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*Live. Life. Well.*

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## Nature Therapy

The sound of moving water, chirping birds, and rustling leaves helps us reconnect with nature. In some ways, nature may even help us reconnect with ourselves. After all, we are nature.

Sometimes called Eco therapy, nature therapy includes outdoor activities like hiking, rock climbing, kayaking, gardening, swimming, or simply spending time in natural environments.

Nature therapy has been associated with a number of health benefits like the following:

- **Better lung function.** With each breath, your lungs remove carbon dioxide from your blood and resupply your body with life-giving oxygen. Spending time outdoors where there is less air pollution may offer respiratory benefits.
- **Reduced stress levels.** Studies have found that exposure to natural environments may help reduce cortisol levels, a hormone that increases with stress.<sup>3</sup> Forest bathing can also lower blood pressure, which may be due to feeling more relaxed while spending time in nature.<sup>3</sup>
- **Fewer symptoms of depression.** Being outdoors can be therapeutic for your emotional and physical wellbeing, too. Exposure to sunlight triggers your body to make vitamin D and may reduce symptoms of depression.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, physical activity produces endorphins (your body's natural feel-good chemicals) which offer a distraction from negative thoughts.

- **Enhanced immune function.** Studies have linked nature exposure to enhanced immune function. One theory is that plants emit airborne phytoncides, which may offer benefits similar to phytonutrients that are found in fruits and vegetables.<sup>3</sup> It is now understood that the lungs also contain beneficial microorganisms that support health, much like the gut microbiome.<sup>2</sup> While research in this area is still in the early stages, researchers have uncovered several “microbial signatures” that are closely linked to the presence of certain types of respiratory disorders like asthma and COPD.<sup>2</sup>

Taking a breath of fresh air can help put challenging moments into perspective. When life feels chaotic or stressful, step outside and let nature's calming energy help you breathe easier.

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1. Healthline. [8 Health Benefits of Getting Back to Nature and Spending Time Outside](#). Accessed Aug 21, 2023.

2. Natalini JG, Singh S, Segal LN. The dynamic lung microbiome in health and disease. *Nat Rev Microbiol*. 2023 Apr;21(4):222-235. doi: 10.1038/s41579-022-00821-x. Epub 2022 Nov 16. PMID: 36385637; PMCID: PMC9668228.

3. Jimenez MP, DeVillie NV, Elliott EG, Schiff JE, Wilt GE, Hart JE, James P. Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021 Apr 30;18(9):4790. doi: 10.3390/ijerph18094790. PMID: 33946197; PMCID: PMC8125471.



## Exercises for Better Breathing

Breathing exercises help your lungs work more efficiently by removing stale air and increasing oxygen levels in your blood. These exercises can help improve lung capacity, reduce blood pressure, and make breathing easier.<sup>1</sup>

Chest breathing involves taking short, shallow breaths, which only fills the top portion of your lungs. This type of breathing is less effective than belly breathing, which fills the lungs completely. Chest breathing can lead to heart palpitations, dizziness, and chest pain.

Belly breathing and pursed-lip breathing are two breathing techniques that can help when you feel short of breath or anxious.<sup>3</sup>

### Belly Breathing

- **How it works:** This type of breathing requires less effort to breathe because you are using your diaphragm to fill your lungs completely. Your diaphragm is a muscle positioned just below your lungs. When you inhale, your diaphragm contracts to allow fresh oxygen to enter your lungs. In individuals with healthy lungs, the diaphragm does 80% of the work of breathing.<sup>2</sup>
- **How to do it:** Lie down or sit up straight and place your hands on your belly. Close your mouth and take a slow, deep breath through your nose. As you breathe in push out with your stomach and allow your belly to expand as if you were filling a balloon. Then breathe out fully through your mouth as if you were blowing bubbles. Repeat for five to 10 minutes until you feel relaxed.<sup>3</sup>



### Pursed Lip Breathing

**How it works:** This type of breathing opens your airways, slows your breathing rate, and helps get more oxygen into your lungs.

**How to do it:** Sit down and relax your neck and shoulders. Breathe in slowly through your nose with your mouth closed. Then breathe out through your mouth with pursed lips (as if you were going to whistle). Try to breathe out longer than you inhale. For example, inhale for a count of three and exhale for a count of four.<sup>2</sup>

1. Cleveland Clinic. [Diaphragmatic Breathing](#). Accessed Aug 26, 2023.

2. American Lung Association. [Breathing Exercises](#). Accessed Aug 26, 2023.

3. American Lung Association. [Belly Breathing](#). Accessed Aug 27, 2023.





## Quitting Tobacco

Nicotine is a highly addictive stimulant drug that is linked to many health issues. Cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, smokeless tobacco, chewing tobacco, snuff, and e-cigarettes all contain nicotine.<sup>1</sup> The long-term effects of using tobacco can lead to serious lung diseases like emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and cancer. It is also associated with higher risks of type 2 diabetes.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, quitting tobacco comes with a whole host of health benefits. Here are a few tips to help you quit tobacco for good:

### Set a quit date

Choose a quit date and mark it on your calendar. Then, share your plans openly with friends and family who can support and encourage you. Setting a quit date helps strengthen your commitment to quitting.

### Create a tobacco-free environment

Remove all tobacco products from your home, car, and any spaces where you keep supplies. It may also be helpful to stay away from places or people that make you want to smoke until you have had time to create new routines.

### Talk with your healthcare provider

Quitting tobacco can result in irritability, anxiety, changes in sleep patterns, increased appetite, and weight gain.<sup>2</sup> That is why it is important to get the support you need in advance to help minimize side effects. Discuss your quit plans with your healthcare provider and ask for guidance on how to deal with withdrawal symptoms.

You may also want to ask your doctor about nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), which can help reduce cravings and make it easier for you to quit. Currently, there are seven FDA-approved NRT medications: nicotine patches, gum, lozenges, inhaler, nasal spray, varenicline (Chantix), and bupropion (Zyban).<sup>2</sup> Other non-prescription quit aids, such as sugarless gum, straws, and toothpicks, may also be helpful for some people. Check your benefits to see if NRT medications are covered under your plan, or if there are community resources in your area.

The most important thing to know is that every tobacco user can quit.

If you use tobacco, you can take action right now by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW or visiting [www.smokefree.gov](http://www.smokefree.gov).<sup>3</sup>

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1. U.S. Food & Drug Administration. [Nicotine Is Why Tobacco Products Are Addictive](#). Accessed Aug 27, 2023.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). [Quitting Starts Now: Make Your Quit Plan](#). Accessed Aug 30, 2023.

3. American Lung Association. [How to Quit Smoking](#). Accessed Aug 30, 2023.

# Healthy eating for a healthier life

It can be confusing to make a healthy eating plan you'll stick to. But good news – it can include foods and drinks that you like, fit your budget and include your cultural traditions.

Here are some ways to make your plan to eat better:



## 6 tips to create your healthy eating plan\*



### 1. Plan meals with healthy staples

Make sure to include fruits, veggies and whole grains. Look for low-fat or non-fat dairy. For protein, both lean meat and plant-based work. And include healthy fats and oils.



### 2. Evolve as your needs change

In general, younger people need more calories. They tend to be more active and may still be building muscle and bone mass. Conditions we have and medications we take may also change how we eat.



### 3. Watch out for emotional eating

Many of us eat to relieve boredom or stress. It might work in the moment. But it can keep us from dealing with emotions in healthier ways.



### 4. Limit certain foods and drinks

Try to limit foods that are high in sugar and salt. And stay away from ultra-processed foods and trans fats.



### 5. Stay within your calorie needs

The number of calories we take in helps us stay in a healthy weight range. Another key part is how active we are. The balance of the two plays into whether we gain or lose weight.



### 6. Try mindful eating

Focus your attention on what you're eating at mealtimes. It can help you slow down and consider what you're eating and why. Your first step toward mindful eating is to put your phone away when you eat.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Answering these questions can help you design a successful eating strategy:

- What are the pros and cons of this way of eating?
- Does it work for you, your family and your lifestyle?
- Will you enjoy eating this way?
- Can you see yourself eating this way in the long term?



\*HelpGuide.org <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-eating/healthy-eating.htm>

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## Salmon Couscous Salad Bowl

### Ingredients

#### Salmon:

- 2x 4-6 ounce salmon fillets (use fresh rather than previously frozen salmon, if possible)
- 1 tablespoon avocado oil (or other high-heat cooking oil)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- Salt + pepper, to taste

#### Salad:

- 1/2 Moroccan couscous, dry
- 1 cup cucumber (Persian or English)
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes (vine-ripened, if possible)
- 2 tablespoons shallot, diced
- 1/4 cup fresh mint
- 1/2 cup feta, crumbled
- 1/2 a lemon, juice only (or more, if desired!)

#### Prep Time

10 minutes

#### Cook Time

25 minutes

#### Serving Size

2



### Nutrition Facts

Calories	308
Total Fat	20g
Sodium	664mg
Carbohydrate	18g
Dietary Fiber	9g
Protein	16g

### Instructions

1. In a small bowl, mix avocado oil with cumin, paprika, garlic powder, and salt until well-combined.
2. Place salmon fillets on a plate and brush with oil and spice mixture until evenly coated. Season with pepper and set aside.
3. On the stovetop, cook couscous according to package directions.
4. While the couscous cooks, chop cucumbers, tomatoes, shallot, and fresh mint.
5. Once couscous is cooked, add chopped cucumber, tomatoes, mint, feta, lemon, and olive oil to the pot. Toss with couscous, seasoning with salt and pepper as desired. Set aside.
6. Heat a large pan over medium-high. Test to make sure the pan is hot enough by splashing a drop of water on it. If it sizzles – you are good to go!
7. Place salmon skin side down onto the hot pan. Cook for 3-5 minutes (depending on thickness), using a spatula to press salmon down.
8. Once the sides of the salmon have turned more opaque, flip the fish so that the skin-less side is touching the pan. TURN OFF THE HEAT, and let the fish cook for another minute or two. The goal is to have the outside cooked, but the insides soft and tender.
9. Serve couscous salad in 2 bowls and top with cooked salmon. Enjoy!





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