Yang, 태양, 太陽), lesser yang (So-Yang, 소양, 小陽), greater yin (Tae-Eum, 태음, 太陰), and lesser yin (So-Eum, 소음, 小陰).

By reading some descriptions online, I clearly fall into the "lesser yin" category. But at my appointment, they showed me a list of statements that fell under either "Hot" or "Cold." By

glancing at the list there was no doubt that I identified most with the "Cold" body tendency. Note that these hot/cold labels don't refer solely to body temperature, but include personality, body tendencies, digestion, and a variety of other indicators.

My recommended herbs and foods to "warm" my body are ginger, cinnamon, ginseng, mugwort, honey, dried orange peel, jujube, milk vetch root, spring onion, garlic, and pepper.

## Aromatherapy

Now that I knew what type I was, we went into a side room to first make an aroma pouch. I was instructed to put three herbs inside: cinnamon, wall gardenia, and fennel.



I've been keeping the pouch by my pillow, so I inhale the aromas as I sleep. Then I made a bar of soap with the same scents. Since there are no preservatives and no chemicals in the soap that I made, I have been using it when I shower (I don't use shampoo and I previously didn't use any soap in showers). I'm enjoying the "warm" scents, whether or not they're having an effect on my body.

## Acupuncture

After sitting and talking with the kind Korean doctor for a while about my health and hearing various recommendations for my digestive woes, he asked if I was comfortable with acupuncture. Of course! He then got out a huge model ear and explained that if you turn the ear upside down, it closely resembles a baby's fetus. So traditional Korean medicine uses the idea that each part of the ear corresponds with a body part.

He then put in a short, tiny acupuncture needle into each ear on the spot that corresponded to the digestive tract. The tiny needles were actually on a small sticky patch, a sort of tiny square band-aid that adhered to my ear. I was to leave them in for three days, and could apply pressure with my fingers when I wanted. I got to take ten more home with me, but they're beads instead of the tiny needle.

## Cupping Therapy

Finally, after discussing the spinal fusion I had at age 16, he suggested we do some cupping therapy. I had never heard of this before, but learned that it's very common in Korea. Cupping involves placing plastic or glass cups on the skin and creating suction by removing some air from inside. The suction promotes healing and increases blood flow. It felt just like what a bit of suction feels like on the skin. I was lying on my stomach, and could feel as various cups would lose their suction and pop back up.

One woman stayed in the room during the ten minutes, and would come over and re-suction as necessary. They had warned me that it would leave marks that could last up to five days, which I didn't care about. When I got home that night I was surprised to see the dark purple circles on my back. Some were just outlines, but one was a solid purple circle. I excitedly took some pictures to remember, as the marks have since faded.



## Korean Traditional Medicine

It was great to experience a bit of the Eastern Korean traditional medicine that day. Without knowing much about Eastern medicine, I like how it looks at the whole body's interconnectedness (rather than just the part that's causing trouble). I like how it takes into account personality and bodily tendencies, and I'm also a fan of the natural suggestions first.

Koreans don't stick to strictly natural, though. When talking about my spinal fusion, he said that his nephew was actually going to have one done the following week. He added that traditional Korean medicine practitioners do use Western surgeries when necessary, but always follow up with Eastern care. I've had no follow-up since my spinal fusion nine years ago, which is why he had suggested the cupping therapy.

---

July 15, 2014

## *Food Over Medicine: The Conversation That Could Change Your Life*

This past weekend I finished reading "Food Over Medicine: The Conversation That Could Change Your Life" by Dr. Pamela Popper and Glen Merzer. The book is written as a conversation between the two authors, making it a book anyone could read.

The more I keep reading about adopting a whole food plant-based diet, the more obvious it all seems to me: What you eat dictates your health. Opinions and knowledge I previously had about about doctors, medicine, healthy eating, health insurance, and cancer—they're all wrong. Dr. Popper writes, "If people really understood, in clear terms, what food did to them, they'd have a whole different attitude about it."

I'm starting to understand, and my attitude is completely changing—about more than just food.

## The Importance of Diet

Reading "Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition" and now "Food Over Medicine" has got me realizing that what we eat has a huge impact on our health. And it makes sense, right? Your body needs food to survive and function. The body works with what it's given, but it doesn't stay quiet

if there's a problem. The body tries to tell us when we're eating wrong, when it's not getting what it needs to function well. But are we listening?

Do we change our eating habits or do we go to the doctor with various symptoms and leave with a bottle of pills in hand? One piece of evidence mentioned in the book—attesting to the power of diet—was migration studies. Say someone moves from Wisconsin, USA to Seoul, South Korea. If this person adopts the typical diet of South Koreans in Seoul, he or she will soon have the same disease risk of natives in Seoul, South Korea. Why? Because most diseases are caused by what we eat!

## **Diet Is a Combination Lock**

Another point related to diet that I really liked was when one of the authors compared a diet to a combination lock. To open the lock successfully, you need all four numbers to be right. If you have three numbers correct, 75 percent, you don't get 75 percent of the results—you get zero. Like a lock, diet needs to have all of the right pieces in place in order to see health results. If you're doing it 75 percent right, you won't get 75 percent of the results.

I think this could be part of my digestive problem. I'm probably missing something, and those few tweaks in diet could be the difference between suffering with IBS-D and thriving with a healthy flora. This analogy has given me motivation to adhere to a strict no-dairy, whole food plant-based diet when I return to the states in November.

Again, I'm waiting because I'll have total control over my diet at that point, as well as the time to prepare and cook all of my meals. I'm hoping John will try it with me for a few weeks at the start, and I also have this (probably unrealistic) desire that my parents will want to give it a try too.

## **Plant-Based Diet Success Stories**

Throughout the book, Dr. Popper mentions again and again her "Wellness Forum," which is based in Worthington, Ohio. Sometimes it comes off as too self-promotional, though I'm sure the system at her Wellness Forum works. One section of the book provided success stories from Wellness Forum members.

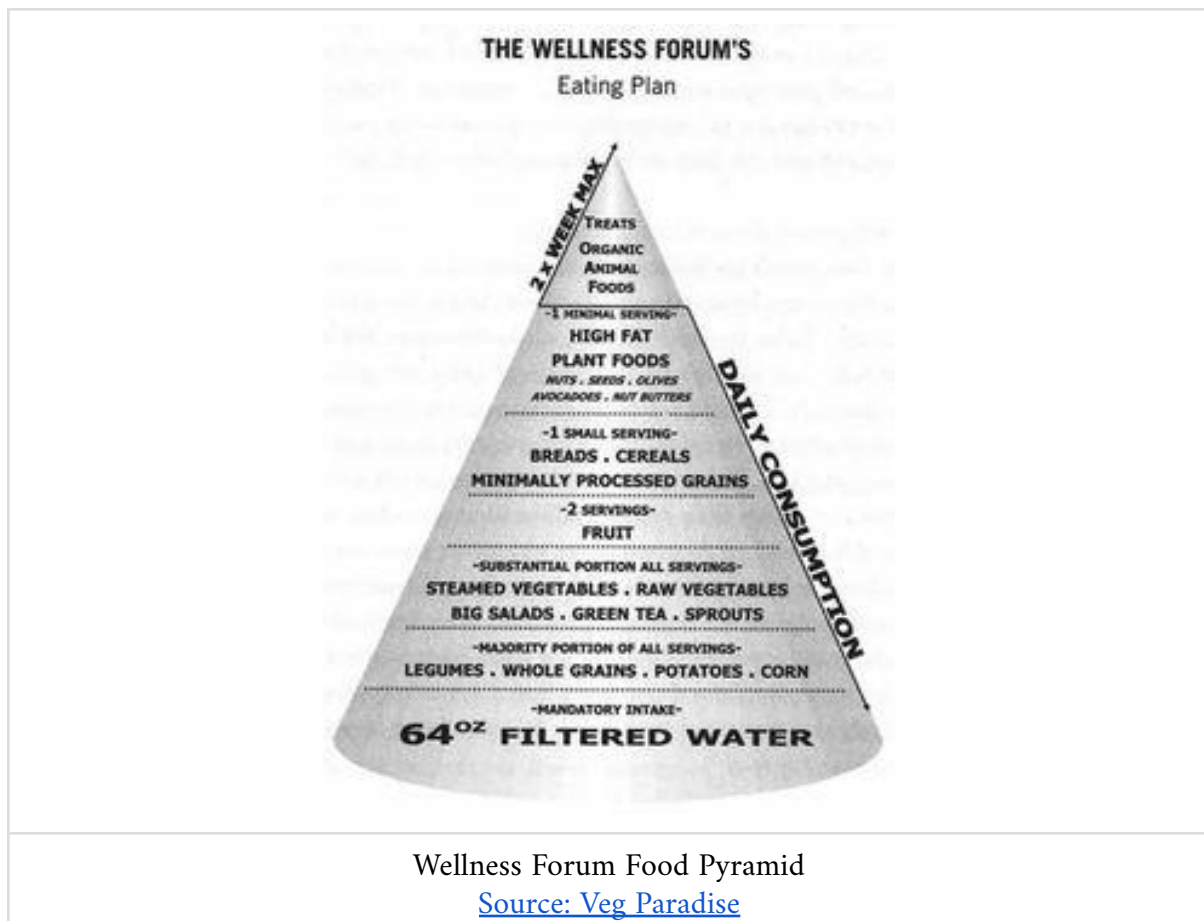
First, the doctors described the client and their situation, and then the client wrote a first-person account of their journey to health. There was a young lady who was too sick to go to college or have a job. She's now a healthy university student. Other successes were a patient who got rid of Crohn's Disease, a woman who eliminated her ulcerative colitis, and a man who completely got rid of his cardiovascular issues and high cholesterol.

A final story that really stuck out was from a 60-year-old man. When he went back to the doctor after adhering to the Wellness Forum diet for several weeks, his doctor was stunned. The doctor said, "I think there's a mistake. Last time you were in here you had advancing coronary artery disease and now, my God, it's like you have the arteries of an eighteen year old." The man had reversed his disease, which doctors see often at the Wellness Forum.

## Wellness Forum Diet

So what is this "Wellness Forum diet"? The book unfortunately doesn't go into many details of the diet, apart from the fact that it's whole-food, plant based, with no dairy or oils. Exactly what to eat simply wasn't the main focus of this particular book.

One paragraph did describe their food pyramid. On the bottom are 64 ounces of water; followed by beans, rice, corn, and potatoes. Next are steamed and raw vegetables and big salads, with fruit up on the next, smaller level. Here's a graphic I found of the complete Wellness Forum food pyramid:





There was a nice selection of recipes in the middle of the book, though. And online you can see what food is served at their [Wellness Forum Foods](#), as well as information about their cookbook ["Better Than Vegan."](#) which I plan to purchase.

## **Nutrition Misconceptions**

Another section of the book covered some common misunderstandings about nutrition—things that we're taught in school and are widely accepted in society, but that simply aren't true. I won't get into the details or research behind each one, as that could turn into an entire post itself (and it's found in the book), but here were some of the topics included:

### ***Protein***

Americans are taught that the body needs much more protein than it actually does. It's nearly impossible to be deficient in protein when you're eating 1,500-2,000 calories per day—no matter the combination of foods. But we're eating too much protein and it's detrimental to our health.

The history that led to this misconception about protein was quite interesting. Protein was one of the first nutrients ever discovered. Animals died without it, so it was seen as a vital nutrient and its benefit has been exaggerated ever since. Merzer then shares of when he reminded his protein over-consumer weightlifting friend that "elephants manage to grow pretty strong on a diet of plants." Oh yeah, I guess they do!

### ***Osteoporosis***

I grew up in the dairy state (Wisconsin), so it was drilled in since childhood that milk builds strong bones. I grew up with the "Got Milk?" campaign on commercials and magazine ads, and at school we drank milk both in the mornings and with lunch—not to mention the gallon or two that was always in the fridge at home. The reality of the situation is that the highest rates of osteoporosis are in countries with the highest dairy intake. Your bones will be better than fine if you eat a plant-based, dairy-free diet.

### ***Mammograms***

I'm not at the age to think about a mammogram yet, but I had previously thought it's just something all women are supposed to do. After reading this book, I will never have one! Mammogram statistics are skewed based on the set-up of experiments/surveys. They detect pseudo-cancers, which results in gross overtreatment, and mammograms do not reduce the risk of dying from real breast cancer. Findings by the Cochrane Collaboration ("the most independent medical research organization in the world") in 2001 stated that there is actually no reliable evidence to support mammogram screening at any age.

## ***Supplements***

And lastly, this book confirmed what I have been learning and realizing about health supplements: taking them is useless. Supplements fail to prevent, stop, or reverse any diseases. One of the authors did say that the B12 vitamin was special in that it could be taken as a supplement, but that's the only nutrient.

## **U.S. Government's Role in Health**

The idea of preventing and reversing diseases through a whole foods, plant-based dairy-free diet is somewhat new to my mind, so I hadn't yet thought about all of the implications of such a concept. "Food Over Medicine" touched on politics near the the end, looking at the U.S. government's role in our health, and introducing some new ideas to me.

I already knew that the government is outrageously tangled with farming (industrial livestock and dairy) and processed food companies. So if the government gives the right nutrition advice, they will make someone upset (most likely agriculture and manufacturing groups, the book suggests). What it really comes down to is that the government voluntarily sacrifices over tens of millions of people each year to unnecessary procedures, destructive drugs, and even deaths. For what? To be viewed in good light by the National Dairy Council and Kellogg's?

The two then go on to discuss Obamacare, one openly criticizing it as a Democrat. Obamacare is trying to give health insurance to all, not health for all. There's a huge difference between the two. If the government wants the people to have their health, they need to take away dairy/agriculture/meat subsidies and encourage a whole food plant-based diet, end of story.

The authors mention Michael Moore's documentary "Sicko" in this discussion as well, which I had always liked. But now I realize that's the wrong angle. So the pills and medications are much cheaper in other countries. Can you imagine how many more people would be on those meds if they were more easily accessible and cheaper? Prevent, stop, and reverse diseases with diet.

We need to end production and selling of "processed foods," which really isn't food at all. Introduce more farmer's markets. Tax \$1 on all meats and put that money towards truthful nutrition education. I suppose it's too far for the government to control what types of foods are available for consumption. But hopefully once enough people learn about the reality of food, companies like Kraft and Nabisco will go out of business on their own. Wishful thinking, eh?



## Education of Doctors and Health Practitioners

The last section from the book that I'll mention was about medical schools, and how doctors are and aren't trained and educated. "Nobody is taught that the diet is the cause of the diseases we battle and nobody is taught that diet will reverse them," writes Dr. Popper.

To put it simply, doctors are taught to treat symptoms. It's an outcome-oriented field. But we need to be preventative and stop the symptoms from ever occurring in the first place. How can your doctor learn that the progression of diseases can be stopped—and even reversed—with diet?

Dr. Popper suggests that you heal yourself with diet, and then be the first person to show your doctor that you reversed your symptoms with diet. That idea has also become part of my motivation for adopting this diet when I'm back in the states this fall.

## The Conversation That Could Change Your Life

This book, "Food Over Medicine," very well could change your life. As I said, it's written as a conversation between two people, so it's not a high-tech dense book. It's interesting and important.

I'll close with a quote from one of the Wellness Forum members, Patty Yeager, sharing her success story. It's something I really need to drill into my mind: "If you continue to do what you have always done you will continue to get the same results."



---

July 31, 2014

## *During Low Times, Find One Positive*

It's been nearly two months since my last health check-in here on the blog. While this won't be a complete check up like the last one, I do want to comment on some recent personal events, how my health has taken a toll as a result, and the one thing I'm still doing right despite everything.

A completely unexpected breakup last week—when I have just one month left here in Korea—led me to do some emotional eating. There's been lots of chocolate making its way into my apartment, after I had gone over two weeks without a single drop! I had been so proud of my no-chocolate record. So I've definitely done some back pedaling, but I'll soon be able to take some steps forward again. The chocolate's not here to stay, just here to comfort.

I've also been frequenting the "bakery" in town every day this week, eating things like donuts and sandwiches (things that I hadn't touched for several months). This is partly due to the fact that I'm teaching summer camp right now during my school's summer vacation period. Our cafeteria is closed during vacation, so I have to bring something to eat every day (since I can't call to order delivery and can't drive to a restaurant, as Korean teachers do). Recent events had me completely unmotivated to do any cooking (plus it's super hot and my refrigerator doesn't really keep things cold... not the greatest combination), so I've been stopping by this bakery every morning to pick up a breakfast item and lunch item for the day—and sometimes a treat too (aka a donut).

This will not become a habit, as my surroundings will change by the end of next week when camp finishes and I have a week and a half of vacation with my sister and Grandma. And I'm starting to kick back into gear, regaining some of the motivation that had been completely drained out of me last week. After all, I'm writing a post!

One last let down is the fact that I haven't been exercising or stretching. Any chance of running stopped back in June when the humidity and heat became so gross and high here. It's stayed all July, and I just can't go out and run in that, though I'm sure some sort of exercise would have been really good for me this past week. But I also haven't been doing any *Give It 100* videos or my regular stretching at home in my AC (I think my last video was Day 77). That took a hit when I started a second job—an online editing gig—just over a month ago. My daily routine changed as a result.

Now instead of stretching and making a video right when I get home from work, I log two hours of editing work and then feel so very drained and only want to shut off my mind with a TV show before bed. Recently I'm making pitiful efforts to stretch to some extent, even if it's just a few toe reaches during passing time at school. Again, I'm not worried because my daily routine will completely be redesigned when I leave Korea at the end of the month, and my legs will get a fabulous workout every day when I walk the *Camino de Santiago* in September/October.

I did mention there was one thing I'm doing right. I must not beat myself up about all of my latest health "fails," so I'm making sure to highlight my single success: I'm drinking plenty of water! The summer heat definitely is to thank for this one, though being reminded to drink water in two recent readings have reaffirmed the habit.

The first was in [James Clear's article on sleep](#). He wrote that he usually drinks an entire glass of water right when he wakes up, because his body has just gone 6-8 hours without any fluids. I'd never thought about that before, so even though it was just a brief sentence, the image really stuck with me. It's caused me to grab for a water bottle first thing in the morning a few times already. The second was seeing the base of the Wellness Center's food pyramid as I read "Food Over Medicine": 64 ounces of filtered water. Again, it was a new image in my mind—to see water as the base of a food pyramid—and it brought water closer to the front of my attention. I'm taking great advantage of the drinking fountains at school, refilling my water bottle several times each day, and then drinking more once I'm home for the evening.

We all go through times of turmoil, so I wanted to honestly share how such a time has recently affected my health journey. Even in just writing this post, by identifying my unhealthy behaviors and the causes, I feel as though I've taken a step towards the right path again.

---

November 6, 2014

## *November Health Updates*

Three full months have passed since my last post. What have I been up to? Why the absence?

## Accounting for My Time: August - October

During my school's summer break in August, my sister and grandma came to visit me in Korea for two weeks. We spent some time in Seoul and Gwangju, and then finished up in Hong Kong. I left my computer at home the entire trip.

Then I had my final week working and living in the country. I kept busy packing, cleaning, taking care of loose ends, and blogging about the recent trip with my grandma and sister. Then I spent five brief days in Tokyo where I visited a friend before continent hopping over to Europe.

I was reunited with my love, Madrid, before heading off to walk the *Camino de Santiago* across northern Spain for a month. And then the last two weeks of October I visited my dear friends in London.

On Halloween I spookily reappeared at my parents' front door here in the states. While I've journeyed to pockets of the globe, I've remained on this health journey as well. I'm looking forward to putting greater focus on my digestive health, now that I'm living in a place where I speak the language and have total control over how I spend my time and what I choose to eat.

## November 2014 Health Update and Posts to Come

And now for the catch-all, I'd like to document where I'm at now and what you can expect in the coming weeks here on the blog.

### ***Exercise***

I signed up for zumba and pilates (each meets once a week), plus a 3-month weight room pass at my town's village center. The plan is to get into a routine of going every morning at 8am, whether it's for one of my classes or lifting in the fitness center. This is good!

### ***"Fed Up"***

My older brother lent me the documentary "Fed Up," which I'll be watching and writing about soon.

### ***Human Gut - American Food Project***

I recently placed an order online to participate in the [American Food Project - Human Gut](#). When the kit arrives (3-4 weeks), I'll be submitting a stool sample, and will eventually receive a list of the bacteria living in that sample, and their abundance. I'm hoping this will give me some insight to my IBS.

### ***Soil-based organisms supplement***

While I've previously written about why I stopped taking probiotics and other supplements, I just ordered a bottle of [Swanson's Soil-based Organisms with 72 Trace Minerals](#). Why? My grandma told me that a distant cousin of mine had had digestive problems for many years. He started taking these capsules and within a few days felt better than he had in a long time. So I figured why not try it out, just in case? The bottle was only \$10, so it's not a huge investment.

### ***"The Omnivore's Dilemma"***

I'm in the second half of Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma" and enjoying it so much. A write-up will follow.

### ***Month-long challenge/experiment***

I've been telling many people that I'm going to do some sort of strict month-long diet challenge/experiment. No dairy and no meat (and no processed foods) was the original idea, though it could change. I need to solidify this soon and START!

So I clearly haven't even started this month-long "food challenge" yet, but I'm already meeting some resistance. My grandma keeps telling me to start it after Thanksgiving; she really wants me to eat everything she makes for the holiday, but I'm fine with skipping it. Also, living with my parents there's a ton of food around that I shouldn't eat. Certain things are really easy to avoid (Kraft mac & cheese, for example... there's no way I would ever open and cook you!), but others are a lot more tempting (like the dark chocolate M&Ms that live in the almond container).

So while I'm happy to be home (and not paying rent...), sharing a kitchen with others who eat very differently from me does pose its difficulties. I've got to sit down and make a plan, and then stick to it. I might be ordering a spiralizer, too, to help consume more plants. So that's where I've been, where I am, and where I'm headed. How are you doing?

---

November 13, 2014

## *James Clear: 18 Superb Posts for Better Health*

One of my favorite blogs I started following this year is that of [James Clear](#). James Clear is an entrepreneur, weightlifter, and travel photographer. He writes about "science-based ideas for

living a better life and building habits that stick." He publishes two posts on his blog every week, always on Mondays and Thursdays. He has done this for nearly two years now—talk about commitment and consistency!

The posts vary in topic, as you might guess from his interests and pursuits, but all share a common theme of improving yourself. So the posts show you how to build habits, increase productivity, boost health—become better. For those of you who are new to his blog, this week I've pulled together a collection of his best posts about health—both physical and mental. Enjoy!

## 18 Superb Posts for Better Health from James Clear

### *Physical health*

- [Hacking the Workout Journal: How to Track Your Workouts in the Simplest, Most Effective Way Possible](#)
- [How to Sleep Better: The 3 Ways to Improve Your Sleep](#)
- [3 Simple Ways to Make Exercise a Habit](#)
- [Mozart as Medicine: The Health Benefits of Music](#)
- [Make More Art: The Health Benefits of Creativity](#)
- [Live Longer: What You Can Learn from Elite Athletes and Why the Japanese Never Die](#)
- [What Happens to Your Brain When You Eat Junk Food \(And Why We Crave It\)](#)
- [10 Simple Ways to Eat Healthy, Backed by Science](#)
- [Simple Diet Ideas: Effortless Ways to Lose Weight and Eat Healthy](#)

### *Mental health*

- [Sisu: How to Develop Mental Toughness in the Face of Adversity](#)
- [How Positive Thinking Builds Your Skills, Boosts Your Health, and Improves Your Work](#)
- [How to Be Motivated Every Day: Lessons Learned from Twyla Tharp](#)
- [Let Your Values Drive Your Choices](#)
- [Feeling Uncertain Doesn't Make You Weak, Weird, or Unqualified](#)
- [How to Be Thankful for Life by Changing Just One Word](#)
- [It's Good to Feel Stupid: 5 Thoughts on Overcoming Fear and Self Doubt](#)
- [5 Simple Ways to Be Happy: Try These Today](#)
- [Martha Graham on the Hidden Danger of Comparing Yourself to Others](#)

November 20, 2014

## *Where Do Vegetarians and Vegans Get Their Protein?*

So while I haven't called myself vegetarian or vegan yet, the first meat I've had in over two weeks was in my chili on Tuesday night. My aunt and uncle had taken me out for dinner, and I'd decided to stay in town—which means not many options. I saw chili and salad on the menu which sounded so good, especially considering the freezing cold outside, so that's what I ordered.

In that moment, I completely forgot why I hadn't been ordering meat out: I want to know where it comes from! I want it to be grass-fed and treated right if I'm going to eat any meat! Which, in my budget, will probably translate to cooking it at home. I feel like all of the restaurants around here that are conscious of where their meat comes from are way out of my budget.

But anyway, so I'd spaced out, which wasn't a big deal—since I haven't established any particular diet that I'm following yet. My aunt works as a dietician in a nursing home, and knew that I have been changing my diet. During conversation, she asked about me eating meat, and then proceeded with, "So how are you getting your protein?"

As soon as she said it, I knew that I had read about this very question in at least one of the books I've read this year, but could I remember the details of what it had said? Of course not. All I could muster is, "Plants and fruits." Later, "Oh, and beans! Legumes! Everything has protein." She said, "But it's not the same type of protein." And I think that conversation ended with a weak "I get enough protein" or something from me. It's fuzzy now.

Later that night I remembered that elephants, the strongest land mammals, are herbivorous. Should have spouted that fact! I also remembered something from one of the books about the fact that protein was the first nutrient discovered, and extra importance was placed on it because the lab rats died without any. This is how my memory usually works in cases like these - I can't remember the specifics of what I've read/seen unless I write it down and study it.

So today I wanted to look into the topic more, be sure that I was getting "enough" protein, and learn how to answer the question better next time.

### **How Much Protein Do You Need Each Day?**

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following daily intake of protein in adults:

- Women: 46 grams protein
- Men: 56 grams protein

Government health recommendations are too often littered with political agendas, but I think this is all right to go by.

And so what does that mean in terms of food? From what I've read, basically if you eat a varied diet it's hard not to reach this amount. Most Americans actually get way more than the recommended daily value, and apparently it's not clear (or not agreed upon yet) if consuming excess amounts is harmful or not. So I wouldn't go out of your way to surpass this daily intake amount.

## Why Is Protein Important?

As I touched on above, protein has this extra importance placed on it, at least in the American society. That's because it was one of the first nutrients discovered. Researchers found out that lab rats died when they didn't have any protein, so it was seen as this special nutrient that sustains life. Yes, without any you will die, but the benefits of protein were very much exaggerated.

What's in this protein that sustains life? Amino acids, the building blocks of life. Our body can make many amino acids, but there are nine that we must consume from outside sources in order to have them in our bodies. These are called essential amino acids. There's such an emphasis on meats, dairy, and fish when it comes to protein because they carry all nine of these essential amino acids, and are thus labeled "complete proteins."

There is still plenty of protein in plant-based sources, but each of these individual sources will not contain all nine essential amino acids. That's why a healthy varied diet should be getting you what you need. So which vegetarian and vegan foods provide the most protein?

## Where Can Vegetarians and Vegans Get Protein?

Here are some foods where both vegetarians and vegans can get some of their protein. It is not at all exhaustive, and when there are categories, I've only listed a few suggestions.

- Green peas
- Edamame
- Quinoa
- Nuts and nut butter (almonds, walnuts, pistachios, pecans, cashews, pine nuts)
- Beans (red, black, lentils, chickpeas)
- Tofu
- Leafy greens



- Seeds (chia, sunflower, sesame, poppy)
- Avocado

For those of you looking for longer lists, and breakdowns of exactly how much protein is found in each item (and even which amino acids), check out these awesome sources:

For Vegetarians: [Vegetarian Protein Foods - No Meat Athlete](#)

For Vegans: [Protein in the Vegan Diet - The Vegetarian Resource Group](#)

So that's what I've compiled so far on this protein topic. Yes, we need it, and yes you can get enough on a vegetarian or vegan diet. Hopefully now we're all a little more prepared for the next time a well-intentioned family member or friend inquires about our protein intake.

---

November 30, 2014

## *The Importance of Gratitude*

When I was younger, my mother would always say to us four kids during dinner, "All right, two good things." And my siblings and I would go around the table, each required to tell two good things that had happened to us that day. It's just what we did.

Some days I loved it, excitedly sharing something neat that had happened at school. Other days if I were in a sour mood, I would grudgingly give a thoughtless answer. As we got older, moving into middle and high school, meals together became rare. Between the four of us kids we had jobs, music lessons, rehearsals, co-curricular events, and so on. So at some point, the "two good things" dinner routine stopped.

### **Writing Thank You Notes**

Another "forced-gratitude" element of my childhood, if you will, was writing thank you notes. After every birthday, Christmas, and any other occasion in which we received a gift of any sort, we little ones had to write thank you notes to each and every giver.

At the time I did it because we had to, and it would get added to our chores list. If many days had passed since receiving the gifts, we probably couldn't watch TV until we finished writing those thank you notes, or something like that.

But now, I willingly and gladly write them, snail mail lover that I am. They're fun to make and decorate, and it simply feels great to express gratitude. I love putting that energy into the card or letter, knowing that it'll create even more good feelings when the recipient opens it.

Because of my upbringing, plus personal experiences since, I've learned that gratitude is so important to have and share. Here are a few reasons why:

## The Many Benefits of Gratitude

- Focusing on something positive, like what you're thankful for, makes you happier. It just does. So if you want to feel better? Appreciate what you've got.
- Gratitude lowers your stress levels, making your body healthier and resulting in better sleep at night.
- Focusing on gratitude shifts your mind, filling it with positive thoughts. This shift helps you solve problems and deal with others in a kinder way during the rest of your day.
- The goodness of appreciative thoughts take up room in your mind, leaving less space for negative thoughts. There's a direct increase in self-esteem because of this.
- Gratitude also strengthens your relationships. By honestly and openly telling your friends or significant others what you appreciate about them, you'll create positive emotions all around.

*Have I convinced you yet? So what are some simple ways to add more gratitude into your life right now?*

---

December 5, 2014

## *Swanson Soil-Based Organisms: A Worthy Supplement?*

While my grandma was visiting me this past summer when I still lived in Korea, she inquired about my digestive health. This discussion resulted in her telling me something so huge that I wondered why I hadn't heard about it sooner.

She said my cousin (all right, a second cousin's son if we're being precise) had bad digestive problems for many many years, recently started taking some supplement, and his symptoms have totally left! Of course I asked what supplement it was, so she e-mailed his mother and got an answer within the day.

What did he take? [Swanson soil-based organisms](#). Yeah, I know I've publicly sworn off supplements here on the blog before, but when you hear a success story like that from someone you know and trust—a relative—it's hard to ignore. So as soon as I got back to the states last month I ordered a bottle online. And at \$9.99 per bottle of 90 capsules, it was an easy purchase to make.

Let's take a closer look at what's in these guys:

## Swanson Ultra Soil-Based Organisms



This dietary supplement is meant to promote "regular bowel function and immune system health." It has 15 strains of beneficial microorganisms and digestive enzymes. Here's the product blurb from the Swanson Health Products site:

*Regain the missing ingredient lacking in so much of the food grown today and enjoy steadier energy levels, easier digestion and improved bowel function. Modern farming techniques that impoverish soil together with cooking and heat processing destroy the microscopic soil-based organisms (SBO) that give our food its full nutrient potential. With over 5 billion live organisms per serving, plus digestive enzymes and 72 trace minerals, SBO will improve your intestinal absorption of nutrients and speed the body's synthesis of superoxide dismutase (SOD), a powerful first-line-defense antioxidant. The SBO retain full potential until you consume them, only activating upon exposure to liquid.*

And [here's the complete ingredient list](#).

## My Experience with Swanson Ultra Soil-Based Organisms

You're supposed to take one capsule a day with water or juice, but I'm not great at swallowing pills (hence my Dr. Mercola's powder probiotics I used to take). And believe it or not, when you're out of practice you don't get any better.

The first day I was pleasantly surprised that I actually got it down on the second try! Maybe I could become a capsule-swallowing pro after all. All hope dwindled on the second day when I just couldn't swallow it no matter how many swigs of water I took. Soon the capsule started disintegrating in my mouth—which tastes oh so very great as you can imagine.

So I improvised and have been able to swallow a capsule with my first bite of bagel when I have breakfast. For some reason it's completely doable when I'm swallowing with food. But when that capsule is floating in my mouth with a bunch of liquid, my body just does not want to swallow it. So I take it with food, and then drink a few swallows of water before continuing to eat my bagel. I hope this isn't affecting the results, though I did see one customer comment saying that you should take this supplement with food (but if that's the case, then why wouldn't they instruct it?).

So can I notice a difference? It's been several weeks now, I'd say, and I take one capsule every morning. The first few days I didn't notice anything, though a couple more days in and I noticed new smells and colors (hint of green) leaving me. So something was changing, at least; with the Dr. Mercola probiotics I used to take regularly, I never once noticed any changes.

And then after maybe a week I noticed a heftier change in my BM one day. All of a sudden that morning something solid left me! Small parts, but solid nonetheless. I was really excited that day, could this be it? Was this all I had needed to introduce into my gut ecosystem? And then things returned to "normal" the following day (my normal=liquid), and ever since.

I also noticed back when I first started taking the supplement that I wasn't very hungry. Normally when I'm home all day (which I am now, working from home), I'll snack and snack. Especially to procrastinate. But at the start I'd fill up on less than normal and not feel like eating until I'd be hungry again, which wouldn't be until significantly after American meal times (a good thing though, I think, to only eat when you're hungry).

So I'm not sure if that had to do with the supplement or not. I'd say maybe I'm still eating less than my "average" now, but it could be due to my new environment, new food, the winter season, new exercise routine, etc. I'm tired too, but I think that has more to do with the winter season, lack of light, and working as an editor (it's draining!) more than anything.

## **Supplements Aren't "the Solution"**

I know that you can't just take supplements and expect things to magically be fixed, which was part of my reasoning last April to not take them anymore in the first place. Rather, you must change what you eat if you want to see changes in your health. Remember, in the words of Patty Yeager:

***If you continue to do what you have always done, you will continue to get the same results.***

That said, I'm going to keep on taking the supplement every morning for now, hoping it will help my body grow a healthy flora as I experiment with food choices. I'm well aware that what I choose to eat always impacts my health—with or without the supplement. I'll be sure to update in another month or so regarding these soil-based organisms, and whether there's been any change or no change at all.

---

December 12, 2014

## *Fed Up: It's Time to Get Real About Our Food*

For the first time in the history of the world, more people are dying from obesity than from starvation. That's one of the earlier lines in [the movie "Fed Up," which my food blogger brother wrote about in October](#).

Documentary-lover that I am, and with my interest in nutrition and health, I borrowed his copy of the movie and watched it myself. I highly recommend the film, especially for Americans who have never thought about their food before. It's a great, simple introduction to many of the complex problems surrounding the average American's health and diet today.

[Here's the trailer](#).

### **Fed Up with Childhood Obesity and Diabetes**

The movie focused on the problem that more children today than ever before in history are becoming diabetic. This is also the first generation expected to have shorter lives than their parents. Why? It's because of what children are eating.

The movie follows the stories of a few severely obese children and their families, observing how each is trying to fight the problem. One is a 12-year-old girl who weighs 212 pounds. Another is a 400-pound 9th grade boy from Texas. It was hard to watch at times, only because most of their families were going about helping their children lose weight in the completely wrong way, hence no results.

For example, the 12-year-old swims four days a week and walks her dog on the weekend, says she's "eating healthy," but still no change in weight. Her doctor told her to join Weight Watchers, but when they looked into the program, they found out she's not old enough. So they stopped going to the doctor. Instead, the parents check fat content on boxes, always sure to buy low-fat products, and fortified cereals with whole grains in them. At school she eats the school lunch, but that's often a cheeseburger and fries. (More on public school lunches in a bit.)

As the rest of the movie explains, this is the wrong way to lose weight and have your health. But I suppose this was part of the point—that directions from our doctors and physicians, coupled with what items in the grocery store are mislabeled to make you think, aren't clear. Society blames people for not exercising enough, they blame the obese person's lack of will power. But that's not the problem. So what's to blame? This film says that sugar is the main culprit, and I believe it.

## **Fed Up with Sugar and the Processed Food Industry**

In order to look at the present day sugar and processed food problems, we need to first go back to 1977. [The McGovern Report](#) from that year was the first time the U.S. government sat down to write dietary guidelines for the country. But the egg, sugar, dairy and beef industries didn't like the suggestions in the report, as it would have hurt business (surprise, surprise). So under industry pressure, the recommendations in the report were changed. It encouraged Americans to buy more lean products instead of less processed and sugary products. So that's what prompted the '80s to boom with "low-fat" products.

How does low fat lead to sugar? Well, as the film explains, if you remove the fat, the food tastes worse. So to make it taste better they add sugar. Lots and lots of sugar. If you take a look at all of the products sold in grocery stores today, 80% have added sugar in them. In fact, from 1977 to 2000, Americans have completely doubled their daily sugar intake. D-o-u-b-l-e-d. And we wonder why there are so many health problems today...

Well, how do we know that all of this excess sugar is bad? What are the dietary guidelines about sugar? How can so much be in all of this food if it's bad for us? In 2002, the World Health Organization (WHO, division of the United Nations) put together a document called TRS 916. Original name, I know. The TRS 916 included the recommendation to restrict sugar intake to 10% of your total calories. This is nearly a repeat of the McGovern report, because once again, the food industries didn't like the health recommendation.

So because of all their pushback, Tommy Thompson went to Geneva himself and actually told the WHO that if they were to publish the document, the USA would withhold the 406 million dollars

they'd promised the organization. Wowzer. So guess what happened? The WHO completely removed the sugar recommendation from the report. Surprisingly (or not?) the USA now recommends that 25% of your daily calories should come from sugar.

Yeah, it got bumped from 10% to 25% in our country: two and a half times the original WHO recommendation! How did all of this sugar creep into our diet? Easy, check the nutritional label of anything. Find the sugar line and look at the grams. Now look at the Daily Value %. Oh wait, there isn't one! Yes, food companies are somehow magically exempt from reporting the daily value percent for sugar. On many products, the sugar percentage would be super high, often over 100%—and that's with the daily recommended value that's already 2.5 times the World Health Organization recommendation!

The bottom line is that sugar is addictive, it's cheap, so the food companies are thriving off of it, while our health is suffering incredibly. Food companies are here to make money, not to make us healthy. The food industry does not care about your health, no matter what their boxes, labels, and advertisements may try to trick you into thinking.

## **Fed Up with Lies from the Processed Food Industry**

As I've learned earlier this year from reading several books (especially "Whole") and doing some nutrition research, a calorie of x is not the same as a calorie of y. "Fed Up" compares 160 calories of almonds to 160 calories of soda as an example. The almonds have fiber naturally built in (nature knows what it's doing, folks), meaning that it's not absorbed immediately by the body, so blood sugar rises lower for longer. Soda, on the other hand, is absorbed directly through the portal system to the liver. This causes the liver to have a sugar rush, so the organ immediately turns it into fat. A calorie is not a calorie, yet all of the soda companies and processed food companies will tell you the opposite. They want you to focus on calories, calories, calories—because they can turn those up or down as they wish.

The documentary also briefly touches on the political muck surrounding fast food and processed food companies. Many, like Coca Cola and Pepsi for example, fund university research and donate to professional societies. This allows them to get studies showing the results they want—which is neither science nor the truth. These companies have teamed up with Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" campaign, to keep her from attacking their industries. The First Lady's original campaign was set to tackle both diet and exercise, but quickly became solely focused on exercise when the big companies heard the message she was going to spread. So companies like Kraft, Coca Cola, Hershey's, Kellogs, etc. signed an agreement with her to remove 1.5 trillion calories out of the marketplace in 2015. This only comes out to a bite a day for the average child,

but that's besides the point. See what their focus is again? Calories. They're taking out a few calories, but these new products have the same amount of sugar.

## **Fed Up with Processed Food Ads Targeting Children**

"Fed Up" actually compares processed food and fast food companies to tobacco companies 30 years ago in the way that they target children in ads.

They use cartoons, have toys in kids meals, fun play areas in the restaurant, etc. But kids have never seen a commercial for fruits and vegetables, and this completely changes their whole conception of food—which I can attest to, as I was born in 1989. All people born in the '80s and on have been surrounded by these processed food and fast food advertisements their entire lives. Candy bars in check-out aisles of every type of store, fast food in school lunches. I didn't know what real food was until I left the country for the first time my junior year of college and my eyes were opened.

## **Fed Up with U.S. Public School Lunches**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture got put in charge of the country's dietary regulations after the McGovern report, which definitely shouldn't be the case. (Conflict of interest, anyone?) Even though school lunch policy was recently "improved," did you know that both pizza and french fries count as a vegetable under our country's policy? You heard me: According to the U.S. government, pizza and french fries are vegetables.

Want to know how the pizza remained in that definition? Schwan, a frozen food company from Minnesota, makes 70% of its pizza sales to public schools. So if the government would have declared the truth, that pizza is not a vegetable, pizza sales would have dropped.

Another case of special interests being put ahead of public health. So many fast food restaurants operate in schools. If school cafeterias prepared food in the school, as they did years ago, that would fix so much of this health epidemic. Movie narrator Katie Couric asks near the film's end: What if all sodas carried a warning label, like cigarettes do now? What if fast food and processed food advertisements were removed from TV and taken out of public spaces? What if school lunches were cooked at school, removing all fast and processed foods from the building? What a wonderful world it would be!

## **The "Fed Up" Challenge: Sugar Free for 10 Days**

The makers of the movie have created the "Fed Up" challenge, which is fantastic because people need a concrete action in order to change. People may agree with everything in the film, but



unless you have a specific action to put in place, old habits will remain. So the challenge is to go sugar free for ten days.

Other ways to get involved and keep the conversation flowing would definitely be to watch the film if you haven't yet seen it—better yet watch it with someone (friends, family). Be aware of that sugar line on food labels, check for sugar in the ingredients list, and avoid "low-fat"/"reduced fat" foods. Better yet, stick to the outer rim of the grocery store (produce, fresh foods) and purchase more foods that don't come with a nutrition label.

And after you've seen the film, I'd love to hear from you—are you fed up?

---

**December 19, 2014**

## *The Omnivore's Dilemma*

Last month I finished reading Michael Pollan's "The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals"—named one of the top 10 books in 2006 by the *New York Times*.

### **"The Omnivore's Dilemma": A Fascinating Read**

Just like Pollan's other books I've read this year ("In Defense of Food," "Food Rules," and "Cooked"), "The Omnivore's Dilemma" was a fascinating read. Pollan is a gifted writer who conveys important information in a clear, honest, and entertaining way. What I love about Pollan is that he always dives right in and gets involved with the source of whatever he's researching, learning first-hand from various people. Living and working on a "grass farm" and learning to hunt wild boar are just two examples of such involvement from this book.

The Omnivore's Dilemma is split into three sections: industrial corn, pastoral grass, and the forest; with their accompanying four meals: fast food, grass-fed, industrial organic, and hunter-gatherer. I never knew reading about corn or the word "organic" could be so interesting! Throughout the book, Pollan points out the problems with the modern American diet, and how they came to be. In the introduction, he writes that this book is the answer to the question "What should we have for dinner?," as well as an exploration of how this basic question became so complicated.

I highly recommend this book for any American eater. Since a summary could in no way live up to or correctly explain concepts learned through reading the whole book, I'll just share some of my big takeaways using quotes that I highlighted while reading. (Note: Book quotes are italicized and blocked.)

## Big Takeaways from "The Omnivore's Dilemma"

### ***The problem with corn***

I mentioned earlier that it was so interesting to read about corn in the United States (though also a bit depressing and hopeless). Pollan introduces that section by going through a grocery store and common American food items, tracing each back to the same origin: corn. Basically corn is overproduced and also subsidized by the government, and most is used to make high fructose corn syrup, a cheap and unhealthy sweetener for processed foods.

*A farm family needs a certain amount of cash flow every year to support itself, and if the price of corn falls, the only way to stay even is to sell more corn. Naylor says that farmers desperate to boost yield end up degrading their land, plowing and planting marginal land, applying more nitrogen—anything to squeeze a few more bushels from the soil. Yet the more bushels each farmer produces, the lower prices go, giving another turn to the perverse spiral of overproduction.*

I liked that I had this background before watching "Fed Up," as the book explains in depth how corn became so cheap, which made it the key ingredient in sodas (high fructose corn syrup) and so many processed foods.

### ***What it means to be "organic"***

*"The organic label is a marketing tool," Secretary Glickman said. "It is not a statement about food safety. Nor is 'organic' a value judgement about nutrition or quality."*

While some organic foods are made on smaller farms that take into account natural systems, the book also explored "industrial organic" farms, as the author names them. These industrial organic farms cause many of the same problems as industrial farms, and aren't much more humane to animals and the land. Pollan shows with specific examples how the picture painted on many organic food labels can be just as misleading as non-organic labels.

### ***The magic of a grass farm***

I loved the chapters that Pollan spends on Joel Salatin's "grass farm" in Virginia, Polyface. It's often called a grass farm because the various species of grass are so important to the overall health of

the farm's ecosystem. Everything is connected, and it was a wonderful reminder of nature's beauty to see the interconnectedness of all species and plants, big and small.

*The reason Joel moves his cattle at the end of the day is because that's when sugar levels in the grass hit their peak; overnight the plant will gradually use up these reserves. It seems the chickens eschew fresh manure, so he waits three or four days before bringing them in—but not a day longer. That's because the fly larvae in the manure are on a four-day cycle, he explained.*

Joel says that this gives the fly larvae enough time to fatten up for the hens to eat them, but not enough time to actually hatch into flies. He explains how the forest on the northern side of the farm impacts all of the plants and creatures, for example, as well as numerous other elements. It was so eye-opening and refreshing to see that nature's default is health.

Here's a snippet of what we learn about Budger, a cow on Joel's farm:

*Chances are Budger has also chosen exactly which grasses to eat first, depending on whatever minerals her body craves that day; some species supply her more magnesium, others more potassium. (If she's feeling ill she might go for the plantain, a forb whose leaves contain antibiotic compounds; grazing cattle instinctively use the diversity of the salad bar to medicate themselves.)*

We also see how this drastically contrasts to cows raised in industrial farms, which are force fed corn (their stomachs are specifically meant to digest grass) which basically kills them. They have to be kept "healthy" by so many antibiotics and shots (there goes big money to the pharmaceutical companies) which in turn gets absorbed into your body when you eat meat from an industrialized farm. It is absolutely cruelty to animals what happens on such farms, and while it's certainly not pleasant to read the details, I'm really glad that I did and am no longer living in ignorant bliss. Without even consciously deciding to change anything, I haven't been ordering meat at restaurants nor buying it from the grocery store.

### ***The environmental impact of industrial farming***

I think the biggest thing most people think about when it comes to industrial farming is the negative impact on animals. What I had never given much thought to before reading this book is the entire environmental impact, and how farming is connected to global warming.

*For example, if the sixteen million acres now being used to grow corn to feed cows in the United States became well-managed pasture, that would remove fourteen billion pounds of carbon from the atmosphere each year, the equivalent of taking four million cars off the road. We seldom focus on farming's role in global warming, but as much as a third of all the greenhouse gases that*

*human activity has added to the atmosphere can be attributed to the saw and the plow.*

It was also important to see how these impacts, both environmental and human health-related, aren't taken into account at all when pricing food items.

*The ninety-nine-cent price of a fast-food hamburger simply doesn't take account of that meal's true cost—to soil, oil, public health, the public purse, etc., costs which are never charged directly to the consumer but, indirectly and invisibly, to the taxpayer (in the form of subsidies), the health care system (in the form of food-borne illnesses and obesity), and the environment (in the form of pollution), not to mention the welfare of the workers in the feedlot and the slaughterhouse and the welfare of the animals themselves. If not for this sort of blindman's accounting, grass would make a lot more sense than it now does.*

I think many people don't buy organic or grass-fed items because you can get off-brands cheaper, but Pollan makes the point that as a consumer, you can choose to either pay for "honestly priced" or "irresponsibly priced" food. I now keep this in my mind when I'm grocery shopping.

While shopping I also remind myself that Americans spend the lowest percent of their paychecks on food compared to any other country, which always gets me to go for the better option. I'm paying for my current and future health when I make good food choices, as well as helping the environment and reducing our country's future health care costs.

## **Read "The Omnivore's Dilemma" This Month**

I highly recommend "The Omnivore's Dilemma"; why not pick it up from your library this week and start reading it? While the book communicates must-know information about America's food sources, it's engaging and fun to read at the same time.

***Has anyone else read The Omnivore's Dilemma? What did you think?***

---

December 30, 2014

## *Sticking with Dietary Restrictions Over the Holidays*

Firstly, happy holidays!

Secondly, this week I wanted to share the difficulties I've found in keeping to dietary restrictions around the holiday seasons, plus some tips that have worked for me to make it easier. So which dietary restrictions am I talking about here?

### **My Current Dietary Restrictions**

I feel like it almost goes without saying that processed/fast foods are off limits; they're hardly even a legitimate option in my mind of something to eat, which is huge progress from where I was at several years ago.

So my main answer to that question right now is that I avoid dairy. I simply can't digest the stuff, but surprisingly I don't miss it (still battling with chocolate, though). I've also been learning that dairy perhaps isn't as good or necessary for us as our country's food pyramid makes it out to be, which makes it that much easier to stay away from.

And one final restriction to add: Lately, especially since reading "The Omnivore's Dilemma" though, my diet is getting closer and closer to a meatless one. I haven't yet sat down and strictly decided to eat a vegetarian or vegan diet, but I don't want to eat meat from industrial farms. So I haven't been buying meat from the grocery store, and I look for vegetarian options when out at restaurants, though occasionally I'll eat a bit of meat if one of my parents makes something and I'm so inclined to indulge.

### **Difficulties of Dietary Restrictions During the Holidays**

The biggest difficulty for me has been the surplus of food at my house. We were six for just one night, and the numbers varied as my siblings came and went, so my parents cooked lots of full meals (which we honestly don't normally do), plus we hosted one of our family Christmases on Sunday.

On top of all the food, my mom made a batch of sugar cookies a few days before Christmas, my aunt brought a big tupperware of cookies, the neighbors brought over cookies, my sister and mom's elementary students gave them cookies and sweets... so basically I've been surrounded by Christmas cookies and chocolate.

I was actually surprised by how little I was tempted by lots of these sweets I would have devoured even a year ago. The Hershey's kisses don't even tempt me. Yay for progress! But I really don't like to waste food, and with so much coming in, I often thought that I had to do my part in not wasting said food.

So how did all of this come into play over the holidays? I'll fill you in on some happenings that went down while sharing tips for sticking with dietary restrictions during this time of year. And yes, I realize it would have been loads more useful to put this list together before the holidays, but you live and learn.

## **Tips to Sticking with Dietary Restrictions over the Holidays**

### ***Prepare healthy alternatives for yourself***

If you know you're going to be surrounded by lots of things you can't eat, plan ahead and surround yourself with things you can eat. Even go ahead and spoil yourself with a healthy treat, which for me would be a Naked (juice) or something.

I had (and still have) dried mangos on hand, which have been my latest treat when I'm itching for something sweet, plus other fruits, hummus, and various good snacks.

### ***Purchase substitute ingredients***

If people around you are going to bake some traditional holiday recipes, they could easily substitute ingredients if you have them. So this is another one where it's easier if you plan ahead. Family members are much more likely to substitute an ingredient for you if you have the alternative right there in the kitchen, versus needing to run out to the store after someone's already begun cooking.

This holiday season, my two biggest substitute ingredients I always had in the fridge were Earth Balance (butter substitute) and rice/almond milk.

### ***Notify hosts ahead of time and make it easy for them***

If you're going somewhere for a Christmas meal, talk with your hosts a few weeks ahead of time to find out what they'll be serving, and discuss your dietary restrictions. If you feel comfortable asking, see if the host is willing to use any of your substitutes when making any of the dishes, if you provide them, of course.

If the menu is not yet decided, you could recommend dishes that are safe for you to eat, and delicious for everyone else. A specific recipe would make it so much easier for the host.

### ***Host your gathering or offer to bring dishes***

You can go a step further, and offer to bring dishes to the gathering, as I did with one of our Christmases. My grandma was really concerned about there being things I could eat, so at first I mentioned two new recipes I'd copied from this vegan cookbook I had checked out from the library. As the event got closer, I decided to make the two sides at home on my own, and just bring them to our family gathering. This way, I knew there would at least be two safe dishes, and I saved my grandma the headaches of having to figure out what she could/couldn't make.

Bringing a dish or two is probably the preferred option when going to someone else's house, though I suppose each host has his/her preferences. If possible, you could also offer to host the meal/event yourself, which would put all food preparation under your control.

### ***Bring your own meal or eat beforehand***

If you're not as lucky as I am, and don't have understanding family/friends, you can always pack yourself an entire meal to bring to the event. Explain that you have special dietary restrictions, and you would never hold others to the same restrictions, so you've brought your own meal.

I'm actually going up north tomorrow for New Year's to stay with some extended family, and I'm bringing two tupperware of "safe meals" for myself just in case there are limited options for me based on my dietary needs. Plan ahead and help yourself make it easy to eat the right things. Depending on the gathering, you could also eat at home before you go, so that you're not hungry when you arrive.

### ***Be grateful for your understanding relatives***

Finally, be grateful for your understanding relatives or loved ones. I was not home for the holidays last year, so this is my first year at home with my "new" non-dairy, more plants-based eating. My family was really awesome about it this holiday! Check it out:

- My mom used my Earth Balance spread instead of butter when she made sugar cookies and chicken pot pie (yup, that's one of the meat dishes I did eat).
- My dad made a special non-cheese quiche with almond milk just for me at our Christmas brunch, with my red and green peppers I had left in the fridge.
- My aunt always gives all of the grandkids chocolate candy and a \$5 Culver's gift card, among other Christmas trinkets every year. This year instead of chocolate she gave me a

bag of energy bites from nuts.com and \$5 at Trader Joe's instead! It was so very thoughtful and considerate, and I loved not being tempted by the chocolate candy.

- My grandma was super worried about what I'd be able to eat—both at Christmas and Thanksgiving—and was willing to make whatever I said.

All in all, it was a pretty successful holiday on the food front. Did I eat things I shouldn't have? Yes, for sure. Since my mom used "my butter" in the sugar cookies, I felt obligated to eat many of them. I had some Christmas cookies and a bit of chocolate and fudge.

But did I eat a million times better than any previous holiday in my life? Heck yes! Only ate one peanut butter cup cookie from my aunt this year (who always brings a boatload). Didn't eat any Hershey's anything. Didn't eat ham or sausage at our brunch, even though I was tempted.

So I'm definitely making progress, yet there is still a ways to go. Luckily, a fresh blank slate of hope and motivation is just around the corner with 2015 in sight.

*How was your holiday season food-wise? How do you handle diet restrictions at this time of year?*

---

January 2, 2015

## 2015 Health Resolutions

Happy New Year everyone! I make resolutions on [my personal blog](#) every year (creating this blog was actually one of them from 2014!), so it's only logical that I make health-specific resolutions here. So I'm just going to jump right into it below; John will be posting his resolutions on Tuesday.

### 2015 Health Resolutions

#### *Eat a whole foods, plant-based diet.*

I want to continue adding more whole foods to my diet, eating mostly plants, and cutting out the processed things that I still eat. This won't happen overnight, but rather slow, gradual progression is the way to go for me when it comes to diet changes.



In order to make this goal more concrete and measurable, I'm resolving to either cut out one processed food or add one new whole food to my diet every month.

***Exercise at least 3x a week; gain muscle.***

If you recall, even my Korean traditional medicine doctor said I needed to gain muscle when I had my Eastern medicine experience last summer. So this past fall, I was taking three classes a week: two days of Pilates and one of Zumba.

That session of classes ended mid-December, but I've signed up for two fitness classes this session: "Shape" and Pilates. So then it'll be up to me to work out at least one other day a week in order to get the third time in (though more is obviously welcome).

***Post once a week on Have Your Health.***

Since it will keep my focus and help me progress, plus something I learn could hopefully help someone else, I'll continue to post here weekly on Thursdays during 2015.

***Read one book or watch one documentary a month, and share what I learn/gain.***

Reading all of the health-related books I read last year really helped keep whole foods on my mind, and changed my thoughts about food. To keep this up, I need to constantly be reminded of these things, and the best way for me has been by reading a book or watching a documentary. And then I'll have more to write about here! Win-win.

***Improve digestion; heal gut.***

This last one should be at the top if I were ordering by importance. It's currently vague, though, because I don't know what I should try next or what will work, but I need to keep trying. It's a bit disheartening that despite all my knowledge and diet changes, I can't tell a difference from a year ago, but I can't let that negativity impede my efforts.

I've had a new problem with the BMs surface three times in the past month, something not good (hint: red!) that I had once a year and a half ago, but I'm hoping it'll just go away on its own, and that there's no serious cause.

# Part Three: The Recovery

## *Closing Have Your Health and Moving to France*

Soon after the new year in 2015 I decided to close down the *Have Your Health* blog. It began in collaboration with my then-boyfriend, but during 2014 we transitioned our relationship to a platonic friendship. Ultimately, it felt right to end the project—especially knowing that all of my learning and writing from the previous year would still remain with me.

In spring I went to Montpellier, France for two months of French classes. Although I still drank non-dairy milk and avoided ice cream/yogurt, I added cheese back into my diet there, simply because it was so prevalent in the culture. I started dating Damien (who is French) near the end of my time in Montpellier, and ended up moving to France with a year-long visa in the fall of 2015.



In January of 2016 I had a terrible week of painful internal hemorrhoids. We didn't have a bathtub at our apartment, so instead I squeezed my bum into this tiny plastic wash bin filled with warm water, to try and soothe the pain. But I had many sleepless nights in painful misery, where mere seconds felt like endlessly long minutes. Painful minutes. Second after second, for the entire night. I got tiny witch hazel oral tablets and hemorrhoid cream to help out, but it took a while for the pain to completely disappear. (It didn't help that my liquid BMs would make everything burn up again!)

Looking back, I wonder if this wasn't solely a problem from the chronic diarrhea, but also lifestyle. I was quite gloomy during those winter months, and hardly moved my body since I worked from home on the computer. I had lots of doubts about my then-relationship, which I kept somewhat suppressed until I broke up with Damien in March.

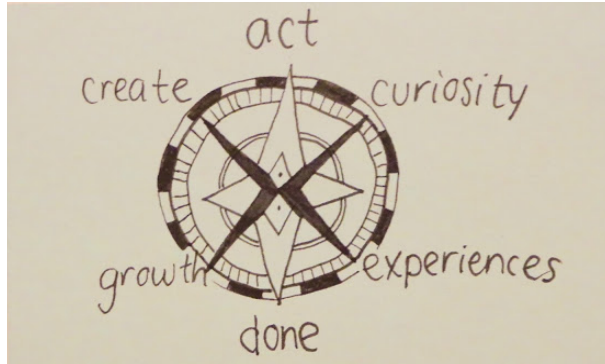
I would often get stressed out with my work, as well—and I was reminded of this when a stress spot in my left shoulder began to flare up nearly every day that spring/summer of 2016. For a variety of personal reasons, I ended up giving my notice in July to leave that job in September.

Then one day in August, I had tiny balls in my stool! They were mushy with ragged edges for sure, but it had some sort of form. It was a miracle! Surprisingly, it wasn't just a one-time thing. Over the next few months my stool continued to progressively solidify and grow, until I was having regular type 4 sausage-like, smooth BMs. This was an entirely new feeling for me; I had forgotten what the sensation felt like to have solid stool leave my body. It's now been over a year and a half of solid stools, and I still feel grateful every time I pass a BM. Every. Single. Time.

Once again, I sense that this positive change can not only be attributed to my years of diet change (towards a whole food plant-based diet) and health education, but also to lifestyle changes. I ended a relationship that hadn't felt right. When I returned to Montpellier, I began playing ultimate frisbee twice a week with two different groups. I followed my intuition and left my virtual job, even though I had no idea what would be next. My body knew it needed to get away from that screen and have other experiences.

## *Personal Sabbatical*

When I returned to Wisconsin after my year in France, I [made a personal compass](#) to guide my "Personal Sabbatical" time of purposeful unemployment. That fall and winter I got involved with a local English group where I volunteered teaching English to adults.



In 2017 I spent three months in Europe travel sketching, visiting my past homes (Madrid and Montpellier), and volunteering on a small Italian farm. Then I lived with my parents for several months—growing a garden, participating in a local art project, reading lots of books from the library, meditating, and generally having calm days.

Although the food I put into my body definitely has had the largest effect, this lifestyle realignment (which now focuses on living my values) had a positive impact on my digestive health as well. Everything is connected.

## *Conservation Corps*

In September of 2017 I joined American Conservation Experience (ACE) in Arizona as an AmeriCorps member and have spent the past six months using my body to do physical work outdoors each day. We camp while on hitch, using our surroundings as one large, natural bathroom. I've thoroughly enjoyed my term of service—from communal living to all of the time I get to spend in the beautiful outdoors.

Since most ACE members are serving through AmeriCorps, they're usually between the ages of 18 to 25. At times I've found myself wondering what my life might have looked like if I'd been in ACE during my early twenties rather than at age 28. But then I realized I wouldn't have even been *able* to participate during those years of my life—due to my IBS.

Since I turned my focus to my digestive health all those years ago, followed by pursuing moments aligned with



my values, I'm now healthy enough to have this incredible conservation experience today. And for that, I'm so grateful.

***The body isn't the foundation of your health. The body is the physical manifestation of the sum of your life experiences.***

— Lissa Rankin, "Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof That You Can Heal Yourself"

## *Going (Almost) Vegan*

I've continued to eat a mainly whole foods plant-based diet, and in July of 2017 I stopped eating eggs and meat/fish as well. It was prompted by watching the documentary "What the Health," but that was merely a tipping point. The decision felt natural—and I attribute that to my years of reading and learning about whole foods, digestive health, and environmental issues.

So I've been telling many people this change was a long time coming. I had admired vegans and vegetarians from afar for some time, not realizing that I was slowly moving towards these lifestyles over the years myself. Only last fall did I feel this was definitely the right choice for me. I could live my values of treating animals humanely *and* caring for our Earth in daily acts of grocery shopping and eating mindfully.

My living/working environments aided in making this a smooth transition. A month after I moved to a mostly-vegan diet, I moved to Arizona to work at ACE. I listed myself as "vegan" for dietary preferences when I joined, so I got to eat excellent vegan food every day on hitch. On our off days in Flagstaff I lived in an apartment whose closest grocery store was Whole Foods, so that's where I shopped.

In 2018 I turned my attention to sustainability, so I'm exploring new questions as I make small changes to lower the amount of waste I produce. I now try to ask myself: What are your food purchases supporting? What is the full cost (social, environmental, etc.) of this product? Are the farmers/companies environmentally conscious? What does the brand/company value? How do they treat their employees? I no longer make purchases—both food and other—based solely on the dollar amount, because I've learned a dollar is not equal to a dollar.

It's currently April of 2018 and I'm continuing to eat a 95% vegan diet, though I'm in no rush to take on the label "vegan." I still eat honey, for instance, but mostly I don't want to put myself into a cage designed by others, which could invite unnecessary feelings of guilt or pressure into my

days. I make food choices that feel right to me in the moment, using as much awareness and self-kindness as I can.

Healthier choices to improve our digestion are going to look different for each one of us, depending on where we're at in our journeys and our various life situations.

The other wondering I have about becoming a vegan is what it would be like to return to Spain, South Korea, or France: past homes where certain animal-source foods were a big part of my lived experience. The next time I return to Spain, for example, I'm not sure if I could turn down a nice *pincho de tortilla* (which has egg) or a slice of *jamón ibérico* (ham). So many warm memories in each place are tied to cultural food staples and/or family meals—all of which contain animal products.

Then there's the added knowledge that food production/nutrition policies and methods in other countries are different from those in the USA (i.e. in France we bought our meat from the local butcher who got it from nearby farms, so I felt better about buying meat there), but that's another topic altogether. While I certainly don't need to make any decisions today, it's a question I'm pondering—what I would and wouldn't eat when returning to any of the places I used to live.

# Conclusion

So that's where I'm at now and where I've been. Especially through the year of *Have Your Health* blog posts, you've probably seen several themes appear again and again. The biggest lessons I've learned—and which I hope to have shared with you—are the following:

## Food Is Health

In my adult life, one of the largest changes in my understanding of the world has been that of health. We *are* what we eat, and food can certainly be medicine. I've gotten more connected to the earth and feel best when I eat a mainly whole foods plant-based diet.

Lifestyle and mind are elements of one's health as well, which I hadn't considered much during my first two decades of life. As a result of this shift, rather than treating symptoms I now try to look for the root cause of the problem from a holistic standpoint.

## Change Happens Slowly

That said, this huge change in perspective happened over many years, and my improvement in digestive health happened over a decade! It all began with adjusting my awareness. Slowly, the foods I purchased and consumed, the books I read, the movies I watched, the conversations I had, the posts I wrote, the forums I visited, all contributed—over time—to this change.

Your journey won't look the same as mine, but I still recommend beginning with your awareness: What holds your attention on an average day? How can you change or use this to invest in your health?

## Start Small and Be Kind

Small changes *do* compound over time, just keep in mind that it's harder to see the impact from day to day. Remembering the concept of diet as a combination lock can help here, as that could be one reason for not seeing immediate results when you make small changes to your diet.

Celebrate your small wins and cheer yourself on. If you were to introduce just one new whole food into your diet this month, for example, that's excellent! Be kind to yourself; offer yourself compassion and patience. We're humans after all. How many times did I still eat milk chocolate

when I knew my gut would reject it? Countless. Over and over. For years and years. But I had to forgive my shortcomings and encourage myself to continue on the journey to health.

And if this self-kindness feels difficult, by the way, try thinking of it as treating yourself as you would a dear friend.

## **Experiment and Advocate for Yourself**

Finally, I've learned that outcomes will not change if your actions don't change. I had to experiment and gradually change my habits in order to regain my health. Unfortunately, I didn't have the best success with doctors at the beginning of my journey—nor did I know how to take charge to get the kind of care I was looking for.

If this has been your experience as well, continue searching for someone who shares your view of health. Ask questions. Take charge. Be strong. Keep trying and learning. You can do it!

I'll leave you with one of the quotes I keep returning to:

***If you continue to do what you have always done, you will continue to get the same results.***

-Patty Yeager

Best of luck on your journey. Know that I'm rooting for you!

Warmly,  
Rebecca



# Health Journey Influences

These are the books and movies that have had the largest influence on this journey to digestive health.

## Books

- ["Eating for IBS"](#) by Heather Van Vorous
- ["The First Year: IBS"](#) by Heather Van Vorous
- ["Food Over Medicine: The Conversation That Could Change Your Life"](#) by Pamela A. Popper and Glen Merzer

By Michael Pollan:

- ["The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals"](#)
- ["In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto"](#)
- ["Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation"](#)
- ["Food Rules: An Eater's Manual"](#)

By T. Colin Campbell:

- ["The China Study"](#) (also by Thomas M. Campbell)
- ["Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition"](#) (also by Howard Jacobson)

## Documentaries

- "Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead" (2010)
- "Fed Up" (2014)
- "Forks Over Knives" (2011)
- "Simply Raw: Reversing Diabetes in 30 Days" (2009)
  - YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2pjkC71exKU>
- "What the Health" (2017)

# Update: August 2022

Hello dear reader,

It's Rebecca of August, 2022—the Rebecca five years after my digestion was fully healed, and four years since writing this ebook. People are always changing, and a static PDF cannot reflect my current perspectives, but below I have included some thoughts and notable updates.

Some statements may feel sweeping—as it would take multiple memoirs to take you on my journey these past five years—but we only have a few pages of text together here.



## On the Surface

Here are a few snapshots of my health that are easier to see externally:

### *Eating Plants*

I did go back to France in 2019 and ate whole foods plant-based, save for a *pain au chocolat* that I got one day. Damien's mother made me a vegan paella and vegan donuts!

I continue to eat what feels right for me, and that has been a whole foods plant-based diet. I buy organic groceries, I am growing some vegetables in a small garden this summer, and I drink lots of tea and herbal infusions. I cook and bake each weekend so that I'll have nourishing meals and snacks during the workweek. To be cooking or to be baking grounds me, connects me to the Earth, and is an act of care for myself.

There are plenty of new resources which encourage vegan eating, including [Earthling Ed](#). He is a vegan educator and public speaker who has made fantastic resources, such as [this free ebook which debunks common vegan "myths."](#) (If I'd known about Earthling Ed all those years ago at dinner with my dietician aunt, I could have confidently declared "All protein comes from plants!" when she inquired about my protein.)

## ***Not Drinking Alcohol***

I haven't drank alcohol since February of 2019, another change that has felt great in my body. This wasn't a conscious decision; first days went by, then months, and the more time that went by without alcohol, the less I wanted to drink it. I can feel more in my body, I sleep well, and my senses are clear, deep, and alert. My relationships are stronger and I experience so many more emotions and sensations.

Things don't have to be "rock bottom" or problematic in order to stop doing something. (See Nicole Antoinette's [podcasts](#) or read Laura McKowen's memoir ["We Are the Luckiest"](#) for more of this thinking.) Wanting to do something is enough reason to do it.

During the summer of 2020 I got super into sparkling water, after disliking it my whole life prior. It's still a refreshing summer beverage for me now. Who knows what my body will enjoy five years from now? In five years, I'll know.

## ***Doctors***

I have an incredible naturopathic doctor where I currently live, and she makes me feel seen, heard, and safe. Earlier this spring we did some blood tests and a saliva cortisol test to get some information about my body. I've been taking a few supplements since, to help with a specific health concern.

This season of my life I'm working regularly with a [therapist/energy healer](#), and have been meeting with a massage therapist monthly or so as well.

## ***Life Rhythms***

I live without internet in my home and I don't use social media. I go to bed at 7:30 p.m. and wake up around 5 a.m. I generally don't make plans, but perhaps I'll set an intention. I wake up each day and assess my energy levels/capacity and inclinations as they arise. If I feel creative energy is present, I'll bake something or sing a song or write a letter. If I have lower energy, I'll rest. If I need to move emotions, I'll walk or cry or write. If I feel the need to release, I'll make a small ceremony or snap a branch in half. And so on.

This feels aligned, true, and right for the mammal that is me at this moment. Slow is my speed. Books, journals, and trees are my joyful companions. We're all different; it's a matter of learning how your mammal reacts and what your mammal needs. In this personal chapter of my life, my body needs safety, gentle kindness, and comforts. I know what feeds my energy/soul and what

drains it, so I give myself what I need and I avoid / say "no" to what drains it. These rhythms will change over time.

### ***Language***

I'm intentional about the language I use. There are many phrases I used in writing five years ago, which I wouldn't use today. For example, "*dietary restrictions* over the holidays" sounds limiting and excluding. I love eating plants-based! I eat a much wider variety of flavors and dishes than I ever did growing up, and it's quite enjoyable. That's just one phrase. The language I choose to speak and write today has changed to be more inclusive and more resonant with my Spirit.

## **Below the Surface**

Here are some shifts in my perspectives which are perhaps harder to see externally:

### ***Spiritual Sensitivity***

The largest change is the spiritual lens I've gained since writing this ebook. I interact with subtle energy, and have become a deep-sensing person. (Other terms that resonate at different levels: empath, Highly Sensitive Person, 6-sensing, spiritually sensitive). This impacts how I perceive reality, and how I spend my time each day.

Digestive health was the focus of the healing journey documented here, but my current healing journey centers on grief, trauma, a sensitive nervous system, Somatic Experiencing, inner child work, shadow work, energy, and my relationship with the Earth.

Spirituality has become my center. Following my Inner Knowing and curiosities has been pivotal for my well-being:

- Letting my Spirit be who she is at the core, based on intuition, experience, and feeling.
- Noticing where I feel pressures from others and what my natural inclinations are.
- Living with the seasons.
- Feeling my emotions and expressing them freely.
- Letting the quiet nudges guide my days.
- Learning what Rebecca Rose needs, nurturing her inner child, grounding her energy with the Earth's, and allowing her to bloom.

### ***Wholeness & Nature***

Our Western society may fool us to believe we can work on parts separately, but everything is interconnected so intricately and deeply. Health is not separate from a Job or Relationships or Rituals or Family or Making or Body Movement or Friendships or Thoughts or Relationship

With Self or Connection With Nature or Emotions Experienced in Childhood. Everything is woven together.

A key piece of this web is Mother Earth. Many indigenous cultures honor the Earth and her life-giving force, as do many spiritual and religious traditions. A connection with the Earth is necessary to health/life. Lack of this relationship is what causes much pain and suffering in our world. If each board meeting/school day/family breakfast/etc. began with a moment to feel the sun's warmth on our skin, to thank the sun and the Earth, to feel gratitude towards the plants which feed us, house us, give our lungs oxygen to breathe—what kind of decisions would be made?

I do not need to read studies; I know what my body/energy feels like when I'm sitting in the backyard, watching the grasses sway, hearing the birds singing, smelling the fresh air as it enters through my nose, and seeing the web of tree branches overhead.

### ***Western Medical System***

Not only is the Western medical system mechanistic and based on parts, but it was created within the patriarchy—within institutions/societies that are racist, misogynistic, homophobic, transphobic, capitalistic, and generally excluding of minorities. Perhaps some of this has been illuminated to you in recent years. If not, and/or if you're curious to learn more, the book ["Medicine Woman: Reclaiming the Soul of Healing"](#) by Lucy H. Pearce is a great exploration.

Human bodies cover colorful spectrums and have a wide range of lived experiences. Much of the Western medical system, however, puts humans into their boxes, and has historically given preference to learning about the bodies of white, able-bodied men. This system tends to treat symptoms on the surface instead of healing root causes. I trust my lived/felt experience in my body over someone else's opinions of my body based on the filters they were taught.

### ***Energy***

Hand-in-hand with my spiritual lens and deep-sensing is energy. Since I can now feel subtle energies, an interest of mine is energy healing. "Anatomy of the Spirit" by Caroline Myss and Deepak Chopra's "Quantum Healing" were the first books I read on this topic.

I've dipped into a lot—through reading, working with practitioners, and experiencing myself: Shamanism, Reiki, Feldenkrais, Donna Eden's "Energy Medicine," The Realization Process (Judith Blackstone), somatic meditation (Dr. Reggie Ray), Catherine Liggett (inner child/shadow work for empaths), and Intuition Medicine (Francesca McCartney).

## ***Somatic Experiencing***

In the past year and a half, the most influential experience/learning for my health has been Somatic Experiencing. The body holds trauma, and all humans have trauma—big T and little t. Trauma is not an event; it's how the body's nervous system responds to certain stimuli.

Somatic Experiencing has taught me about my particular nervous system's wiring, and is helping me heal its sensitivities/activations that were programmed in childhood.

I was introduced to all of this through Molly Caro May's Story Mammal workshop, which I've experienced twice at this point. I'm in the middle of this particular journey, learning how to heal/rewire my sensitive nervous system.

—

And that is a little taste into where my mind, body, and heart have been over the past couple of years. Below are some sources that have shaped my thinking during this time.

## **Recent Resources**

### ***Books***

#### *Energy Healing*

- ["Give the Gift of Healing: A Concise Guide to Spiritual Healing"](#) by Rosemary Altea
- ["The Realization Process: A Step-by-Step Guide to Embodied Spiritual Awakening"](#) by Dr. Judith Blackstone
- ["Quantum Healing: Exploring the Frontiers of Mind Body Medicine"](#) by Deepak Chopra
- ["Energy Medicine for Women"](#) by Donna Eden
- ["Body of Health: The New Science of Intuition Medicine for Energy & Balance"](#) by Francesca McCartney
- ["Anatomy of the Spirit: The Seven Stages of Power and Healing"](#) by Caroline Myss
- ["Shaman, Healer, Sage: How to Heal Yourself and Others with the Energy Medicine of the Americas"](#) by Alberto Villoldo

#### *Intuition/Spiritual Sensitivities*

- ["Expecting Adam: A True Story of Birth, Rebirth, and Everyday Magic"](#) by Martha Beck
- ["Belonging Here: A Guide for the Spiritually Sensitive Person"](#) by Dr. Judith Blackstone
- ["The Spontaneous Fulfillment of Desire"](#) by Deepak Chopra
- ["Trust Your Vibes: Secret Tools for Six-Sensory Living"](#) by Sonia Choquette
- ["The Empath's Survival Guide: Life Strategies for Sensitive People"](#) by Judith Orloff

- ["The Book of Ceremony: Shamanic Wisdom for Invoking the Sacred in Everyday Life"](#) by Sandra Ingerman
- ["Wild Mercy: Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom of the Women Mystics"](#) by Mirabai Starr

### *Loving Thoughts*

- ["Heart Minded: How to Hold Yourself and Others in Love"](#) by Sarah Blondin
- ["Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha"](#) by Tara Brach
- ["The Dark Side of the Light Chasers: Reclaiming Your Power, Creativity, Brilliance and Dreams"](#) by Debbie Ford
- ["Loving What Is: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life"](#) by Byron Katie
- ["Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof That You Can Heal Yourself"](#) by Lissa Rankin
- ["A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose"](#) by Eckhart Tolle
- ["A Return to Love"](#) by Marianne Williamson

### *Mother Nature*

- ["Coming Full Circle: Ancient Teachings for a Modern World"](#) by Lynn V. Andrews
- ["The Moon Book: Lunar Magic to Change Your Life"](#) by Sarah Faith Gottesdiener
- ["Poet Warrior: A Memoir"](#) and ["Crazy Brave"](#) by Joy Harjo
- ["Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants"](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- ["The Overstory"](#) by Richard Powers
- ["The Earth Path: Grounding Your Spirit in the Rhythms of Nature"](#) by Starhawk

### *Somatic Experiencing*

- ["Call of the Wild: How We Heal Trauma, Awaken Our Own Power, and Use It for Good"](#) by Kimberly Ann Johnson
- [Molly Caro May](#) (Story Mammal workshop; The Loam community)
- [Somatic Experiencing Directory](#) (list of SE practitioners)

### *Documentaries*

- [Heal](#) (Netflix, Prime)
- [Crazywise](#) (traditional approach to mental illness)

### *Podcasts*

- [Bliss and Grit](#) (Vanessa Scotto and Brooke Thomas)
- [We Can Do Hard Things](#) (Glennon Doyle & Abby Wombach)
- [It's All Related](#) (Sonia Choquette & daughters Sonia and Sabrina)
- [Tender Revolution](#) (Catherine Liggett)

# About the Author



**Hey there! It's me, Rebecca.**

I feel most alive when I'm learning something new. Past learning endeavors include teaching English at an elementary school in South Korea, learning French to fluency, doing trail work out west, and I'm currently on journeys learning the maintenance trades and the healing arts.

I follow my intuition from one moment to the next, and it feels good to live in this fluid way.

More information—including [zines](#) and [other ebooks](#) I've written—can be found at my website, [www.rebeccarosethering.com](http://www.rebeccarosethering.com).

If you've read along with my whole journey and felt something, I would love to hear from you! What brought you to my story? Did anything here resonate with you? Whatever the reason, I'm grateful to receive your reflections.

- **Email:** [rebeccarosethering@gmail.com](mailto:rebeccarosethering@gmail.com)



All rights reserved. Rebecca Rose Thering. 2018.

Thank you for reading.