



5 KEYS TO BUILDING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

Optimizing Well-Being and Performance in Fitness and Life



BY KRISTA STRYKER



The following pages provide an overview of the five keys to building mental and physical fitness based on the latest scientific research and my own decade-plus experience working in fitness and entrepreneurship.

To live the good life—a life full of joy and pain, love and heartbreak, fear, and courage—we have to take care of minds, spirits, and our bodies. We have to keep pushing for growth, even when it's hard.

My hope is to inspire you to dream bigger, follow your curiosities, and work toward your full potential as an athlete and human being, wherever you're at in your journey.

– Krista Stryker

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***IT IS NEVER TOO LATE
TO BE WHAT YOU MIGHT
HAVE BEEN.***

— George Eliot



The five keys to building mental and physical fitness:

- 1. Move**
- 2. Mindset**
- 3. Nourish**
- 4. Recover**
- 5. Flourish**

Many people think of exercise as something they have to do to lose weight or achieve a certain physique. But exercise has so many benefits that have nothing to do with weight loss or appearance.

Not only can movement become a great source of joy in our lives, it can also increase our connection with others, make us feel more hopeful and optimistic, and help us become the best possible version of ourselves.

Research shows exercise can:

- **Elevate your mood**
- **Help you learn faster**
- **Increase focus and concentration**
- **Boost short and long-term memory**
- **Help you deal better with stress**

So how much exercise should you be getting—and what type should you be doing?

- **At least 30 minutes of movement every single day**
- **Focus on intensity a few days a week** (HIIT, sprints, etc.)
- **Include resistance training a few days a week**
(Bodyweight or weights)
- **Exercise outdoors for even more mood-boosting benefits**
- **Incorporate movement into your lifestyle**
(Walk more, find fun activities to do with family and friends, learn a new sport/skill/activity)

Need some workout ideas?

Download the free [12 Minute Athlete app](#) or do one of the thousands of free workouts on our [website](#).

If you want to up your mental game and aim for peak performance in any area of your life, whether your goals are fitness, lifestyle, or career-related, you have to start out with a **growth mindset**.

A growth mindset is the belief that if you put in the work, you can improve. Compare this to a fixed mindset, where you believe that talent is innate and that it's pointless to even try.



WHETHER YOU THINK YOU CAN OR YOU THINK YOU CAN'T, YOU'RE RIGHT.

— Henry Ford

Your mindset is just the first step to making progress.

To really up your mental game, you need to dial in the following techniques:

- **Proper goal setting**
- **Dream big, then break down your goals into small, manageable steps**
- **Develop grit**
- **Learn how to stick with your goals even when things get hard**
- **Stack your motivations**
- **Have multiple motivators to keep you going**
- **Learn to accept struggle as part of the process of growth**
- **Treat failures as stepping stones, not end points**
- **Count small wins**
- **Nurture your strengths**
- **Take the VIA Character survey**
- **Play the long game**
- **Aim for mastery and enjoy the process**

Eating healthy isn't as hard as most people make it out to be.



***EAT FOOD, NOT TOO MUCH,
MOSTLY PLANTS.***

— Michael Pollen

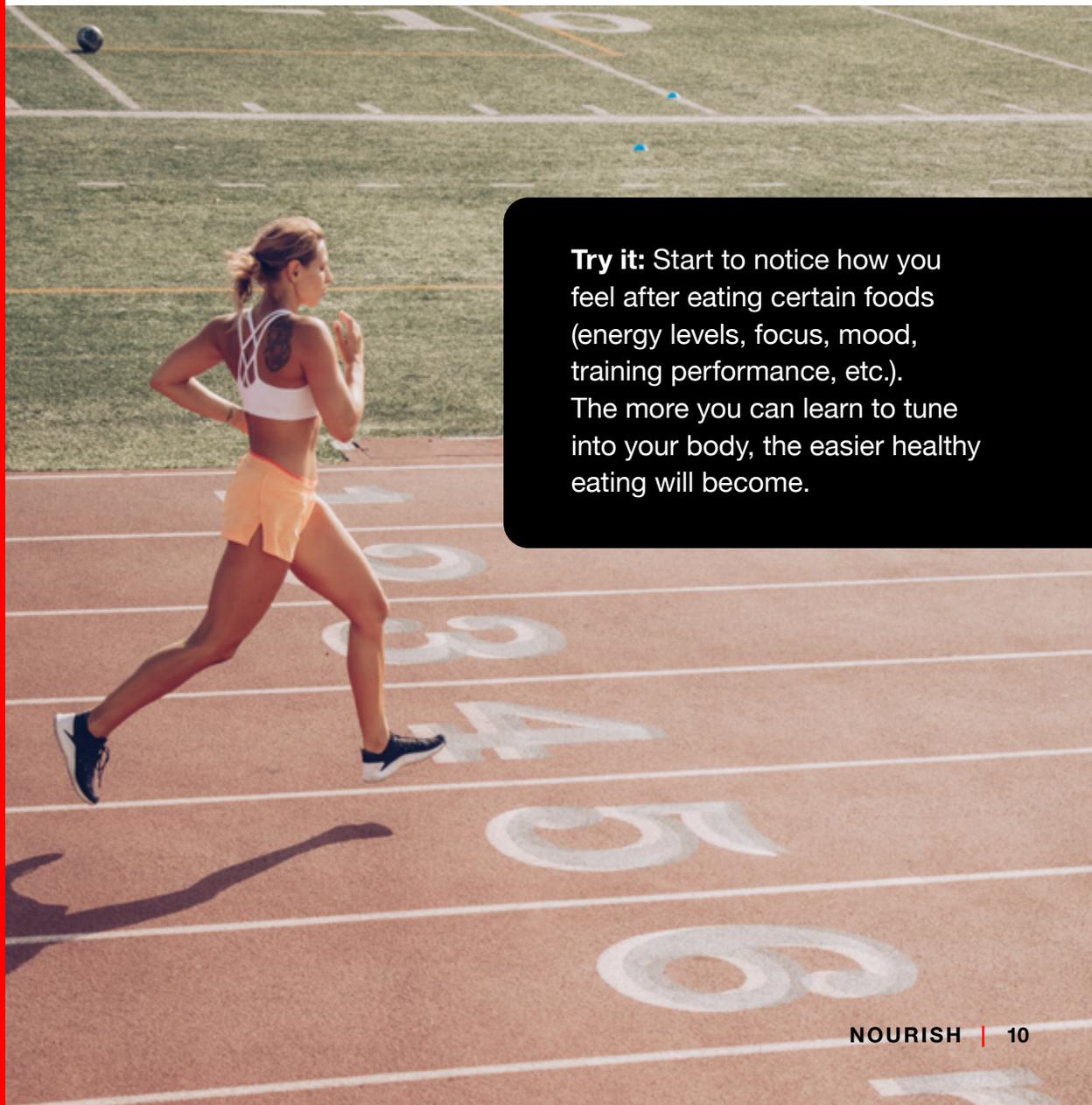
Despite what marketers may try and tell you, there is no single perfect diet. What you eat should change based on your activity level, goals, commitment, and amount of time you have for food prep. Ultimately, your goal should be to learn to listen to your body and figure out what works for you at this point in your life.

That being said, there are a few basic rules that make healthy eating easier:

- **Include plenty of veggies** (aim for at least two meals a day)
- **Eat the rainbow** (aim for variety)
- **Fruit is healthy** (but don't overdo it)
- **Complex carbohydrates work well for most people** (whole grains, legumes, etc.)
- **Include protein** (but don't obsess about it)
- **Allow some wiggle room for your favorite "cheat" foods**
- **Treat every meal as beginning anew** (your diet is not "ruined" after one big meal)

Here are several benefits of healthy eating that have nothing to do with appearance or weight loss:

- **Greater cognitive performance**
- **Better focus throughout the day**
- **Increased energy**
- **Less brain fog**
- **Increased ability to learn**
- **Better mood**



Try it: Start to notice how you feel after eating certain foods (energy levels, focus, mood, training performance, etc.). The more you can learn to tune into your body, the easier healthy eating will become.

Just as it's important to put in the work, whether in the gym, classroom, or office, it's also crucial that you plan time for rest and recovery. Rest is just as important as the work for our bodies and our brains.

WORK + REST = GROWTH

Keys to resting physically and mentally:

- Sleep 7–8 hours a night (this means being in bed 8–9 hours)
- Take active rest days
- Foam roll and stretch regularly
- Stay hydrated
- Connect with community
- Nature walks
- Mindfulness and meditation practice
- Prioritize fun activities
- Self-care

Learn to listen to your body and brain and understand when you need to go harder (rev up) and when you're going too hard (time for a break).

Remember, you're in this for the long run: going too hard too soon or for too long will lead to burnout or injury. Learn to listen to your body and mind and give both a break when needed.

We are hard-wired as human beings to seek out joy and meaning in life. Happiness is not a destination; it's a process.

To take your growth to the next level, you must also pay attention to what brings you joy, piques your curiosity, and helps you feel fully immersed in life.

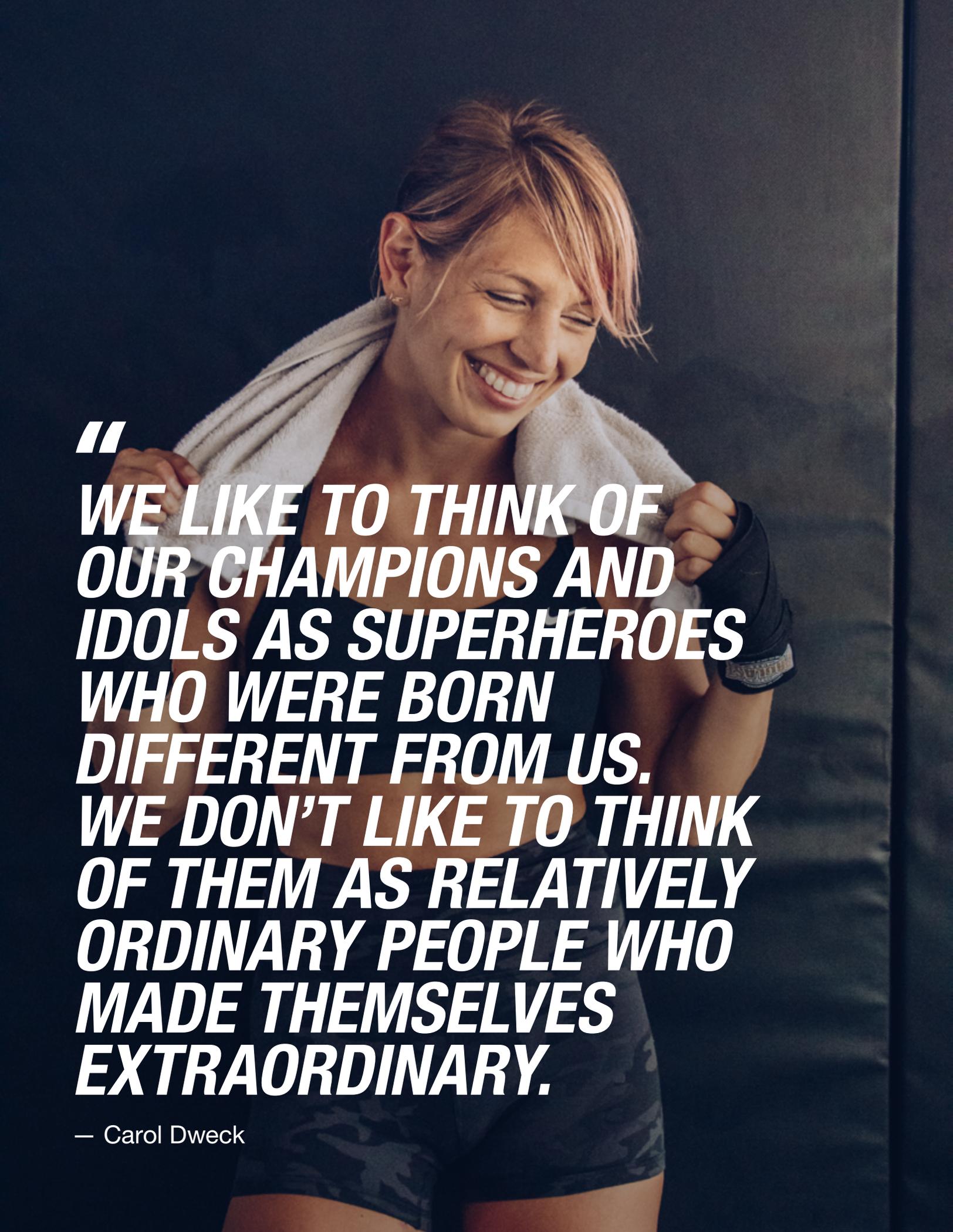
The following strategies can help you flourish, no matter your current goals:

- **Learn new things** (read, take classes, seek out challenges)
- **Connect with community** (cultivate meaningful relationships)
- **Carve out time each day for unfocused play**
- **Make time for hobbies**
- **Stop doom scrolling** (turn off the news)
- **Create and pursue meaningful goals**
- **Find ways to regularly help others**

Strategies like keeping a gratitude journal, being more mindful, and adding in a meditation practice can also contribute to greater happiness and growth.

Recommended reading for building mental and physical fitness:

- [**The Art of Learning: An Inner Journey to Optimal Performance**](#) by Josh Waitzkin
- [**The Art of Impossible: A Peak Performance Primer**](#) by Steven Kotler
- [**The Confidence Gap: A Guide to Overcoming Fear and Self-Doubt**](#) by Russ Harris
- [**Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience**](#) by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- [**Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance**](#) by Angela Duckworth
- [**Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment**](#) by George Leonard
- [**Mindset: The New Psychology of Success**](#) by Carol Dweck
- [**The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph**](#) by Ryan Holiday
- [**Peak Performance: Elevate Your Game, Avoid Burnout, and Thrive with the New Science of Success**](#) by Brad Stulberg and Steve Magness
- [**Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain**](#) by John Ratey
- [**Stop Missing Your Life: How to Be Deeply Present in an Un-Present World**](#) by Cory Mascura
- [**Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization**](#) by Scott Barry Kaufman
- [**The Way of the Champion: Lessons from Sun Tzu's the Art of War and Other Tao Wisdom for Sports & Life**](#) by Jerry Lynch

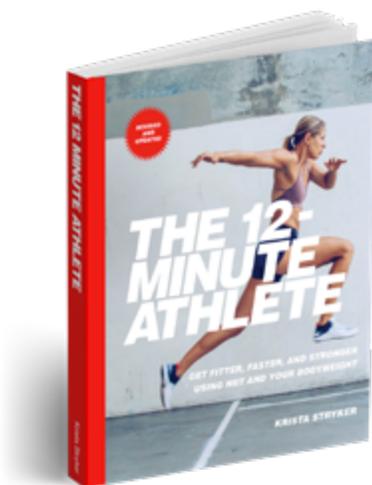


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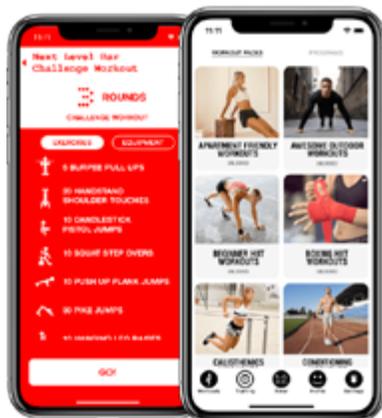
— Carol Dweck



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[The 12 Minute Athlete: Get Fitter, Faster, and Stronger Using HIIT and Your Bodyweight](#)
by Krista Stryker



[12 Minute Athlete HIIT Workouts app](#)

