

Restoring Baseline

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Introduction

I'm 24 years old, and I'm writing this completely for free because I want to help people who have been in my shoes.

I spent years with full days wasted behind screens. No direction, depressed, judgemental, and sad. I figured these problems out in my own life, and I've coached and helped enough people now that I'm confident these ideas work.

These aren't just the typical "here's what to do." I'm trying to go deep into exactly how to apply the things you probably already know, because actually doing the things we're supposed to do is a lot harder than knowing what they are.

This guide is built on one idea: modern society is a failed experiment. We built a world our brains and bodies were never designed for, and the result is an entire generation that's depressed, addicted, and directionless. We are zoo animals who built our own zoo.

The 9 steps in this guide are not goals. They are repairs, listed in order of priority. The first ones are the most urgent. They are the things that, if left unfixed, make everything else harder or impossible. You are not building toward some aspirational future version of yourself. You are undoing the damage that the modern world has done to you, starting with the worst of it. The aim is to get back to baseline: the way you were supposed to feel before all of this got in the way.

And here's the thing nobody tells you. Once you actually restore that baseline, the need for some grand life purpose mostly falls away. You'll be healthy, clear-

headed, connected, and capable. From there, whatever you want to do next will become obvious. You won't need someone to tell you what to aim for. You'll be able to see it for yourself.

So this guide doesn't start by asking what you want. It starts by clearing the fog.

Table of Contents

1. **Quick Start Checklist**
 2. **Part One: How to Think About This**
 3. Intentional Consumption
 4. Decide Once, Then Stop Deciding
 5. Become Your Own Coach
 6. **Part Two: The First Principle**
 7. Start at Baseline
 8. **Part Three: The Nine Repairs**
 9. Step 1: Self-Acceptance
 10. Step 2: Content Addiction
 11. Step 3: Screen Addiction
 12. Step 4: Comfort Addiction
 13. Step 5: Exercise
 14. Step 6: Diet
 15. Step 7: Fear
 16. Step 8: Relationships & Community
 17. Step 9: Goals
 18. **Resources & Recommended Reading**
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Quick Start Checklist

These are not goals. They are repairs. Solve these 9 problems and the rest takes care of itself.

These are listed in order of priority. Step 1 comes first because it makes every other step possible. Steps 2 and 3 come next because they are the biggest drains on your time and mental clarity. Work on them all when you can, but if you're overwhelmed, start at the top and work down:

- [] **1. Self-Acceptance.** Forgive yourself. Make criticism constructive, never destructive. You can't build on a foundation of self-hatred.
 - [] **2. Content Addiction.** Cut porn and slop. These are the most potent fake signals hijacking your brain. Everything else gets harder while these are active.
 - [] **3. Screen Addiction.** Set a hard screen time limit you can't bypass. Your screen time IS your free time.
 - [] **4. Comfort Addiction.** Sit with nothing for 5 minutes a day. Remove wants, identify needs. Boredom is a superpower.
 - [] **5. Exercise.** Gym 2x/week minimum. 7,000+ steps/day. Sit down less. This is baseline human maintenance.
 - [] **6. Diet.** 0.8g protein/lb bodyweight. Cook your own food. Stop eating things you didn't consciously choose.
 - [] **7. Fear.** Find what scares you and run towards it. Exposure is the cure. The AMCC grows when you do hard things.
 - [] **8. Relationships.** Loneliness kills faster than smoking. Elevate your circle. Do things with people, not around them.
 - [] **9. Goals.** Once the foundation is set, aim. Chase what terrifies you. Your fears are a compass pointing directly at growth.
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Part One: How to Think About This

Before the steps, there are three principles that underpin everything in this guide. These are the operating system. The steps are the applications that run on top of it.

Intentional Consumption

This applies to everything. Food, content, relationships, activities, thoughts. All of it.

The rule is simple: do not eat, drink, watch, or do anything you did not actively choose and give a good reason for. "I felt like it" is not a reason. That is your hijacked instincts talking. "I chose this because it gives me energy for training" is a reason. That is you taking control. The distinction between those two sentences is the distinction between living on autopilot and living with intention, and most people never make the switch.

Everything you do has an opportunity cost. Every hour spent consuming is an hour not spent creating. Every bad meal is a good meal you didn't eat. Every 30 minutes of mindless scrolling is a conversation you didn't have, a walk you didn't take, a chapter you didn't read, a set you didn't do. Consumption is not a hobby. Watching something tricks your brain into thinking it is doing something. You feel like you learned, socialised, or achieved, but when you look up, nothing has changed. Your brain logged the experience as real when it was not. If the only options available to you are bad, choose nothing. Sit and do nothing until you figure out something good. Nothing is always better than something harmful. That sounds counterintuitive, but it is one of the most practical principles in this entire guide.

Pay attention to how you speak about the world, because language shapes how you experience it. "It's shit outside" is not the same as "it's raining." One is a judgement. The other is a fact. When you describe things as they are instead of projecting emotion onto them, you start seeing reality more clearly. Your language is the interface between you and the world. If that interface is sloppy, your perception of reality will be sloppy too.

This connects to something broader. In British culture especially, we've been miserable for so long that misery feels like identity. Cynicism passes for intelligence. Pessimism passes for realism. Complaining passes for insight. None of that is true. Reject it. This is not a call for toxic positivity. It is a refusal to adopt negativity as a default setting. Be honest about what is bad. Be equally honest about what is good. Most people only do one of those.

Decide Once, Then Stop Deciding

This is the most important practical idea in the entire guide.

It is overwhelming and impossible to consciously choose what's good for you all day, every day. We evolved in a world where we could follow our instincts without making hundreds of decisions before lunch. Our environment made most of those choices for us. A hunter-gatherer did not have to decide whether to go for a walk today. Walking was how you survived. Trying to replace that automatic system with pure willpower is a strategy that will always fail, because willpower is a finite resource. Research by Roy Baumeister at Florida State University demonstrated that self-control depletes measurably throughout the day, a phenomenon he termed "ego depletion" (Baumeister et al., 1998). You cannot white-knuckle your way through every decision forever.

The way around this is to decide once, then follow it. Make the switch one time, set the new default, and never revisit it.

Here is what that looks like. Switch to glass and metal containers for your food. Don't frame it as restriction. Frame it this way: no containers exist in nature. Human ingenuity created glass and metal ones you can use. How great. Anything else simply doesn't exist. Then never think about it again. The decision is made. You move on.

If you have to motivate yourself to go to the gym every single time, you will eventually quit. But if you make it a non-negotiable, something that happens on these days regardless of how you feel, your brain will stop fighting it and start trying to make the best of it. That is when you learn to enjoy it. The resistance disappears because there is no decision to resist.

It is the same principle as cookies in the house. If they are in the cupboard, you have to resist them every time you walk past. That is a decision you are

making fifty times a day, and eventually you will lose. But if you don't buy them, there is nothing to resist. They don't exist. You don't even think about them. The best defence against temptation is making the temptation impossible, not fighting it.

Think of it like diverting a stream. Changing the course of a stream takes effort. You have to move rocks, dig a new channel, redirect the flow. But once it is done, the water flows in the new direction on its own. You do not have to stand there pushing it every day. Habits work the same way. The effort is in the initial change, not the maintenance. Once the new default is set, your brain stops resisting and starts optimising within the new constraints. This is how you turn intentional consumption from an exhausting daily battle into a system that runs itself. You don't need willpower if you've already decided.

Become Your Own Coach

The goal of this guide is not to give you a set of rules to follow blindly. It is to help you understand why these things work, so you can adapt them to your own life and make your own decisions. You are making the transition from following subconscious signals (instinct, habit, culture) to conscious value perception (understanding, evidence, deliberate choice). That transition, from autopilot to intentional, is what this entire guide is about.

To make that transition stick, you need to stay current on the ideas that underpin it. You don't need to become an academic. You need to know enough to be your own coach.

The fields worth paying attention to are neuroscience (how the dopamine system drives reward and habit, how the AMCC builds willpower, how circadian rhythms regulate energy and sleep, how neuroplasticity means your brain physically changes based on what you repeatedly do), evolutionary psychology (hunter-gatherer baseline, supernormal stimuli, mismatch theory), philosophy (Stoicism for voluntary discomfort and focusing on what you can control, Nietzsche for the danger of comfort and the importance of becoming who you are, Carl Jung for shadow work and the unconscious), exercise science and nutrition (protein synthesis, progressive overload, glycemic index, satiety research), and evidence-based biohacking (what supplements are actually proven to work versus what is marketing, circadian biology, sleep

optimisation). If you find it easier to watch lectures than read books, which I do, Jordan Peterson's Biblical Series is a good entry point. He is covering the same ideas that Nietzsche, Jung, and the Stoics wrote about, just in a modern video format that is easier to absorb.

One example of why this knowledge matters: your brain has a system called the reticular activating system (RAS). It filters out roughly 99% of the information your senses take in, because processing all of it would be overwhelming. What determines what gets through the filter? Whatever you have told your brain is important. When you set a clear goal or learn a new concept, your RAS starts flagging relevant opportunities that it was previously deleting. You start noticing things that were always there but invisible to you. This is not mystical. It is a well-documented neurological function. The more you understand about how your brain works, the more effectively you can direct it.

You don't need to master all of this. You need to understand enough that when you make a decision about your body, your diet, your habits, or your goals, you know why you're making it.

Part Two: The First Principle

Start at Baseline

Most people who try to change their lives start by looking at everything wrong and trying to fix it piece by piece. Cut out junk food. Reduce screen time. Start exercising. Stop procrastinating. The list is infinite and the approach is overwhelming. You are trying to subtract from chaos, and there is always more to subtract.

This guide takes the opposite approach. Instead of starting with your current life and trying to remove everything bad, start from zero. Imagine you are a hunter-gatherer. You have nothing. No phone, no processed food, no social media, no couch, no Netflix. Now, intentionally add back only what genuinely

helps you. If you can't give a good reason for something, it doesn't make the cut.

This reframe works because of a simple biological fact: we spent roughly 99% of human history as hunter-gatherers. Homo sapiens has existed for approximately 300,000 years. Agriculture appeared around 10,000 years ago. The industrial revolution was 250 years ago. Smartphones have existed for less than 20 years. Our brains and bodies have not meaningfully changed during any of these transitions. We are running ancient hardware in a world that would be unrecognisable to the people that hardware was built for. This is what evolutionary psychologists call "mismatch theory," the idea that many modern problems arise from the gap between our evolved traits and the environment we currently live in.

Everything you have beyond baseline is a bonus. None of it was guaranteed. When you truly internalise that, entitlement dies and gratitude replaces it, because gratitude built on experiencing less is far more durable than gratitude built on affirmations.

Consider what happens to animals in zoos. They have adequate food, no predators, climate-controlled environments, and medical care. By every material measure, their lives are comfortable. And yet zoo animals consistently develop depression, obesity, aggression, repetitive behaviours, and loss of reproductive drive. A 2008 study in Applied Animal Behaviour Science found that over 80% of captive carnivores exhibited stereotypic behaviours, repetitive purposeless movements that are considered indicators of poor psychological welfare (Mason et al., 2007). Sound familiar? We are zoo animals who built our own zoo. The solution is not to destroy the zoo. It is to understand what you actually need versus what the zoo provides.

For every habit, substance, and activity in your life, ask one question: would this help a hunter-gatherer survive and thrive? Exercise? Absolutely. They walked 10+ miles daily, sprinted from predators, climbed, and carried heavy loads. Whole food? Yes. They ate what they could find and kill. Pornography? No signal even remotely close to this existed in the natural world. Ten hours of screen content? Their "content" was real experiences, real danger, and real connection with real people.

This is not about romanticising the past. Hunter-gatherer life was brutal and short. The point is to use evolution as a diagnostic tool. If your body evolved expecting something and you are not providing it, or if your brain evolved without exposure to something and you are flooding it with that thing, you will experience problems. That is not a moral failing. It is a predictable biological outcome.

England is a useful case study here, because it was the first country to industrialise. It was the first to pull an entire population indoors, away from the land, and into factories and offices. It is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. Growing up in a city in England means growing up in an environment that is about as far from baseline as it is possible to get. The consequences are visible everywhere if you know what to look for.

Some things are worth questioning even if you end up keeping them. Do you think Spotify should exist? What would change if it didn't? Shoes are bad for foot health in certain ways, but they're comfortable and practical. Worth the trade? Even farming and agriculture, while enabling civilisation, removed us from the purpose-driven life of hunter-gatherers and eventually moved us indoors. These are not claims. They are prompts. The point is to decide for yourself, understanding both sides, before continuing to live a life that is completely different from the one your body was designed for. We evolved to want laziness but never achieve it. We didn't used to have to deal with this problem because rest, junk food, and infinite entertainment were all impossible. Now they're the default.

Part Three: The Nine Repairs

Step 1: Self-Acceptance

You already know you should be kinder to yourself. The question is why you aren't, and why fixing that comes before everything else.

You cannot build anything on a foundation of self-hatred. Most people who feel stuck are doing something cruel to themselves without realising it: they are

stuck, and they are also beating themselves up for being stuck. That is double punishment. It creates a cycle where the shame of being behind generates anxiety, the anxiety generates a burst of motivation, the motivation burns out because it was fuelled by panic rather than clarity, and the burnout generates more shame. Round and round it goes. Research by Kristin Neff at the University of Texas has shown that self-compassion consistently outperforms self-criticism as a driver of lasting behavioural change (Neff, 2003). People who treat themselves with compassion after a failure are more likely to try again. People who punish themselves are more likely to avoid the situation entirely.

Self-improvement that starts with shame always fails. When your starting point is "I'm broken and I need to fix myself," the fixing becomes its own compulsion. You start chasing the feeling of progress instead of actually progressing. Every new habit, every new book, every new system becomes another hit of "at least I'm trying," and when the novelty fades you're back where you started, except now you also feel guilty for failing at self-improvement. The cycle feeds itself.

So the first repair is this: forgive yourself. Whatever you've done, whatever time you've wasted, that version of you didn't know what you know now. Make criticism constructive, never destructive. "I need to change this" and "I'm worthless" might feel similar in the moment, but they produce completely different outcomes. The first leads to action. The second leads to paralysis. Learn to tell the difference. Be radically honest about where you are, but never confuse honesty with cruelty. "I'm 30kg overweight and it's affecting my health and confidence" is honest. "I'm disgusting" is cruel. The honest version moves you forward. The cruel version freezes you.

Self-acceptance and self-improvement are not opposites. They are prerequisites for each other. You accept where you are, make an honest assessment, take targeted action, accept your new position, and repeat. People who skip acceptance get stuck in the shame-motivation-burnout loop forever.

There is a reason this step covers everything and not just one area of your life. All problems are one problem. Every area of your life that is falling short has the same person in charge of it: you. Your career, your health, your relationships, your habits. They are not separate issues requiring separate

solutions. They are all reflections of the same underlying relationship you have with yourself. Fix that relationship and the rest follows. This is also why guilt matters more than most people realise. You never truly get away with anything. Acting against your own values does not require anyone else to catch you. Guilt itself is the consequence. Living out of alignment with what you know to be right is its own form of suffering, and it compounds quietly until it becomes unbearable. Honesty with yourself is the only way to stop that accumulation.

One practical way to approach this: treat yourself like someone you are responsible for looking after. If a friend came to you living the way you live, eating what you eat, spending their time the way you spend yours, you would tell them to change. You would never let someone you care about continue down that path. Be your own client. Give yourself the same honest, compassionate advice you would give someone you love.

You can also construct the version of yourself you want to become. All identities are constructed. The "real you" is just the version you have been defaulting to. If you can choose to be passive and avoidant, you can equally choose to be disciplined and intentional. Neither is more authentic than the other. Pick the identity that serves you and practise it until it becomes automatic.

Carl Jung wrote extensively about what he called the "shadow," the parts of yourself that you refuse to face. His core insight was that everything you refuse to acknowledge about yourself does not go away. It controls you from below the surface. You have to face yourself honestly first. All of it. The embarrassing parts, the failures, the things you're ashamed of. Only after you've looked at the full picture can you decide what to change from a place of clarity rather than panic.

Step 2: Content Addiction

You already know these are bad for you. Everyone does. The reason "just stop" doesn't work is that you are fighting against the most sophisticated reward-hijacking systems ever created, and you are trying to beat them with willpower alone. That will never be enough. This step is about understanding

what these things actually do to your brain so that the decision to remove them stops feeling like deprivation and starts feeling like self-defence.

Pornography and low-quality digital content ("slop") are the most potent fake signals in the modern world. They are things that did not exist at baseline, things that no human brain was built to process. Nikolaas Tinbergen won the Nobel Prize in 1973 for his research on supernormal stimuli, demonstrating that animals will prefer exaggerated artificial signals over real ones, sometimes to the point of self-destruction. A bird will abandon its own eggs to sit on a giant painted dummy egg because the fake signal is stronger than the real one. That is exactly what pornography and algorithmically optimised content do to the human brain.

Your brain cannot distinguish real sexual experience from simulated sexual experience. Pornography hijacks reward circuits that evolved for real human connection and reproduction. The dopamine response is supernormal, meaning real intimacy cannot compete, so your brain gradually stops wanting it. The documented effects include sexual dysfunction, warped expectations of intimacy, reduced motivation to pursue real relationships, and escalation to increasingly extreme content as tolerance builds. This is not a moral argument. It is a neurological one. Your brain is being physically rewired. Gary Wilson's *Your Brain on Porn* compiles the clinical evidence extensively.

Short-form content, memes, rage bait, and mindless scrolling operate on the same principle at a cognitive level. Your brain thinks it is learning, socialising, and being entertained. In reality, nothing is retained, no skills are built, and no real connection is made. It is the cognitive equivalent of eating cardboard. It feels like eating, but it provides nothing. A practical test: if you cannot remember what you consumed 30 minutes later, it was slop.

The solution is removal, not moderation. You do not moderate heroin. You do not use it. Willpower is a finite resource, and as discussed in the "Decide Once" principle, it is always better to avoid temptation than to fight it. Install blockers, delete apps, change your environment so that the path of least resistance is not consumption. The goal is not discipline. The goal is making the bad option harder than the good option. Decide once, set the default, and move on.

Step 3: Screen Addiction

You know your screen time is too high. Everyone does. The average young adult in the UK spends 4 hours and 14 minutes per day on their smartphone alone (Ofcom, 2023), and that number does not include laptops, TVs, or gaming consoles. For many people, total screen time reaches 8 to 10 hours per day. That is not "some of your day." That is functionally all of your free time. Your screen time is your free time. They are the same thing.

The mechanism that keeps you scrolling is the same mechanism that keeps people pulling slot machine levers. Variable reward schedules, where the reward is unpredictable in timing and magnitude, produce the most compulsive behaviour of any reinforcement pattern. Every scroll is a pull of the lever. Occasionally you get something genuinely interesting, and that intermittent payoff is enough to keep you going through hundreds of empty scrolls. Social media platforms are engineered around this principle. It is not an accident that you can't stop.

This connects to a deeper idea: inaction is action. Choosing to keep scrolling is choosing not to train, not to read, not to call a friend. It feels passive, but it is an active decision with real consequences. Once you start seeing inaction as action, laziness becomes almost impossible, because you realise that doing nothing is not neutral. It is a choice to stay where you are.

Every hour on a screen is an hour you did not spend exercising, learning a skill, talking to a real human, being bored (which, as Step 4 explains, is actually valuable), or simply being outside. The cost is not just the time. It is the compounding effect of what that time could have become. One hour of reading per day is 365 hours per year, roughly 50 books. One hour of training per day is enough to reach a competitive level in almost any physical discipline within two years. One hour of scrolling per day is nothing. It compounds into nothing.

The solution is brutally simple. Set a hard screen time limit you cannot bypass. The key word is "cannot." If you can override it, you will. Use app blockers, screen time restrictions with a password someone else sets, or physical timers. Start with a limit that feels uncomfortable but survivable, and reduce it over time. Replace the time with walks, gym sessions, physical books, phone calls with friends, or simply sitting in silence.

One distinction matters: tool use is different from consumption. Using a screen to do your job, learn a specific skill, or communicate with purpose is not the problem. Scrolling, watching, and browsing with no defined endpoint is the problem. The limit applies to consumption, not tool use. But be honest with yourself about which category your usage actually falls into.

Step 4: Comfort Addiction

You know comfort is making you soft. What you may not have considered is that comfort at this scale is a completely new problem for the human species. Your ancestors never had to resist it because it was impossible to be this comfortable.

For 99% of human history, we had almost nothing. Depression and purposelessness at the scale we see today are modern inventions. They are symptoms of the failed experiment. We have eliminated nearly all physical discomfort from daily life, and the result is not happiness. It is emptiness. Comfort does not satisfy. It anaesthetises. The hedonic treadmill, extensively documented in psychological research (Brickman & Campbell, 1971), shows that humans adapt to improvements in comfort remarkably quickly, returning to a baseline level of satisfaction regardless of how much better their circumstances become. More comfort never leads to more happiness. It leads to a higher threshold for what feels normal.

The principle here is to remove wants and identify needs. Strip back to what you actually require versus what you have been trained to crave. This is where genuine gratitude comes from. Not from affirmations or gratitude journals, but from the experience of having less and realising you are fine. Marcus Aurelius wrote in *Meditations*: "See how little you can live with." The less you need, the freer you are. The more you need, the more you are enslaved by those needs.

Boredom is central to this step, and it is wildly undervalued. Boredom is your brain asking a question: "What am I supposed to be doing?" In a world of infinite stimulation, you never have to hear that question, and so you never answer it. Boredom is the space where purpose, creativity, and self-knowledge emerge. If you cannot sit alone with your own thoughts for 10 minutes, you have a problem, and the problem is not the boredom. It is the fact that you

have been drowning out your own inner voice for so long that hearing it feels unbearable.

Nietzsche wrote that you should never trust a thought that comes to you indoors. Walking is when real thinking happens. It is not a coincidence that almost every great thinker in history was an obsessive walker. When you move through the world without a screen in your hand and without a destination, your brain enters a state where it can actually process what is going on in your life. Most people have not experienced this in years.

The practical application is straightforward. Sit unstimulated for 5 minutes daily. No phone, no music, no TV, no fidgeting. Just you and your thoughts. Start there and build to 10, 15, 20 minutes. Notice what comes up: anxiety, restlessness, ideas, fears, goals. That is the raw material of your life that you have been covering over with noise.

Beyond that, practise voluntary discomfort in small doses. Cold exposure, fasting, sleeping without a pillow, walking in the rain instead of driving. The point is not suffering for its own sake. The point is proving to yourself that you do not need comfort to be okay. That proof changes everything, because once you know you can handle discomfort, comfort becomes a choice rather than a dependency. The Stoic philosophers understood this two thousand years ago. Seneca deliberately practised poverty on a regular basis, not because he enjoyed it, but because he wanted to ensure that the thing he feared, losing his wealth, held no power over him.

Step 5: Exercise

You know you should exercise. What this step asks you to consider is that movement is not a bonus you add to your life. It is the minimum your body was built for. You are not going above and beyond by going to the gym. You are catching up to what a hunter-gatherer did every single day without thinking about it.

The non-negotiables are simple. Resistance training at least twice per week. Seven thousand steps per day as an absolute minimum, with ten thousand or more being better. Sit down as little as possible. Standing, walking, and moving should be the default state of your body, not an exception carved out

of a sedentary day. Hunter-gatherers walked an estimated 9 to 15 kilometres per day (Pontzer et al., 2012). That was not exercise. That was life.

When it comes to the gym, frequency and intensity matter more than volume. Two or three hard sessions per week will produce better results than six sessions at half effort. Consistency beats motivation every time, because motivation is a feeling and feelings are unreliable. Consistency is a system, and systems work regardless of how you feel on any given day. The sessions that count most are the ones where you don't want to go. Those are the ones that build the habit. Don't overdo it. Exercise is a tool, not an identity. Diminishing returns kick in fast. Doing too much leads to injury, burnout, and quitting, which is the opposite of progress. Start, and don't stop. You cannot speed this up. The timeline is the timeline.

If exercise feels impossibly hard, you might be approaching it wrong. There is a version of training that you can sustain, and finding it matters more than grinding through something you hate. The goal is to make it feel manageable enough that you keep showing up, because showing up consistently for years is what produces results. If you are dreading every session, that is a signal to change the approach, not to push harder.

Exercise selection matters, but less than you think. The best exercise is the one you actually do. Focus on compound movements (squat, deadlift, bench press, row, overhead press) because they give you the most return on time invested. Understand mechanical tension, muscles under load through a full range of motion, as the primary driver of muscle growth. Learn what RPE (Rate of Perceived Exertion) means and train hard enough to stimulate growth without training so hard you can't recover. Try everything for a while. It won't feel good at first. Nothing worth doing does. Find what you can tolerate, learn to enjoy it, and eventually it becomes something you look forward to. If you still hate it after months, switch. But give it a real chance first. And ignore your starting point. You can't get good without being bad first. Nobody in the gym cares where you start. Nobody is watching you. They are all thinking about themselves.

Nutrition essentials:

- 0.8g protein per lb of bodyweight. This is the foundation. Everything else is secondary

- 50g fat minimum daily. Essential for hormones, including testosterone, cortisol regulation, and reproductive health
- Natural carbs before training for fuel. Learn about the glycemic index: low GI for sustained energy, high GI for immediate fuel

Don't obsess over food. Perfectionism with diet leads to disordered eating. If losing weight, eat as little as possible without being hungry, and prioritise high-satiety meals built around protein, fibre, and volume. If gaining weight, eat more of the same good food. Track roughly, not religiously. Awareness matters more than precision.

Evidence-based supplements (only what's proven):

- Olive oil daily (anti-inflammatory, cardiovascular, cognitive)
- Sunlight first thing in the morning for circadian rhythm. If in a northern climate, use a SAD lamp at 10,000 lux for 20-30 minutes
- Magnesium glycinate or threonate (sleep, recovery, 300+ enzymatic processes; most people are deficient)
- Vitamin D3 + K2 (especially in northern climates)
- Zinc, 15-30mg daily (hormone production, immune function)
- Omega-3 EPA/DHA (brain health, anti-inflammatory)
- Creatine monohydrate, 1g per 10kg bodyweight daily (the most researched supplement in existence; benefits muscle, brain, and recovery)

Electrolytes: Make your own blend at home with sodium (table salt), potassium (lite salt), and magnesium. It costs roughly 1/100th of branded electrolyte products and contains the same ingredients. Essential if you train hard, eat clean, or are in a caloric deficit.

Step 6: Diet

You know what healthy eating looks like. The reason your instincts fight you is that the signals your body uses to choose food are being systematically exploited by an industry that profits from your confusion.

In our natural habitat, taste was a superpower. Sweet meant ripe fruit, which meant energy. Savoury meant protein, which meant survival. Bitter meant

poison, which meant danger. These signals kept us alive for hundreds of thousands of years. In the modern world, food engineers design products to be maximally palatable with minimal nutritional value. They have cracked the code on the exact combinations of salt, sugar, and fat that override your satiety signals and make you eat past the point of fullness. A 2019 study by Kevin Hall at the NIH found that people consuming ultra-processed food ate an average of 500 extra calories per day compared to those eating unprocessed food, even when both diets were matched for available calories, sugar, fat, and fibre (Hall et al., 2019). The processed food was simply engineered to make people eat more. Food that tastes incredible but provides nothing your body needs is slop, the same concept as content slop. Your taste buds are being lied to, in the same way your screen lies to you.

The rule from the Foundation section applies here with full force: do not eat anything you did not actively choose and give a good reason for. "I'm eating this because it was in front of me" is not a reason. "I'm eating this because it has 30g protein and will fuel my training" is a reason. If it's slop, nothing is better than something. Cook your own food as much as possible, because when you cook you control exactly what goes in. Build your diet around whole, single-ingredient foods: meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, fruit, rice, oats. Read labels when you buy prepared food. Understand what you are consuming.

This problem is not new. Thousands of years before psychology existed, ancient civilisations already knew that human instincts would betray them. That is what fasting was. That is what meditation was. That is what prayer was. They were not random spiritual practices. They were all doing the same thing: interrupting your instincts before they controlled you. Your senses are incredible guidance systems, but they are not perfect. Junk food tricks your taste. Doom scrolling tricks your need to socialise. Video games trick your need for achievement. Ancient people did not have any of those things and they still built rituals to resist their own impulses. We have a thousand times more signals trying to trick us than they ever faced, and we have abandoned every single one of those defences. Start building them back.

Nietzsche would have appreciated this framing: it is not fat versus thin. It is conscious versus unconscious. Most people have never made a single deliberate choice about what they eat. They eat what tastes good, what's convenient, what's marketed to them. Taking control of your diet is one of the

first acts of genuine autonomy most people ever make. It is a declaration that your decisions about your body will be made by you, not by a corporation optimising for your repeat purchase.

Step 7: Fear

You know you should face your fears. What you may not know is that there is a physical structure in your brain that literally grows or shrinks based on whether you choose the hard thing or the easy thing. Fear itself is a survival instinct from a world that no longer exists. The fear response you experience before a difficult conversation or a public presentation is the same cascade of adrenaline and cortisol your ancestors experienced when facing a predator. Your body cannot tell the difference. But the predator is gone, and the fear remains, and it is now pointing at the exact things you need to do to grow.

Carl Jung put it directly: "Where your fear is, there your task is." The things you are most afraid of are usually the things you most need to do. Fear is a signal, not a stop sign. It points directly at growth. Confront your insecurities honestly. Write them down, look at them, decide which ones to tackle. Then go do the thing. Not tomorrow. Today.

Reading about courage does not make you brave. Doing scary things makes you brave. Exposure therapy, the systematic and repeated confrontation with feared stimuli, remains the gold standard treatment for anxiety disorders because it works (Hofmann & Smits, 2008). The principle applies far beyond clinical settings. If you are afraid of heights, go get on a rollercoaster. If you are afraid of talking to people, go talk to a stranger. If you are afraid of failure, go try something you might fail at. The gap between knowing what to do and actually doing it is where most people's potential dies.

The neuroscience behind this is concrete and measurable. The anterior midcingulate cortex (AMCC) is a brain region associated with tenacity, willpower, and, crucially, the will to live. Neuroimaging studies have shown that the AMCC is larger in athletes, smaller in people with obesity, and that it grows in volume when people repeatedly do things they do not want to do (Touroutoglou et al., 2019). In elderly people who maintain their AMCC volume, it is one of the strongest predictors of sustained cognitive function. This is not metaphorical. It is a physical structure in your brain that you are

either building or allowing to atrophy with every choice you make. The AMCC does not care whether the hard thing is useful or productive. It only cares that it was hard and you did it anyway. Nassim Taleb calls this property "antifragility," systems that grow stronger from stress rather than merely surviving it.

Find pain before it finds you. Life will challenge you whether you're ready or not. The only question is whether you've been training.

Step 8: Relationships & Community

You know loneliness is a problem. What you may not fully appreciate is the scale of it. Humans were never supposed to live the way most young people live today: alone in rooms, communicating through screens, replacing real connection with digital approximations of it. Community is not a luxury. It is baseline.

A 2015 meta-analysis by Julianne Holt-Lunstad at Brigham Young University, covering over 3.4 million participants, found that social isolation increases the risk of premature death by 26%, and that loneliness has a health impact equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes per day (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015). This is not soft advice. Social isolation is a clinical health risk. Modern life is engineered for isolation: remote work, delivery apps, and social media that replaces social interaction with the feeling of social interaction. No human in history lived the way many young people live today, and the health consequences are exactly what you would predict.

You rise or fall to the average of the people around you. Research by Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler has demonstrated that obesity, smoking, and even happiness spread through social networks like contagion (Christakis & Fowler, 2007). If everyone around you is stagnant, you will stagnate. If everyone around you is growing, you will grow. This is not about cutting people off cruelly. It is about intentionally seeking out people who elevate you. Proximity is powerful. Physically be around people who are where you want to be.

Humans bond through shared activity, through doing things together rather than simply being around each other. The implication is straightforward: do

things with people. Gym partners, sports teams, projects, adventures. Don't try to force deep emotional conversations first. That comes naturally through shared experience. Join something. A sport, a class, a club, a community project. The activity is the vehicle for connection.

There is a deeper layer to this step that goes beyond socialising. Humans learn through stories. That is not weakness. It is our deepest cognitive architecture. Stories teach empathy, morality, and possibility in ways that facts alone cannot. Pay attention to the stories you consume. Nihilistic, cynical, despairing narratives are the slop of the story world. They feel sophisticated, but they provide nothing. Choose narratives that make you stronger, kinder, and more capable. Look at the people you want to be like and ask: what stories do they tell themselves? What do they believe?

Pay attention to religious and mythological stories, even if you don't believe them literally. They are stories that work, compiled and refined over millennia by billions of people. The Bible, the Bhagavad Gita, Greek mythology, Norse mythology: these contain condensed wisdom about human nature that no modern self-help book can match. Joseph Campbell identified the Hero's Journey as the universal story structure that maps onto every meaningful human transformation. You are on a hero's journey right now. Whether you like it or not. The question is whether you will answer the call.

Step 9: Goals

This step is last for a reason. Most self-improvement content starts here. Set goals. Find your purpose. Chase your dreams. This guide puts it at the end because goals without foundation are just another source of anxiety.

If you've actually done Steps 1 through 8, you'll notice something. You probably don't feel like you need a grand purpose anymore. You're healthy, clear-headed, connected, and capable. That restless desperation is gone. What's left is clarity. This step is not about finding meaning. It is about deciding what to do with a life that already feels good.

Once the first eight steps are in motion (not perfect, just in motion), you are ready to aim. Without the foundation, goals become another thing to fail at and feel bad about. With it, they become fuel. You may notice that you don't

even feel the urgency you expected. That is the point. Baseline restored means the panic is gone. What remains is genuine interest, not desperation. That is a much better foundation for ambition than fear ever was.

Your fears remain the best compass you have. Carl Jung's concept of the shadow, the parts of yourself you refuse to face, points directly at where your growth is. The things you hide from, avoid, and refuse to confront are almost always the things you most need to pursue. If the thought of something makes your stomach drop, that is probably the most important thing you could be doing right now. The hero's journey always begins with a call to adventure that is terrifying, and the hero always has the option to refuse. Don't refuse.

Humans are the only animal that can plan for the future. That is our evolutionary superpower, and not using it is like being a bird that never flies. A goal gives your effort direction. Without it, you are working hard going nowhere. But the goal itself is not the point. The journey is always better than the destination. Chase goals, don't just achieve them, because the person you become in pursuit is the real prize. People who achieve a big goal and feel empty afterward made the mistake of thinking arrival was the point. It never is. The point is who you became on the way there.

Be careful about what you aim for. Being jacked, being rich, being happy: these are not goals. They are side effects of doing the right things for long enough. If you chase the side effect directly, you will end up miserable, because the side effect without the substance is hollow. Chase the process. Get strong because you train with discipline and intention. Build wealth because you develop skills that are genuinely valuable. Become happy because you solved the 8 problems above and your life actually works. The outcomes are symptoms of the system, not targets in their own right.

If you want to find your thing, try as many things as possible. You cannot find what you love by thinking about it. Give each thing a real chance, measured in months rather than days, because nothing feels good at first. Pay attention to what you gravitate toward when nobody is watching and nothing is at stake. That is usually the signal.

Most people don't lack ability. They lack a specific, defined target. A vague desire to "be better" produces nothing. A specific goal with a deadline produces action. Make it measurable, make it time-bound, and make it slightly

beyond what you think you can do. Then pursue it with everything you've got, knowing that even if you fall short, the pursuit itself will have changed you.

Resources & Recommended Reading

Books

- **Meditations** by Marcus Aurelius. The original self-improvement book. Written by a Roman emperor to himself about how to live with discipline, gratitude, and clarity. Read this first.
- **Man and His Symbols** by Carl Jung. The most accessible entry point into Jung's ideas: archetypes, the shadow, the unconscious. Understanding yourself starts here.

Lecture Series

- **Jordan Peterson's Biblical Series.** Not a religious lecture. A deep psychological breakdown of why these stories have survived thousands of years and what they reveal about human nature. This changed how I think about myth, meaning, and suffering.

Videos & Documentaries

- **David Choe on Joe Rogan.** Raw, unfiltered conversation about living without comfort, rejecting modern defaults, and what happens when you strip life back to basics.
- **Outdoor Boys: Living with the Hadza.** Watch how actual hunter-gatherers live. This is what your body and brain were built for. It will change how you see your daily routine.
- **Channel 5: Philly Streets.** A look at what happens when people fall through the cracks. Not to judge, but to understand. This is the reality that comfort hides from you.