

This is not about a diet.

This is not about a fitness routine.

This is about a mind-shift that will help you change your perspective about your body, to help you love your body, and to care for it, from the inside-out.

Create a mind-shift.

Real Food.

Real Fitness.

Real Life.

By Andrea Matthes, CPT

Information contained in this e-book is based on opinion, backed by research and personal experience. It is not meant to cure or treat any disease or disorder. If you have medical concerns, please consult a medical professional before starting any new program or heeding advice from others.

INTRODUCTION

If you are struggling to love your body, you are not alone. There's so much pressure these days to "love the skin you're in" to "embrace your curves" and "rock what you've got". But it's not always that easy.

First let me tell you, you do NOT have to like the way your body looks in order to love it for what it does...or to take care of it with compassion and appreciation.

This is what my body looks like (almost) naked...



You may have seen this image floating around on the web—it's been all over Facebook and Pinterest since May of 2014 when I published a blog post that went "viral" called, "10+ Reasons I Love My Ugly Body."

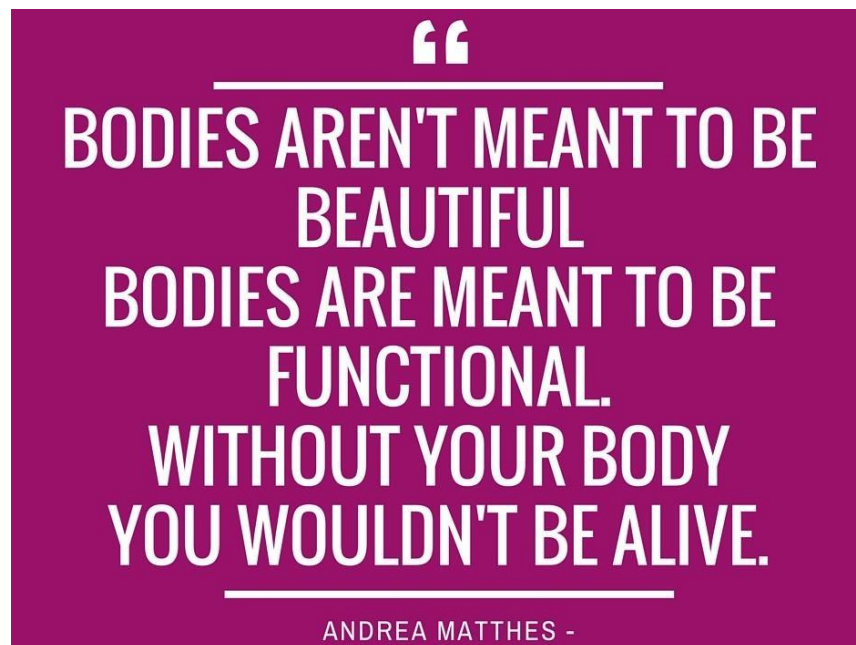
That post has been viewed over 1 million times and has been shared via social media over 200k times, around the globe! To say I'm proud of that post is an understatement, almost as understated as the words, "I love my ugly body."

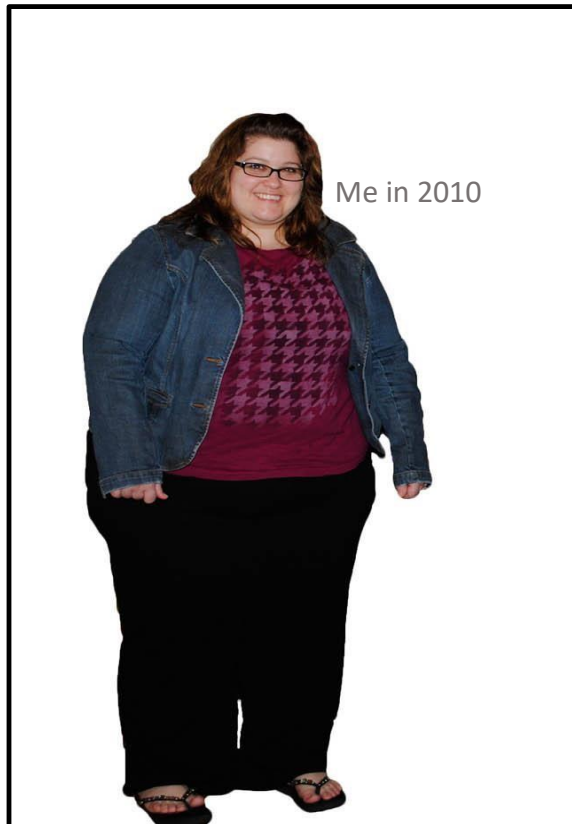
Both the "love" and "ugly" equally.

See, I don't believe that you have to like the way your body looks in order to love it and care for it. In fact, I believe that you **MUST** love it just the way it is, no matter what, in order to love it and care for it.

It doesn't matter who you are, you're always going to find something you want to change about your body—even if it's just your finger nails, but that doesn't mean it isn't deserving of the love and respect it has earned.

Your body is what keeps you alive!





I used to weigh 328lbs.

I was trapped in a body that didn't allow me to live my life. I was uncomfortable all the time, unable to participate in activities I loved, and feeling trapped in a vicious cycle of diet, fail, repeat, constantly at war with my body.

I ended up having gastric bypass surgery in 2011 which gave me the jumpstart I needed to believe I could finally be successful at losing weight, but it did not cure me of my "fatness."

The truth is, I will likely never be "cured" but I have been transformed...from the inside-out.

In 2012, I finally had the mind-shift I needed to realize that my body was more than its size, shape, and cellulite. In 2012 I realized what my body was capable of and I learned to appreciate it for keeping me alive—despite the abuse I showed it for 20+ years.

My body needed me and I needed my body. That's when it all changed. That's when I stopped looking at my body as a problem and started looking at it as an asset.

At that point I had lost about 80lbs and was at a point where my mobility had improved, my joints didn't hurt all the time, I wasn't always out of breath and I was feeling a better sense of control in all areas of my life. It would be another 14 months and LOTS of hard work before I reached my goal weight of 165lbs, but I was no longer in a feeling hopeless and helpless—for the first time in my life I believed change was possible...and that's what it takes to make it happen.

Within a few months of this startling realization, my thoughts about food and fitness changed drastically, which in turn changed my life.

The more I started to live, the more I was able to focus on health and happiness rather than an end result, especially when it got hard—and it definitely got hard, including lots of weight loss plateaus and several set-backs. But because of my mind shift, because I was no longer focused simply on the scale, the size of my jeans, or look of my body, I had no interest in giving up. I just wanted to keep getting faster, stronger, better! I was fueled by life, rather than an end result. And I still am!

These days I'm a certified personal trainer, healthy lifestyle coach, author, public speaker, and a mom to two boys, ages 3 and 1. (as of March 2019)

Another thing I've learned is that there is no before and after, only then and now. Between three pregnancies in 3 years with two being successful, my body has changed a LOT! But despite the extra "baby weight" I still love and adore my body, and make choices that honor myself, my body and my goals. After all, I only get one body, and I'm the only one who's responsible for taking care of it. And doing my best to care for it is the only way I can live the life I want to live. A life that's full of adventure!

My life, much like yours, I'm sure, has been full of ups and downs...and not just on the scale. It's those ups and downs that have made me who I am today and will continue to make me whomever I become—hopefully a very old, very wise, very healthy, 100 year old woman!

In this little e-book I'm going to share with you some of what I've learned over the years about food, fitness and life, and how to use science, intuition and practical application to create real lifestyle change in order to live your BEST, happy, healthy, I'mperfect Life!

CREATING A STRONG MIND/BODYCONNECTION

What is a mind/body connection? A mind/body connection is what happens when the mind and body are no longer at war; when the mind understands how the body works, when the mind starts listening to what the body needs, and when the mind puts into place the actions and tasks necessary to love the body in which it lives.

A strong mind/body connection is part science, part intuition and part practical application.

WHAT IS YOUR BODY?

Your body is your physical being. It is the vessel in which you live and operate from the moment of conception until the moment you die.

WHAT IS YOUR MIND?

Your mind is your mental, spiritual, emotional and intellectual being. Your mind is your thoughts...thoughts beget feelings, feelings beget actions, and actions beget reactions.

Even after you die, your body still exists, but your mind is no longer there. Your body can survive without your mind, but your mind cannot survive with your body.

YOUR BODY WANTS TO SURVIVE

Your body's sole goal in life is to survive. Whether you believe in evolution or creation, no one can deny that our bodies are freaking amazing.

They create life, heal from injuries, recover from illness, and give us the ability to live the life our mind desires.

Our bodies never stop working until the day we die. Never. Even when we're asleep, they're working.

Do you know what our bodies need in order to stay alive?

If your answer was: oxygen, hydration, fuel, shelter and rest, then you're right!

Pretty simple, eh?

Our bodies are extremely complicated in how they actually work, but they are very simple when it comes to their needs. Yet somehow we have found a way to complicate those needs to the point of creating disease, immobility and even death by under-oxygenating, under-hydrating, over-eating and creating extremely stressful environments.

See, the problem isn't with our physical bodies, the problem is with our minds.

Over years of conditioning, our minds become polluted with lessons of “right from wrong” and “good from bad”. I’m not talking about moral issues here—I’m talking about the right from wrong and good from bad when it comes to food and fitness and how those two things relate to the quality of our lives.

We’ve been taught that certain foods are good and certain foods are bad. And that we’re bad if we eat them.

We’re taught that if we overeat, give into cravings, or “mess-up”, we’re weak.

We’ve been conditioned to believe that exercise is either something you love or hate, with no in-between. That it is a currency to buy the foods we love or punish choices that were made.

We are uneducated about how real food, real fitness and real life can actually work effortlessly to create real health and happiness.

We’re conditioned to think that we have to control our bodies which creates a mind/body war leaving us to think we can’t control ourselves, our bodies or our lives.

Those thoughts beget feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy, creating a distrust in ourselves, resulting in self-loathing and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

The farther our minds fall into that rabbit-hole, the more disconnected we become from our bodies.

Minds are very, very powerful, far more powerful than our bodies will ever be, except when it comes to survival. Our bodies will do whatever they need in order to survive. They will make us pass out in order to get more oxygen, they will dry out our mouths to the point of discomfort in order to make us drink, and they will turn the fuel we eat into energy, storing any leftovers for later use as fat in case of famine. They will shiver to warm up, sweat to cool down and sleep when they can no longer stay awake.

Our bodies are smart, but we treat them like they’re dumb. Instead of listening to them and giving them what they need, we go to war with them, creating an even wider gap in the mind/body connection.

We decide that they need to be changed, that something is wrong with them, that they are broken and need to be fixed because they aren’t letting us look, feel, act, do, or be what we want. However, the truth is that our bodies are simply doing the best they can with what we’re giving them.

It’s time to stop looking at our bodies as the problem and start treating them like they are the solution. It’s time to stop this war that is tearing us apart and start creating peace within ourselves.

Wars don’t solve problems. Wars only beat one party down until they can’t fight anymore.

So you have a choice, you can continue the war you're having with your body until it can't fight anymore or you can call a truce, make peace, and create change.

I hope you'll choose to do the latter.

This can be accomplished, I promise. I have faith in you.



It's time for change.

It's time to forgive yourself: guilt and shame are not good motivators.

It's time to appreciate yourself- loving, caring, nurturing, trusting and accepting where you are right now.

It's time to get excited about the possibilities!

It's time to educate yourself- knowledge is power!

By forgiving, appreciating and educating you will have no choice but to love and care for yourself and your body, from the inside-out.

At this moment, right now, I want you to close your eyes (well in a minute after you've read the following...) and apologize to your body for all of the negative things you've said about it.

I want you to thank it for doing its job of keeping you alive, despite that things you've thought and said about...and for the way you've treated it.

I want you to promise your body that from this point forward you will appreciate what it does for you every day that you will listen to it, love it and nurture it because you realize that without it, you would not be alive.



I want you to do this every day for the next 30 days. In the shower, in the car, walking through the parking lot, and lying in bed at night.

APOLOGIZE

THANK

PROMISE

Creating a strong mind/body connection is absolutely necessary for life-long health and happiness. It's what will free you from living in a body you don't love and allow you to live a life you do love.

JUST BREATHE

The body's first requirement for life is oxygen yet it's probably the number one thing in life we take for granted.

We have to make choices when it comes to just about everything we do in life, but we don't even have to think about breathing in order to stay alive...or do we?

Okay, we may not need to put much thought into the basic in and out, but there are times when we should be conscious of our breath.

When we inhale oxygen we're not just filling our lungs, we're oxygenating our blood. That blood gets pumped to every teeny tiny corner of our body, it's what gives us life.

That oxygen also helps calm our nerves, reducing stress and anxiety, and it can help improve attention span and reduce stress.

Times of pain and stress often control our food and fitness choices, causing binge eating and acute depression, so in order to help create a strong mind/body connection we must remember to breathe.

STAY HYDRATED

The body's second requirement for life is hydration, but for some reason, it's usually pretty low on the list of conscious priorities.

Proper hydration is necessary for ALL bodily functions...not just peeing. You've probably heard that our bodies are made up of about 60% water.

There's water in every part of our bodies, even our bones. It what keeps our muscles from cramping, it keeps our joints lubricated, and all of our organs functioning.

Plus we need it in order to sweat, which an automatic (because our bodies are smart) and necessary response to over-heating.

There's no magic amount of water that you or your body need. But it's a good idea to keep a water bottle with you at all times and USE IT.

Staying hydrated reduces stress. Yep there's that word again. Stress. Our bodies do not like to feel stress. They will send us signals when they're stressed, begging us for what they need. In the case of hydration, we will feel thirst.

However, if we're not connected with our bodies, we can often mistake thirst for hunger. So if we're going to give our bodies what they need, we must start from the top and work our way down.

Oxygen first.

Then hydration.

A well hydrated body is a body that feels good.

If you're living in a constant state of dehydration, you may not even realize how much better you could feel. So take a break from reading this, and go get some water.

Water.

Not soda. Or coffee. Or tea.

Water.

Water is always best for hydration. The other stuff is meant to be enjoyed for pleasure. So drink water most of the time. Your body will thank you.

Did you get some water yet?

THE FOOD STUFF!

The body's third requirement for survival. And the one that tends to be the trickiest for us to manage which is why we're going to spend some time here...

Food can sometimes feel like a four letter word. Actually, it is a four letter word, but it's not a "bad" word. Not even when we're talking about foods that we refer to as "bad." Food is just food and food is necessary for life.

We should eat foods that nourish our bodies most of the time.

Food for pleasure some of the time.

And enjoy all of the foods we eat, all of the time. Yes, ALL of the food, ALL of the time.

THE WHAT, WHY AND HOW WE EAT FOOD...

I break food down into five categories. These are the "whats," as in what types of food we eat:

- Nutritious food
- Convenience Food
- Comfort Food
- Habit Food
- Pleasure Food

Within each category, or the "what" we eat, is also the "why" and "how"

NUTRITIOUS FOODS

Nutritious foods are those that promote ideal body function by providing the 6 essential nutrients:

Vitamins and minerals, proteins, carbohydrates, fat and water.

Say what? Aren't those things in ALL kinds of food?

Why yes! Yes they are! This is why I don't like to label foods as good or bad. All foods, even cheeseburgers, pizza, potato chips and candy bars have nutrients, but that doesn't necessarily make them nutritious.

Nutritious foods are foods that are nutrient dense without repercussions. Meaning, they fuel us effectively and efficiently without side effects— like spiking our blood sugar, increasing fat storage, messing with our cholesterol levels or... encouraging us to overeat.

I don't know about you, but I have never made myself sick eating too many carrots!

Nutritious foods are WHOLE foods that when eaten alone or with other whole foods allow us to FEEL good. They provide our bodies with the building blocks they need in order to operate their best.

Whole foods are those that look like they did when they came from nature. A whole apple, versus an apple fritter, a chicken breast versus a chicken patty or nugget, or an ear of corn versus a bag of corn chips.

Whole/nutritious foods are the type of foods we should be eating MOST of the time. These foods pack the most punch when it comes to the calorie/nutrient ratio.

Let's talk calories real quick.

The word "calorie" is actually a unit of measure, like inch or centimeter. But rather than measuring distance, a calorie is a measurement of energy, specifically, how much energy (or how many calories) a food takes to heat one gram of water, one degree Celsius. Yeah? It's all very scientific and you can read all about it on the internet or in a good old fashioned book (or learn about it in my Total Lifestyle Makeover Program) but suffice it to say that when we're talking about calories, we're talking about how much fuel or energy a food has.

The higher the number of calories, the more energy it takes to burn.

I'm going to go one step deeper and then we'll move on—

Carbohydrates have 4 calories per gram

Protein also has 4 calories per gram

Fat has 9 calories per gram

Alcohol has 7 calories per gram

And Fiber (the part of complex carbohydrates that our bodies can't process) has 2
Interesting stuff eh?

A Calorie is a Calorie is a Calorie! Or is it?

Let's talk about this for a minute. 100 Calories vs. 100 Calories...

So, if you think about a medium apple weighing 182g, which is mostly water, and carbohydrates with a little protein, some vitamins and minerals and even a teeny tiny bit of fat—you're looking at a 100 calorie food that is VERY nutritious.

A 100 calorie snack pack of Ritz Snack Mix is going to weigh 22g, provide no water and offer no vitamins, a tiny bit of iron and some sodium, which is added, of course.

See the difference?

It's not that the snack mix is "bad"—it's still 100 calories (of energy) but it's seriously lacking nutritional value. Plus, how often do you eat one pack and feel satisfied? If you're like me, NEVER!

Based on the food categories I listed before- the apple would fall under Nutritious Foods and the Snack Mix would fall under Convenience Foods, which just happens to be next on the list!

CONVENIENCE FOODS

Convenience foods are foods we eat due to hunger but don't necessarily provide much in the way of nutrition. Their purpose is to satiate hunger and provide energy. They are often those foods we grab out of the vending machine or at the gas station or in the drive thru on our way home from work. They might also be the foods we keep in our desk for our afternoon snack—foods that don't spoil, or even premade frozen dinners that we can pop in the microwave when we get home.

Convenience foods aren't bad- they are okay in a pinch, when you need some quick fuel or energy, but they aren't ideal for sustaining good health and often lead to over eating by creating a trigger to want to eat more.

COMFORT FOODS

Next up is Comfort foods. These are the foods we reach for when we want to feel a hug from the inside. Comfort foods make us feel warm and full and craving them and eating them is completely normal!

Comfort foods aren't necessarily nutrient dense, but they sure do feel good.

I believe that eating comfort foods now and then, when we really crave them is actually quite healthy and very normal. Bodies are smart and they know what they need. Comfort foods are typically high in fat and carbohydrates- the two macro nutrients our bodies process the easiest. The third being protein, which takes longer to digest and convert to energy.

So in times when we feel a little stressed, or over tired or when we've worked hard all day doing physical labor, our bodies are going to crave what they need—fast acting fuel—those carbohydrates and fat.

But eat when we're stressed?!? Isn't that emotional eating? Isn't that bad?

Well...yes and no. Stress can be emotional or physical. Emotional stress should not be your reason to eat. But if you've put your body through a stressful event, it's going to crave what it needs—quick fuel. The problem is that although our bodies are super smart in knowing that they need fuel in stressful situations, unfortunately, they can't decipher between physical and emotional stress. It's all just stress to them.

Because our bodies are at our mercy, we need to create an environment for them that allows them to do their job. Part of this includes eliminating stress.

You can't go through life constantly feeling stressed, constantly having a body that's craving what it needs to get through a stressful situation, and then constantly create more stress for yourself by stressing over what to eat...or what you ate. That's another one of those vicious cycles.

So, comfort food is good. Comfort food is okay. Comfort food should not be necessary to get through daily life. Yeah?

Stress = No good! Food may comfort stress, but it doesn't solve it. Address the stress to solve the problem.

HABIT FOODS

Habit foods are those that we eat mindlessly. Those that aren't eaten because we're hungry, or because they're easy, or because we need a hug. Habit foods are the foods we eat without even thinking about it—just out of habit.

Habit foods are those we eat because we're not paying attention. Goldfish in a bowl on the coffee table waiting for your 3-year-old to eat them. The candy bowl sitting on your co-worker's desk. The bowl of ice cream you have every night, just because it's there.

Habit foods are nasty and often times the worst foods we eat because they rarely, if ever offer any real nutritional value, and we are either so completely unaware of them that we don't even know they exist or we become aware of them after the fact and then beat ourselves up over the fact that we just shoved four Oreo cookies in our mouth while we were standing in the kitchen trying to decide what to make for dinner.

And the worst of the worst habit foods? Those that we drink! Soda, juice, alcohol and fancy, overpriced coffees. Those are calories that offer no real nutritional value, wreak havoc on our blood sugar levels creating crashes that leave us craving more, and create an insulin response that causes us to store more fat.

Habit foods have got to go!

PLEASURE FOODS

This brings us to pleasure foods...my second favorite, next to nutritious foods, of course!

Pleasure foods are those we eat for sheer pleasure. Things like your mom's famous lasagna that she makes for you every year on your birthday, or the gorgeous 5 course meal we enjoy on date night with our partner. Maybe it's a 5:30 ice-cold beer you drink on your back deck after a long week at work, or just a small piece of dark chocolate that you let melt in your mouth while you read your book in the evening.

It can be anything, anytime with anyone, big or small, but its sole purpose is to provide pleasure and enjoyment and what makes it special is that it's savored and appreciated.

Pleasure foods are not the cheap glass of wine you drink while you cook dinner—that's a comfort food. They're not the foil wrapped chocolates you snag off your co-worker's desk—those are habit foods. And chances are, it's not your favorite burger from Chili's— because that's most likely a convenience food.

See where I'm going with this?

There's nothing wrong with eating for pleasure. Pleasure is part of living a happy, healthy, I'mperfect Life. But it's important to make sure that the food you're eating is providing true pleasure—physically, mentally, and emotionally; without leaving you over stuffed, or with feelings of guilt, remorse or shame.

Over the next few days I want you to stop and ask yourself these five questions before you eat.

- 1) Is what I'm about to eat a nutritious food, a convenience food, a comfort food, a habit food, or a pleasure food?
- 2) Is this going to make me feel good physically, mentally and emotionally or am I going to feel ill, regret my choice, or beat myself up for eating this?
- 3) Am I angry, sad, tired, stressed or bored?
- 4) Am I hungry?
- 5) Am I going to enjoy this?

Bonus questions:

- 1) When is the last time I had some water?
- 2) Am I sure I'm truly hungry?

REST

Rest not only gives our bodies time to recover, but it provides the opportunity for our brains to flush away toxins (a metabolic byproduct) that build up throughout the day.

Brain fog is legit, and the only way to fix it is to sleep.

When we're tired our cognitive abilities are impaired as well as our judgement, making it harder to choose between foods and activities that benefit our health and those that have the potential to leave us feeling regret, remorse and shame.

If you're having trouble sleeping it's important to identify why and remedy it quickly.

People get caught in the tired-caffeinate,-sleep like crap-repeat, cycle.

If you're struggling to get enough sleep, can't shut your brain off when you lie down, or don't wake up feeling rested here are some things to consider...

Make going to bed a priority. Choose a time that allows you to be in bed for at least 7.5 hours. That means if you get up at 6am, you should be in bed by 10:30.

If you lie in bed at night wishing you could fall asleep but your brain won't cooperate three things could be happening that should be addressed...

Too much caffeine throughout the day, or too late in the day (part of that vicious cycle)

Too much stress/anxiety

Too much stimulation before bed

To remedy these...

Cut way back on caffeine. The first few days will suck, but if caffeine is the issue, I promise you will sleep better, wake up rested and not need to consume it throughout the day in order to stay awake. The few days of hard will be worth it.

Find ways to deal with the stress and anxiety during waking hours. Address the issues instead of letting them fester. Meditate. Practice deep breathing exercises. Make yourself a priority.

Don't watch stressful TV or movies, get worked up on social media, or fight with your spouse before bed. Create a wind-down ritual that involves a transition from life's responsibilities, frustrations, and stressors, to a time of rest and relaxation. Have a glass of wine, take a hot bath or shower, read a fiction novel that isn't going to get you hyped up. Avoid self-help and work-related reading material before bed.

Consider a sleep test. Snoring isn't just annoying to your partner, it can be a real health hazard, one that affects weight and life expectancy. If you toss and turn at night, have nightmares,

wake up short of breath in the middle of the night, wake up tired, or with a dry mouth or sore throat—please, PLEASE get checked out. Sleep apnea is not something to take lightly.

A comfy bed and pillow that support your joints can make a huge difference too. Some people swear by melatonin, others (myself included) like magnesium—especially if you get leg cramps. (Talk to your doctor, first!)

Sleep and rest should be a priority for a happy, healthy body and mind!

SHELTER

This one is pretty basic but it can't be ignored because our bodies rely on us to protect them from the elements. So take care of your body by wearing sunscreen, or better yet—wear UV protective clothing, to avoid over exposure and potential skin cancer.

Wear a jacket if it's cold, and dress appropriately when it's hot.

And although this isn't necessarily a "shelter" issue, it's important that we maintain a clean environment to avoid...can you guess?

Unnecessary stress!

I'm not talking about being a neat-freak. That's probably the LAST descriptor I would use to define myself, but I do try to keep functional areas of my home clean, in order to avoid unnecessary stress. Especially my kitchen!

Do you see a common theme here?

Stress is a huge culprit when it comes to the challenges that occur with the mind/body connection. So reducing stress as much as possible in every aspect of life, is vital to living your best life!

THE FITNESS STUFF!

So here's the thing. Fitness is not on the list of the body's 5 requirements but it comes with amazing benefits that are directly correlated to: oxygen, hydration, food, rest, and shelter. Okay, that last one not so much, unless you're building your own house...although, you know, if you go tent camping you'll need the strength and stamina to put up a tent so...yep, we're going to go with that. Fitness is necessary for shelter, too!

But seriously, although fitness isn't one of the requirements for survival, it definitely has benefits that improve our quality of life. So before we dive into this topic, know that as long as you're taking care of those 5 requirements, you'll be able to live a pretty fantastic life—but I promise, it's even better when we're "fit" for the lifestyle we want to live.

Fitness can be overwhelming but it doesn't have to be. Just as with most things in life (even though we fight this constantly), there's no right or wrong way to be or get fit.

Fitness is freedom. Do it because it feels good and allows you to live a life that is not limited by strength, endurance, or mobility.

Now...I'm going to tell you something you may not have ever heard before. This might shock you. You might feel inclined to disagree—but you should know that this isn't just my opinion, it's a fact. Are you ready for it?

If weight loss is your goal, you should know that you do NOT need to exercise in order to lose weight! For real.

Losing weight comes from creating a calorie deficit, meaning that our bodies burn more calories than we consume. Like I said in the food chapter, a calorie is a measurement of energy, or fuel. If you think about our bodies as cars, and food as gasoline, it looks like this:

We fill our cars with gas to make them go. We fill our bodies with food, to make them go. When we overfill our gas tanks with gas, the gas pours out all over the ground. When we overfill our bodies with food, they store the overflow in our fat cells (a virtually endless storage tank). When we run out of gas in our cars, our cars stop moving. When we run out of food in our bodies, our bodies turn to their reserves (the fat cells) to continue fueling us so we can keep going. It's truly that simple.

So, in order to lose weight, we have to make sure that our bodies are forced to use the extra fuel, stored in our fat cells. This is done by reducing the amount of fuel we put in our tank each day and/or creating a larger fuel expenditure through physical activity.

Now, we can't just stop eating—in fact we must eat in order to provide enough fuel for our organs to function, since they are the ones doing all the work to keep us alive. We also need

enough fuel to get us through our daily activities, like showering, going to work, and running errands. If we don't eat food throughout the day, we won't have the energy to get through our day. Because unfortunately, the fuel that's stored in our fat cells is released into our bloodstream as energy much slower than the fuel that is stored in our liver and muscles, AND we need fuel/energy in order to do that!

HERE'S A QUICK RUNDOWN OF HOW IT WORKS...

- 1) We eat food
- 2) Our body converts the food we eat into the fuel it needs to survive
- 3) If we don't use that fuel right away it will store that fuel for later use. First in our liver and muscles, which have a limited capacity and then in our fat cells, which like I said before, are virtually limitless.

There are a lot more details than this, which I'd love to get into but we'll run out of time... and you might start nodding off, so we'll save that for later. Suffice it to say that in order to lose weight, or burn fat, we need to give our bodies just enough fuel to keep them running but not more than they actually need. Make sense?

This is why it is not necessary to exercise in order to lose weight.

If that didn't surprise you then this might...

When I start working with new lifestyle coaching clients, I actually tell them NOT to exercise. Yes, I am a certified personal trainer, an avid CrossFitter, 25+ race finisher, triathlete and very amateur gymnast (have you seen my cartwheels?) and yet, I tell my clients NOT to exercise.

Here's why...

BABY STEPS

When you're creating a lifestyle change, it's important to recognize that it doesn't happen overnight. It is an evolution that takes place over time. People try to convince me that they are the "all or nothing" type. That baby steps don't work for them...my response— so, how's that working for you? I don't mean it to be a smartass, okay, maybe a little, but it's not out of judgement. I know that approach. It failed me time and time again. The all or nothing approach is overwhelming and quickly ends in defeat. If it worked for you, it would have worked a long time ago and you wouldn't be reading this right now. #toughlove

FOOD FIRST

To ask your body to exercise when it's not being fueled properly is unfair. Expecting your body to get you through any kind of workout fueled by non-nutrient dense foods is just mean and will result in you feeling like crap. And if you feel like crap after you work out, why on earth would you want to do it again?

AVOID CREATING NEW PROBLEMS

Exercising will increase your appetite, we don't want to increase your appetite, we want decrease your calories.

EXERCISE SHOULD BE ENJOYABLE

Exercise is not a means to an end. Exercise is not punishment. Exercise is not something to be rewarded. Until you are able to look at exercise as something you do because it feels good, exercise should be avoided.

SETTING YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

Exercise can put the brakes on weight loss by creating too much of a calorie deficit, causing the body to go into survival mode. It can also cause injuries, forcing us to stop before we've made enough real progress, often leading to a feeling of defeat, perpetuating that whole diet, fail, repeat cycle.

All of this being said, exercise is necessary for life and something I highly encourage everyone to do, when they are ready!

So how do you know when you're ready? Well, you'll be able to feel good about your answers to these questions...

- 1) Do I feel well nourished?
- 2) Do I feel energized, in control, and excited about exercising?
- 3) What is motivating me to exercise? Is that motivation going to keep me going or is it going to make me feel stress, guilt or shame if I don't meet my expectations?
- 4) What is my plan?
- 5) Am I willing and able to make it a priority, to commit to my plan and follow through?

If you're feeling well nourished. If you have plenty of energy and are excited to get moving. If your motivation is something that is truly important to you and if you're going to be okay when/if you miss a day or three and will not beat yourself up for not following through. If you have a clear plan in place and if you're willing and able to make it a priority...by all means, get moving!

If your answers to these questions aren't quite there yet, take your time. Focus on the food, that's the most important part, and then do what feels good. If one day you feel like going for a long walk on your lunch break, do it. If you feel like knocking out a few sit ups or pushups while you're watching TV, do that. Listen to your body and to your heart and neither will steer you wrong.

By letting go of the pressure to exercise you free yourself to enjoy this lifestyle evolution rather than feel like you're battling yourself every step of the way.

Exercise is awesome. It's what strengthens our heart, lungs, muscles and bones. Exercise is what transforms our bodies so we can live the life we always wanted to live without limitations. When we exercise we become fit for life and no longer have to worry about whether or not we'll be able to keep up with our friends, our spouse or our kids. We become strong enough to be able to do things we never thought we could. We learn to find a whole new appreciation for our bodies that has nothing to do with how good it looks in a swimsuit. And we create a mind body connection that allows us to love and trust our bodies to provide us with life. After all, that's their job, isn't it? To keep us alive?

HOW TO GET STARTED...

- 1) Start slow and work your way up
- 2) Try new things to figure out what you like
- 3) Set specific goals like: walk 3 miles per week. Not per day-- per WEEK. Or maybe, attend boot camp on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- 4) Track your progress to see how far you've come and to motivate you to keep going
- 5) Do the best with what you have. Remember that walking and jogging are free. So are sit ups and pushups and the 100's of 1,000's of YouTube videos you can do in your living room, braless, shoeless, shirtless, even pants-less, if you want!

Exercise is something that should be done on a regular and consistent basis in order to reap the true benefits. But something is always better than nothing.

I recommend a combination of cardio and strength training for fat loss. They can be done separately or as a combination in the same workout—these are the types of workouts I prefer to maximum effectiveness with time efficiency!

Whatever you do...

Don't over complicate it.

Don't expect overnight results.

Don't set unrealistic expectations.

Don't make promises you can't keep.

DO NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES beat yourself up if you let yourself down.

Exercise is awesome. You are awesome. You exercising would be super awesome. Make sure you remember that.

Exercise is an incredible way to connect with your body, to challenge it, and to show it love.

And the best part is that it will show you love in return, by getting faster, stronger, better. By allowing you to live a life that isn't limited by physical "fitness" within your control.

LIVE REAL LIFE

Life is going to find a way challenge you. I can promise you that.

Things will happen that will be out of your control—knowing the difference between what you can control and what you can't is key!

If weight loss is your goal, there will be plateaus.

If getting faster or stronger in fitness is your goal, there will be setbacks.

If living your best, happy, healthy, I'mperfect Life is your goal (ding, ding, ding!) know that it will not always be happy and sometimes there will be some "unhealthy".

The difference between what you've done in the past and what I hope you'll do in the future is remember that life is not a project.

Creating a healthy lifestyle is not a journey—there is no final destination. I mean, except for death, but let's hope that is a long time in the future!

There's no road map, no compass, no guide—creating a healthy lifestyle is a constant evolution.

This is YOUR evolution and it's up to you to adapt to whatever life throws at you. If you're lucky, it will be a LOT of doozies! Because all those doozies, mean you're living!

Even when things feel like they can't get any worse, it's important to remember that everything is only temporary.

We must embrace life.

We must savor all of the wonderful experiences it has to offer.

We must get through the devastation and pain, allowing ourselves to grieve properly.

We must learn and grow and adapt to the constant change.

We must love ourselves first and foremost.

We must not give up, give in, or ever allow ourselves to feel like we've failed, no matter how much or how often we don't meet our expectations.

We must let go of perfection.

We must find peace within ourselves.

We must create a strong mind/body connection.

We love (and care for ourselves and) our bodies, from the inside-out.

Love and care for yours.

If you found value in this book, I'd love to know! If you're still struggling, let me know that too. Email me at andrea@imperfectlife.com.

If you could use the support of an amazing group of women, just like you, I hope you'll join our private community on Facebook...

www.facebook.com/groups/iplcommunity

And if you need one-on-one consulting or coaching, just drop me an email or visit www.imperfectlife.com/coaching for more information. I would love to help you master your happy, healthy, I'mperfect Life!

<3 Andrea