



# WARRIORS' ASCENT

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# Self-Care Manual # 1

Foundations: Body

*By Warriors' Ascent*

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This self-care manual is intended to help veterans, first responders, and/or anyone for that matter that is looking for quick and concrete steps to increase their energy level, focus, and overall sense of wellbeing in order to show up more powerfully in life and in their day-to-day personal interactions. While very simple and rudimentary, adopting these practices will set the stage for subsequent improvements as they are the "foundation" upon which self-efficacy, self-mastery, and self-actualization are built.

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*“It is not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.”*— **Sir Edmund Hillary**

# **Prologue**

This handbook is dedicated to the Warriors who serve(d) this great nation and its citizenry and the burden they bear in protecting their fellow Americans.

# Introduction

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**F**oundations. A critical component of maintaining a sense of overall wellbeing (whether recovering from trauma, dealing with anxiety, or overcoming depression) is settings the conditions for health and vitality. At Warriors' Ascent these "foundations" are as follows:

- Sleep
- Eat
- Move
- Breathe

These foundational activities set the stage for a productive day allowing you to show up with energy and focus in your day-to-day actions and interactions. Establishing these habits (protocols) each day will help you maintain the requisite level of energy required to take on life's challenges and succeed. **Without energy and focus (intentionality) all else becomes more difficult.** By dialing in these foundational elements, you're setting the conditions for success.

**Focus on these everyday and the returns will be immeasurable.**

# Chapter 1: Sleep

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“Sleep is the best [meditation](#).” – Dalai Lama

Sleep is the first of our foundations because it influences many of the other elements. A poor night's sleep results in a lack of energy which in turn leads to suboptimal dietary choices (sugar, simple carbohydrates, too much caffeine) and a tendency to skip your movement (walking, biking, hiking, yoga) or workout session. Your meditation practice suffers as well given an inability to focus and stay present in the moment due to sleepiness. **For these reasons, getting a good night sleep should be priority #1.**

*How much would you pay for a pill that increases your energy, recovery, mental acuity, and overall sense of wellbeing? What if I told you that magic pill was 8 hours of quality sleep a night?*

In an era of instant gratification and "magic pills" people tend to discount the holistic practices that they have at their disposal which have many of the positive effects of meds and pharmaceuticals. How much would you pay for a pill that increases your energy, recovery, mental acuity, and overall sense of wellbeing? What if I told you that magic pill was 8 hours of quality sleep a night? Let's see what goes into getting a good night's sleep.

## Sleep Hygiene and bedtime rituals

Maintaining good sleep hygiene practices and bedtime rituals will help you get restful sleep more consistently. Let the below checklist be a reminder to keep you on track.

- Go to bed and wake up the same time (+20 min) every night.
- No blue light (computer, phone, tv) one to two hours before bedtime.
- No caffeine 6 hrs before bedtime.
- Eat 3-4 hours before bedtime. Digestion can interfere with sleep.
- Make your sleeping environment as dark as possible.
- For most people, the ideal sleeping temperature is between 68-72 degree F.
- Regular exercise improves the quality of sleep but don't exercise right before bedtime.
- White noise to drown out ambient noise
- Drink herbal tea (Chamomile) to wind down.
- Take a warm bath/shower before bed.
- Aromatherapy (lavender) using a diffuser helps some people relax and fall asleep more easily.
- Melatonin to help fall/stay asleep.
- Put your phone on silent.
- Do 10 min of meditation to keep you mind from wandering.
- Yoga Nidra to set the stage for sleep:



[Yoga Nidra video instruction \(click for YouTube video\)](#)

# Chapter 2: Eat

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“LET FOOD BE THY MEDICINE, THY MEDICINE SHALL BE THY FOOD.” - HIPPOCRATES

Proper nutrition is of the utmost importance. The saying goes, "You can't outwork a bad diet". Good food fuels your mind and body to perform at an optimal level physically, cognitively, and even emotionally. We all know that a sound diet ensures adequate energy production and repair as well as maintaining cognitive function but did you know that bacteria in your gut affects the production of neurotransmitters (dopamine, norepinephrine, serotonin) which impact your sense of wellbeing and happiness? Thus, eating a proper diet keeps you healthy, smart, and happy! But what constitutes a "good" or "sound" diet?

There are a multitude of diets that people claim are the key to health and wellbeing. It's hard to discern fact from fiction. At Warriors' Ascent we adhere to sound dietary guidelines that are pretty common sense.

- Limited processed foods
- Limited starches and added sugars
- Reduce/eliminate alcohol consumption
- Emphasis on whole plant foods: mostly vegetables
- If eating meat, consume lean meats, fish, poultry, pork, and seafood
- Healthy oils: olive, avocado, coconut
- Nuts and seeds
- Don't drink your calories: limit soda and juices

- Eat nutrient dense foods and less calories: 2500-3500 calories per day depending upon your caloric needs (age, activity level)
- Stay well hydrated throughout the day. Drink water.

**Power Foods.** Meal prep and recipes can be a pain. Sometimes just a few guidelines that are easily followed can make things more manageable and less onerous. Below is a list of some power foods that constitute some very healthy eating choices. Combine them however you desire and you'll be on your way to eating right:

**Meat (protein)**

- fish/seafood: salmon, trout, mackerel, sardines, oysters, shrimp
- poultry
- pork
- lean beef

**Vegetables (carbohydrates)**

- Cruciferous: broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts, bok choy
- asparagus
- carrots
- spinach
- sweet potatoes
- lettuce

**Fruit (carbohydrates)**

- Berries: blueberries, cranberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries
- cherries
- grapes

- citrus fruit
- apples

**Heathy fats**

- avocados
- olive oil
- coconut oil
- whole eggs
- nuts: almonds, walnuts, macadamia nuts
- full fat yogurt

**What about supplements?** It's hard to make sense of the supplement/vitamin industry and truly know what's effective and what is not. We try to keep things simple. As we mentioned before, diet and gut health affect neurotransmitters (serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine) which are responsible for stress response and mood. Omega-3 fatty acids play a big role in facilitating the optimal function of neurotransmitters. Hence, eating foods high in omega-3 (oily fish: salmon, mackerel, anchovies, sardines; oysters, walnuts, flax seeds) or supplementing with a high-quality pharmaceutical grade fish oil (pill) is recommended. Antioxidants are also important in preventing damage caused by free radicals in our bodies. Taking a good multivitamin with vitamin C (500 mg) will help meet this requirement

- Omega-3 fish oil pills: EPA: 1000 mg/day, DHA: 500 mg/day
- A good multivitamin
- vitamin C: 500 mg/day

# Chapter 3: Move

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“Movement is a medicine for creating change in a person’s physical, emotional, and mental states.” - Carol Welch

Movement is crucial for more than just exercise and weight reduction (body composition). It helps the mind, body, and soul. It doesn't have to be a strenuous weight workout or long, grueling marathon running session. The intent is to get the body moving, raise the heart rate, and maintain proper functional movement (walking, bending, lifting, stretching, biking, rowing, etc). Using the FITT principle from exercise physiology (frequency, intensity, time, and type) let's establish a framework for a modest movement/exercise regimen that sets the foundation for improved energy, vitality, and wellbeing.

**Frequency.** Some movement practices can/should be done everyday. Going for a short walk (outside in nature is best), stretching, easy biking (stationary or otherwise), yoga, etc. These are activities that don't require recovery.

Other more strenuous activities (running, hiking, cross training, mountain biking, resistance exercise (body weight or weights), etc may require 24-72 hrs of recovery time depending upon your level of conditioning, your age, and the level of intensity for that session. 3-5 sessions of moderate to intense exercise/movement is recommended.

**Intensity.** Intensity relates to the level of exertion required to complete your exercise/movement session. An easy walk is low intensity. A rigorous cross training circuit

that elevates your heart rate (HR) to 90% or your maximum HR is a high intensity workout. Heart rate is an accurate way of measuring intensity and exertion but requires a heart rate monitor to collect that biometric data. Perceived exertion is a less precise but more convenient means of determining intensity which doesn't require a HR monitor. If you can speak comfortably during your workout session, it's low intensity. If your speech is labored (pausing, huffing and puffing) but achievable, it's medium intensity. If you're not able to converse at all during your session, it's high intensity. The level of soreness you experience as a result of delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) in the next 12 to 24 hrs will be another indicator of intensity (and level of conditioning). Bottom line: adjust the level of intensity and timing (which days) of your workouts based upon your recovery needs.

**Time.** This is the duration of your workout. This may be a function of the time you have available for your movement/workout session or directly related to the intensity level of your exercise routine. Here are some guidelines.

-Something is better than nothing so, when in doubt or short of time, do a little something everyday even if for a few minutes.

-Low intensity (low HR): aerobic/oxidative: 30-60 min

-Mid intensity (med HR): anaerobic/glycolytic: 15-30 min

-High intensity (high HR): anaerobic/phosphagenic: 5-15 min

**Type.** To maintain a well-balanced level of fitness, perform various functional movements (multi-joint) regularly: squat, hinge (deadlift), pull (pull-up or row), push (push ups, presses), overhead presses, core strength (planks, knee ups). Conduct cardio-respiratory focused exercises (walking, running, hiking, biking, swimming, rowing, circuit training) of different types and intensity regularly. Practice flexibility and core training to establish proper functional movement patterns to avoid injury.

Here's an example movement/workout plan using the FITT principle that you can modify to meet your needs.

Monday: **30 min walk, 10 min stretch**

-mid intensity cardio (15-30 min) race pace run, fartleks

Tuesday: **30 min walk, 10 min core (abs, low back)**

-high intensity resistance (5-15 min, or long breaks between sets): max lifts, intense circuit training

Wednesday: **30 min walk, 10 min stretch**

Thursday: **30 min walk, 10 min core**

-high intensity cardio (5-15 min); sprints, hills

Friday: **30 min walk, 10 min stretch**

-mid intensity resistance (15-30 min); circuit training: every minute on the minute (EMOM), as many reps as possible (AMRP) in a minute

Saturday: low intensity cardio, **1 hr walk**, bike, run

Sunday: rest

## Chapter 4: Breathe

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“It is a common belief that we breathe with our lungs alone, but in point of fact, the work of breathing is done by the whole body. The lungs play a passive role in the respiratory process. Their expansion is produced by an enlargement, mostly downward, of the thoracic cavity and they collapse when that cavity is reduced. Proper breathing involves the muscles of the head, neck, thorax, and abdomen. It can be shown that chronic tension in any part of the body's musculature interferes with the natural respiratory movements.

Breathing is a rhythmic activity. Normally a person at rest makes approximately 16 to 17 respiratory incursions a minute. The rate is higher in infants and in states of excitation. It is lower in sleep and in depressed persons. The depth of the respiratory wave is another factor which varies with emotional states. Breathing becomes shallow when we are frightened or anxious. It deepens with relaxation, pleasure and sleep. But above all, it is the quality of the respiratory movements that determines whether breathing is pleasurable or not. With each breath a wave can be seen to ascend and descend through the body. The inspiratory wave begins deep in the abdomen with a backward movement of the pelvis. This allows the belly to expand outward. The wave then moves upward as the rest of the body expands. The head moves very slightly forward to suck in the air while the nostrils dilate or the mouth opens. The expiratory wave begins in the upper part of the body and moves downward: the head drops back, the chest and abdomen collapse, and the pelvis rocks forward.

The importance of breathing need hardly be stressed. It provides the oxygen for the metabolic processes; literally it supports the fires of life. But breath as "pneuma" is also the spirit or soul. We live in an ocean of air like fish in a body of water. By our breathing we are attuned to our atmosphere. If we inhibit our breathing we isolate ourselves from the medium in which we exist. In all Oriental and mystic philosophies, the breath holds the secret to the highest bliss. That is why breathing is the dominant factor in the practice of Yoga.”

— Alexander Lowen, *The Voice of the Body*

The benefits of proper breathing are significantly unappreciated. You can live for weeks without food, days without water, but mere minutes without air. Thus, optimal breathing (breath work) should be a focus if you're looking to maximize health, energy, and overall wellbeing. Deep diaphragmatic breathing, as outlined in the quote above, is gold standard. The Box Breathing technique is one means to help get you there. It can help clear your mind, relax your body, and improve your focus.

## **Box Breathing**

The technique is called box breathing because the duration for each of the four steps (inhale, hold, exhale, hold) is 4 seconds each. The critical part of this exercise is to breath slowly (16 seconds per breath cycle) and rhythmically using deep diaphragmatic belly breaths, not shallowing breathing with your throat and chest.

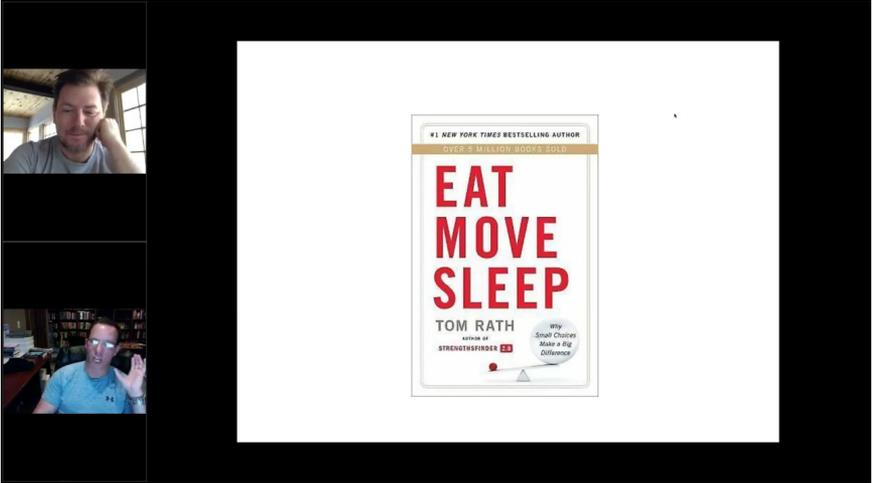
- Inhale: Deep belly breath (4 seconds)
  - Abdomen should expand as you inhale
  - Chest should rise/expand after abdomen has fully expanded
  
- Breath hold: (4 seconds)
  
- Exhale: Diaphragmatic (4 seconds)
  - Evacuate air from chest
  - Use your abdomen (diaphragm) to squeeze out all remaining air. (4 seconds)
  
- Breath hold (4 seconds)



Self-Care video w/ box breathing instruction (click for YouTube video)

# Chapter 5: Other video resources

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[Eat, Move, Sleep webinar discussion YouTube video \(click\)](#)



[The Warriors' Ascent Program \(click for YouTube video\)](#)

## About the Author



Warriors' Ascent is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization based in Kansas City, Missouri founded and run by veterans to help veterans, service members, and first responders who are struggling with PTS. Our five-day program, run 6 to 8 times a year, provides our attendees the tools they need to heal and tend the mind, body, and soul. Through meditation, mindfulness, fitness (yoga), nutrition, and cathartic activities we aim to put our attendees on the path to self-healing where they are empowered to take control of the quality of their lives while offering a sense of community and kinship with those sharing similar experiences. Attendees pay nothing to attend other than travel costs to and from the facility. See [www.warriorsascent.org](http://www.warriorsascent.org) for further details.