

# Balanced Life Challenge

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This challenge is an invitation to explore the dance of balance. Balance is not a static state; it is a dance around the center. In this busy world, losing track of what we recognize as important is easy. You will spend 6 weeks focusing on four of the most essential pillars of health. The goal is not necessarily to lose weight but to develop a healthier way of life.

This program focuses on four of the most essential pillars of health:

- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Relaxation

The challenge will be to track each of these areas daily for 6 weeks (the average time it takes to develop a habit). Various tools are available to help you keep track of your goals.

## Pillar 1: Nutrition

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There are many philosophies on diet and nutrition, but the most reputable research has consistently supported the Mediterranean diet. This is also an easily sustainable nutrition choice in the long term. There is also emerging evidence that intermittent fasting has positive health outcomes. Adding this to the Mediterranean diet may be of benefit to you as well.

The cornerstones of the Mediterranean diet are:

<b>Plenty of:</b>	
Fish	Olive Oil
Olives	Beans and Lentils
Avocados	Fruits
Vegetables	Spices and Herbs
Nuts	
<b>In Moderation:</b>	
Chicken	Red Wine
Turkey	Whole-Grain Bread
Eggs	Brown or Wild Rice
Cheese	Oatmeal
Yogurt	Barley
Whole Wheat Pasta	Potatoes
<b>Limit:</b>	
Beef	Pork
Sugar	Butter or Margarine
Refined Grains	Caffeine

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## Earning Points

You can earn up to 5 points daily for your nutrition choices. Keep track of your daily food intake and tally your points using these guidelines:

- 5 - ½ cup servings of fruits and vegetables a day = +1 point
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil or ¼ cup tree nuts a day = +1 point
- 2 servings protein a day (fish, white meat poultry, legumes, dairy) = +1 point
- 8 8oz. glasses of water or other calorie-free, non-carbonated, decaffeinated beverage = +1 point
- 1 serving of sugary food = -1 point
- 1 serving of processed grains = -1 point
- 1 carbonated beverage = -1 point

If a food has 2 negative points combined (e.g., a cake is both sugary and has processed grains), 1 serving of that food is still only -1 point.

### Additional Option

*Intermittent fasting is choosing not to eat for a window of time each day or week. If you have never done fasting before, begin with the 12/12 option and work your way up. If you are used to fasting, you can begin with the 16/8 option. **Do not include intermittent fasting in your diet if you have an acute illness, adrenal dysfunction, hypoglycemia, or a history of disordered eating.***

- **12/12 Time-Restricted Fasting** – You spend 12 hours fasting and 12 hours not fasting every 24 hours.
- **16/8 Time-Restricted Fasting** – You spend 16 hours fasting and 8 hours not fasting every 24 hours.

Meeting your daily fasting goal is worth +1 point.

## Pillar 2: Exercise

The goal for this pillar is to be consistent in exercising. The highest health impact of exercise is going from nothing to 10 minutes a day of aerobic activity. Aerobic activity is an activity that makes you a little short of breath (you can still talk but not sing).

Choose a level of exercise that requires you to push yourself a little.

Current Exercise Level	Challenge Exercise Goal
I exercise occasionally or not at all	I will exercise 10 minutes a day
I exercise 1-2 times a week	I will exercise 20 minutes a day
I exercise 3+ times a week	I will exercise 30 minutes a day

### Earning Points

Choose your daily exercise goal and keep track of your daily progress. You earn **+2 points** for each day you meet your exercise goal. Suggested aerobic exercises include:

- Walking Briskly
- Jogging/Running
- Cardio Gym Machine
- Biking
- Dancing/Zumba
- Swimming
- Vinyasa/Flow Yoga
- Aerobic Fitness DVD

## Pillar 3: Sleep

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Sleep is vital to good health. It improves immune function, cognitive capacity, and neurotransmitter production. Adequate amounts of sleep are linked to a healthy weight. No absolute amount is required, but most studies support 7 to 8 hours a night as being optimal. It is beneficial to sleep on a regular schedule to help support adrenal function.

### Earning Points

You earn **+2 points** by getting 7 or more hours of sleep each night.

## Pillar 4: Relaxation

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Finding a way to reduce stress is an important aspect of a balanced life. There are many ways to accomplish this, including:

- Breathing Exercises
- Meditation
- Journaling
- Yoga
- Prayer

### Earning Points

You earn **+2 points** by practicing a relaxation technique for 10 minutes each day.