Rebuilding Wellness
Helpful Healing Guide

Sue’s Seven Baby Steps
to
a Happier and Healthier YOU!

The 7 Little Steps That Provide BIG Results!
YOUR GUIDE TO...

Sue’s Seven Baby Steps
to a Happier and Healthier YOU!

Step #1--- *Taking that FIRST step is even more important than what step you take.*

If you’re like me, you have an easy time making some decisions, but others you agonize over. I used to hem and haw about making the “right” decisions about my health. I was always worried about choosing the right doctor, the right treatments, the right healing tools. I even worried about the right heating pads to use. I’ve now learned that making the “right” decision isn’t the problem. The problem really comes when we don’t make any decision at all!

Taking that important first step is your way of making a personal declaration. You get to choose how and when you put one foot in front of the other as you move forward. Once you’re in motion, then things get easier. If you’re not fond of the medical practitioner that you chose, move on to another. If a particular treatment doesn’t seem to work for you, try something else.

*A basic physics class will teach you that it’s easier for an object to change direction when it’s moving than when it’s standing still. The same goes for you! Take that first step and then … keep on moving!*

**YELLOW BRICK ROAD**

Dorothy had it easy.

The yellow brick road was clearly marked; it had a very definite start. There was no doubt where Dorothy should begin to place one ruby red slipper after the other.
It would be nice if the path to wellness was as obvious. Sometimes the hardest step to take is the first. To seek wellness, means bringing change into our lives and we all know that change is scary, right?

Let’s be analytical. What if we don’t change? What if we stay exactly where we are? Staying where we are is safe. No one expects any more or any less from us. We already know how to live with our pain, sleeplessness, digestive upsets, etc. We’re doin’ just fine, thank you very much.

That is, however, if we think that chronically ill is fine.

Let’s say that we’re on the fence about making a change. Think about that first step. What would it look like?

Technically, that first step isn’t a step at all. Simply thinking about making a change is the first step. Considering change leads to reading articles, blog posts, books, and magazines on any desired subject. We get to stick our toes into the pool without committing to a dive. Exposing ourselves to the concept of change helps us to formulate a goal or game plan. As we analyze our options, we naturally gravitate toward ideas or themes that make sense to us. Keep in mind that they won’t necessarily appeal to us. For example, I wanted (desperately), to believe a rheumatologist as he told me that diet had no effect on my health. But logic intervened. My rational brain told me that it couldn’t be so. How could it be possible that our bodies are not a reflection of what we eat? Even as a nutritionally-illiterate person, I understood that food does matter. What we use to fuel our bodies creates the health we experience.

Learning more about nutrition was my first step. Little did I know that nutritional education would become one of my favorite passions. But that’s how it is with change. We might not know where it will lead, but until we take that all-important first step, we can’t make our way down the yellow brick road.

Are you ready?

Stumbling is not falling - Portuguese Proverb
Step #2--- Don’t let judgments from others become your stumbling point.

One of the hardest things to move past, emotionally, is the judgment of others. We were told as young children that it doesn’t really matter what other people think, but is that true?

Maybe specific harsh words or criticisms don’t matter, but how they make you feel definitely matters. Learning to set aside and separate the words from the feelings is a desirable skill. No one likes criticisms or judgments, but time can give you the objectivity to see if the intentions behind the words are helpful or harmful. If the words are unkind, don’t let empty judgments become a stumbling point for you!

ARMAGEDDON REALLY WAS THE END

From - FibroWHYalgia: Why Rebuilding the Ten Root Causes of Chronic Illness Restores Chronic Wellness (*Excerpt used with permission*)

Tenth grade year. We were all a-twitter over the American History project. A handout received several months prior outlined the requirements. It was simple: read a book, write a paper. But, this was a big to-do -- footnotes, bibliography, the works.

There were ten book options, from thick to thin. Most of my classmates chose the first book, PT 109, with two hundred pages. I slogged through Armageddon, from the bottom of the list, just shy of eight hundred pages.

As a burgeoning history buff, I loved the book. I sweated over writing the report. No one was more surprised than me to find I had something to say.

I passed it in, the transparent report cover bending under the weight. On the teacher’s desk, it looked out of place stacked with the other wispy offerings. At that point, I was still clueless about my personal skill set. Finishing the report gave me an inkling of some latent writing ability.
I hoped for an A. I dreamed of a plus next to it. My teacher, a grim football coach with a stereotypical butch haircut, black-framed glasses, and bulldog under-bite, called me to the front of the classroom. He handed me my report and I saw the plus. Everything I’d dreamed of! But his words confused me. “You didn’t write this.”

I looked again. There was a plus sign, but no A. I saw a D+.

My face felt hot. “You don’t talk like this, so you couldn’t write like this,” he said. I went back to my seat in stony silence.

I can think of many retorts, now. From what source would I plagiarize? Who says verbal skills equate to writing skills? A shy student, I rarely spoke in class. How he drew his conclusion I’ll never know. Aptly named, the experience with my Armageddon report snuffed out my budding writer’s voice without a whimper.

There’s an important lesson here. Did you catch it? Is the most telling part of this tale my passive behavior? Nope. The most revealing tidbit is tucked near the beginning.

What book did I select? I chose the longest and most complex book on the list. Given the choice between easy and difficult, there’s no middle road for me. I went for the most difficult of all. This trait has dominated my life’s decisions; I have yet to choose the easy path. You can read more in my book, FibroWHYalgia, how my tendencies affected my journey from illness to wellness.

Youth would be an ideal state if it came a little later in life – Herbert Henry Asquith
Step #3--- Quench your body’s thirst!

Drinking water is such a fundamental step in the right direction that it’s easily overlooked. Keeping the body properly hydrated is a foundational principle when taking steps toward improved health.

How often do you reach for a soda, a sports drink, or something filled with calories, but empty of nutrient? Replacing unhealthy beverages with clean, filtered, water is a quick, low cost, and simple way to improve your diet and much, much more. Water is a vital nutrient, necessary to keep our body’s systems working at peak levels!

RIVER OF LIFE
From - FibroWHYalgia: Why Rebuilding the Ten Root Causes of Chronic Illness Restores Chronic Wellness (*Excerpt used with permission*)

Most survivalists know the Rule of Three: humans cannot survive more than three weeks without food, three days without water or three minutes without air. Obviously, water is fundamental to all living things.

As adults, our bodies are made up of sixty to seventy percent of water. It’s important to keep our “tanks” filled to capacity. Adequate consumption is vital for digestion, regulating body temperature, joint tissue support, circulation, toxin elimination, and even skin rejuvenation.

Rivers provide a great metaphor for the importance of water in our bodies. Rivers are a natural form of transportation, efficiently conveying passenger boats and cargo. They’re symbolic of life, renewal, energy. Water flows through the body like a river. As a transportation system, it carries all elements exactly where they need to go.

Here’s a visual image for you. Imagine the water you drink as an internal river and the nutrients transported by it, are like little rubber duckies. With plenty of water, the duckies happily bob their way in a line toward their destination. Yes, your ducks are in a row.
What happens if the volume of your river is reduced, say, cut in half? Your duckies slow down. Some get stuck, drifting to where there’s little or no water flow.

What happens if your internal river is shut down to a trickle?

A digestive system made sluggish by dehydration is not pretty. Expecting your lunchtime hoagie to make its way through your digestive tract without water is like taking the wheels off your roller skates and still expecting to glide.

How much water should we drink? A likely answer is, probably more than we currently do. Many people don’t know they’re dehydrated. The fact that thirst often masquerades as hunger complicates matters more.

Authorities differ on the exact amount of water we need, but this method from Dr. Batmanghelidji is simple. Divide your current weight by two and convert to ounces. That’s how many ounces you should drink; no complicated math. As an example, a one hundred and fifty pound person should drink approximately seventy-five ounces of water per day. You’ll know you’re getting enough water if the color of your urine is a very, very pale yellow, the color of straw (keep in mind that some B vitamins, veggies, and supplements can alter urine color). NOTE: you may need to consume more water than this equation demonstrates if you are very physically active.

Drinking water becomes a habit when you make it a priority. Always keep it handy. Make a daily goal and track your progress. Drink from a measured container to make monitoring your progress easy. Go easy and take your time increasing your intake. If you’re a new convert (switching to water from sweet-tasting drinks), your taste buds may find water lacking in pizzazz. Most flavored waters contain undesirable ingredients and should be avoided. However, I know of one brand that contains nothing artificial. Metromint water comes in a variety of minty/fruity flavors and can be consumed as is, or diluted with pure water for a “hint of mint” taste. The more water you drink, the more you’ll crave. And, the better it will taste to you.

Initially, you may notice increased trips to the restroom, but this should be a temporary inconvenience. Your body regulates to the

1 Fereydoon Batmanghelidj, M.D., author of Your Body’s Many Cries for Water
2 www.metromint.com

Not for Reprint - Sue Ingebretson www.RebuildingWellness.com
amount of water you’re drinking, and the frequency of your bathroom breaks should normalize. If night-time trips to the bathroom are a problem, it’s a good idea to limit water intake after your evening meal.

Of course, the source of your water (and the container you drink from) is important, too. Avoiding tap water is a good idea. Many brands of bottled waters are simply tap water with an expensive (and landfill-clogging) bottle. Besides the environmental nuisance, the plastic can leach harmful chemicals into the water. It’s best to drink your water from glass, stainless steel, or specially-made plastic containers.

For many people, an acidic imbalance in the intestines is the cause of yeast overgrowth (discussed in more detail in my book, *FibroWHYalgia*). Increasing your hydration levels can help the body as a natural detox and assist with toxin elimination.

Water is the essence of life. Adequate hydration helps body tissues as well as digestion. When your body is adequately hydrated, it shows!

*If we put everything in the hands of experts and if we say that as intelligent outsiders, we are not qualified to look over the shoulder of anybody, then we’re in some kind of really weird world.* - Michael Crichton
Step #4--- Living with a sense of HOPE!

One main difference between living a life focused on the future rather than on the past, is the presence of HOPE.

Do you feel that the days ahead hold the promise of good things? Our perceptions of our options shape how we think. And, our thoughts are far more powerful than you may realize.

Oftentimes, the experiences we have in our bodies – pain, fatigue, anxiety, etc. are in part, reflections of what consumes us mentally. Putting the focus on hope helps to guide our thoughts in a more positive direction.

What dreams make you feel positive, happy, grateful, or hopeful? Dreaming of a positive future may help you find a deeper level of living with a sense of hope.

VOODOO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

Doubt you can think yourself well? What about the opposite? Can you think yourself sick – or worse? Look at case studies provided by authors Bronte and Austen. Who can’t identify with the vulnerable Jane Eyre, and the hypochondriac Mrs. Bennet? They often let their worries and concerns govern their health.

_Your thoughts and attitudes about your health determine your future!_

Ancient Hawaiians practiced _anaana_, a term that literally means, “pray to death.” Based on omens or events, natives gathered and prayed for the end of someone’s life (oftentimes royalty). Victims of this ritual, believing in its power, simply gave up and prepared for death.

It’s bizarre to think how powerful our thoughts can be. In the case of ancient Hawaiians, when hope went out the window, surrender barged in the front door. Give hope a pleasant home full of positive, healthy vibes, and there’ll be no room for despair.

_Men willingly believe what they wish_ - Julius Caesar
AGING GRACEFULLY

Many years ago now, I was approached after church one Sunday. A gentleman asked, “What’s changed in your life?”

An odd question since we’d never spoken. He said, “I’ve seen you for many years, always a single mom with your children, but you look different ... alive somehow.”

How perceptive. There were many changes in my life then and not all of them were good. I didn’t have two nickels to rub together. I had difficulties with my children and relentless harassment from my ex. But what did I have?

Hope.

For the first time in my adult life, I was taking charge. In hindsight, it was a baby step, really, but that baby step was all mine! I had hope for a future. Hope for the achievement of goals that belonged to no one but me.

Apparently, I wore that hope like a facelift. Aging gracefully can have a lot to do with what we choose to wear on the inside.

Reality is the mirror of your thoughts.
Choose well what you put in front of the mirror— Remez Sasson
Step #5--- Being present in all you do.

Do you frequently find yourself trying to calm your racing, overactive thoughts? When this happens at night, sleep eludes us.

Many of us “live in our heads” and have a difficult time focusing on everyday activities because we’re too busy trying to tame the spinning worries that take precedence. Practice is one way to overcome this issue. As you feel yourself drift off into your worry mode or busy thinking mode, take a deep belly breath, and concentrate on where you are, who you’re with, and what you’re doing at the moment.

Life is simply one moment linked to the next, so pay attention, re-direct your thoughts, and enjoy being present in all that you do.

BRAIN TRAINING

Lessons learned in tai chi can be carried through to other workouts, and to life in general. Being present is a difficult skill for linear thinkers like me. My mind often sprints ahead to my next task, preventing me from being present in my current one.

When I’m not fully present, mentally, I don’t get the full benefit of my workout. I’m not one to waste time. To optimize my fitness routines, I turn off the TV and often refrain from reading when I’m on the treadmill or elliptical trainer. Instead, I think about each muscle group, feeling it expand and contract. It seems counterintuitive when I could be multi-tasking, but why do each task half-way? If I’m spending the time to exercise, I want to gain the full benefit from it. This is purposeful exercise; my mind working in cahoots with my muscles for the greater good.

Yes, the body does listen to the mind.

I’m not blessed with the meditative gene. I work hard to quiet the busy thoughts my tai chi instructor appropriately calls, “monkey
chatter.” I’m thankful for the contemplative aspects of tai chi, including methodical breath flow. Learning to breathe deeply (shallow breathing is common for fibrofolk) takes practice but provides both emotional and physiological benefits.

Aptly named, deep breaths are called cleansing breaths. Why not start now? Breathe in deeply through the nose, and exhale slowly through the mouth. That’s it. Put your mind to it, and you’ve already mastered two vital tenants of exercise.

We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit - Aristotle
Step #6--- Work WITH your body not against it.

Are you stiff and sore first thing in the morning? If you have fibromyalgia and/or any other related chronic condition, it's likely that you are. Getting out of bed and lacing up your running shoes for a pre-dawn jog is probably not on your daily agenda. Early morning jogging might be a good idea for someone who doesn’t have the impact of increased pain upon waking, but not for you. That just makes sense. A lot of accommodations are made when dealing with a body in pain simply because it makes sense.

But, some other accommodations might not be as obvious. Learning to work with the natural strengths and weaknesses of your body will go a long way toward helping you achieve your health related goals.

WINDOW OF WELL

It’s taken me ages, but I’ve realized it’s better to work with my body’s limitations than against them. First thing in the morning is my absolute worst time of day. I wake feeling stiff and sore and the increased pain doesn’t fall away for several hours. Evenings are also difficult as that’s when my muscles start to stiffen. Activities that I find effortless at 2 p.m. are not so at 6 a.m. Common sense tells me that I have to work within my Window of Well.

My perfect day would mean rising around 6:30 a.m. and, after a good breakfast, heading to work (at home on my laptop). After every hour or two of writing, I’d jump around on my trampoline, take a short walk, fold laundry, hop on my elliptical, or at minimum, do a series of head, neck, and shoulder rolls.

At about 11 a.m. it’s my peak physical time to exercise. I may head to the gym, do a routine at home, or take a long walk in my hilly neighborhood. Afterward, I fix lunch and get back to work.

My “perfect day” afternoons would look just like mornings, with work and a few bursts of physical activity. Writing happens to be a sedentary venture, and completely engrossing. The day flies by, and
before I know it, it’s time to fix dinner. My ideal evening routine would include a long wind-down with a bubble bath and a good book.

So now, let’s get real.

Who gets to work with no interruptions? Notice the schedule above includes no outside factors – no ferrying kids, no phone calls, no errands. I didn’t leave the house except for neighborhood walks.

Alas, my “perfect day” doesn’t really exist. Outside activities with my kids are a fact of life, and I’m thankful for that. I wouldn’t trade for anything the hours I’ve spent at track meets, band concerts, back to school nights, and science fairs. I just wish that when my kids were younger, I’d had a better understanding of my limitations, including better control over my “volunteer hand” (the one that pops up at every church and school meeting when asked for volunteers).

It does take effort to figure out your own Window of Well, but there’s a great payoff. Ultimately, when it comes to your own Window of Well, it’s your job to protect and respect it!

You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf - Jon Kabat-Zinn
Step #7--- Laugh out loud!

Do you laugh every day? In my book, FibroWHYalgia, I use quite a bit of humor to demonstrate the unpredictable and sometimes bizarre life of someone living with fibromyalgia. As I mention there, fibromyalgia isn’t funny, but life sure is. Funny things can and do happen every day.

I point out that sometimes it’s best to simply laugh about the frustrations of a poorly coordinated body or a memory that’s less-than perfect. Laughing puts everything into perspective and provides you with the proper frame of mind to move forward.

So, while it’s important to laugh every day, I also wonder -- do you laugh at yourself? Learning to laugh at your own behaviors or goof-ups can provide you with a much-needed release of tension and anxiety. Laughing at yourself is the quickest way to make sure others laugh with you.

The following are two short essays that demonstrate how keeping a sense of humor can help to lighten your mood and help you to take yourself less seriously.

DOUGH, RAYS, & ME

I do my best to make good food choices, but I’m only human; I’m no different from anyone who struggles with dietary temptations. A few years ago while on vacation, my husband and I enjoyed a lovely brunch al fresco in sunny Santa Barbara, California. When asked to select a bread to go with my omelet, I deferred to my husband, since I’d be giving it to him anyway. He chose a croissant.

When the waitress placed it on a plate of its own on the center of the table, the buttery scent whispered to me - wafting on the ocean breeze. I’m flaky. Warm. Buttery. Try me....

I chatted on, trying to ignore the taunts from my baked goods. I tugged at one corner of the croissant and popped it into my mouth intending to have just one bite. I savored the texture, both crisp and soft, on my tongue. I continued with my conversation.

The lopsided pastry mocked me. I ate the other corner just to even it out.
Somewhere between “What do you want to do this afternoon,” and “Let’s head North,” I descended on the remainder of the croissant like crows on Tippi Hendren.

Because we’re a typical married couple, we were able to continue the debate of “whose croissant was it anyway” for the full remainder of the afternoon. I pled the original ownership defense and my hubby argued something about a verbal contract.

I’m not really sure what he said, I probably wasn’t listening. After all, it was a lovely day AND I was under the influence of a known controlled substance -- gluten.

LAUNCH MEAT
AN ASTRONAUT’S FAVORITE SANDWICH

Comedian Steve Martin once explained his ability to be so darned funny by saying he put a piece of lunch meat - baloney - in each shoe before a performance. That way, he’d feeeeeeel funny.

What a great way to think! Despite your aches and pains, go ahead and put on your spiffy shoes (with or without baloney). Wear the dangly earrings your cousin gave you or the loud scarf given by a dear friend. If it makes you happy to wear it, do it! Even if you don’t feel well, smile. Paste one on if you have to, but smile.

Yes, it’s annoying to hear, “Gee, you look great!” especially when we don’t feel great, but why is that? And why not look our best? The next time you get a compliment, no matter how you feel or how you think you look, just say, “Thanks.” Period. No excuses, no disclaimers. (Practice in the mirror if you have to.)

This isn’t simplistic advice meant to fool anyone, least of all you. But you truly can feel better by practicing something as simple as looking better – especially when the look pleases you.

So, go ahead and smile – it may not be baloney after all.

The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook. - William James (1842-1910)
Looking for balance sounds more complicated than it really is. Most of us have an innate sense of what activities fill our “cup of blessings” to the brim. The challenge is to recognize the need to make a balanced lifestyle a priority. What does your every day to-do list look like? How many activities, errands, work-related tasks are piled on your plate?

Take a quick look at what you really accomplish in a day, and give yourself a pat on the back. Acknowledging your own personal accomplishments goes a long way toward helping you establish personal boundaries. When you make looking for balance a priority, you’re sure to find it.

FIVE WAYS TO ACHIEVE LIFESTYLE BALANCE

Comparing emotional wellness to physical wellness is like comparing a stem to its flower. Each part is essential to the health of the entire bloom. Emotional wellness feeds physical wellness.

How we think, and the emotions that govern our actions, affects our bodies in profound ways. Emotional distress can lead to any of the following physical problems: headaches/migraines, digestive disorders/upset (irritable bowel syndrome, gassiness, cramping/bloating, constipation/diarrhea), vision problems, hair loss (due to prolonged emotional distress), impaired immune system (increased susceptibility to colds/flu), respiratory distress/shortness of breath, heart palpitations/chest pain, and/or body pain.

Whew! That’s quite a list.

These symptoms are possible physical reactions to thoughts, worries, concerns, emotions, and stress. Stress extends our resources to their maximum. Reducing stress, therefore, is a great way to begin a “seeking emotional wellness journey.” Reducing stress can help you find lifestyle balance.
Can you identify what makes you feel stressed? What activities and expectations leave you feeling overwhelmed and out of control? Finding ways to balance your lifestyle helps to manage stress. Here are a few suggestions you may wish to explore:

1) *Friends/relationships*: Sharing worries with others helps to relieve anxiety and stress. It reminds us that the world is a bigger place than our own concerns.

2) *Nutrition*: Foods feed moods. That sounds complicated, but the bottom line is that what we eat greatly affects how we feel. Food sensitivities/allergies can impact our emotions, among other health concerns. To feel your best, consume whole foods rather than processed foods and include plenty of green, leafy vegetables.

3) *Movement*: Taking time each day to move the body, helps to clear the mind. Go for a walk, ride a bike, swim, enjoy your garden, or go dancing. Attend local yoga or tai chi classes or come up with your own ideas. Whatever physical fitness activities you enjoy doing, do them regularly.

4) *Self-education*: Just as you are what you eat, you are what you read and see. Keep positive and helpful books within reach. If you listen to podcasts, or watch TV and movies, seek ones that are motivating, uplifting, and beneficial to your life.

5) *Prioritizing*: Keep extraneous activities to a minimum and schedule time for relaxation into your daily routine. Know your personal limitations and say *no* to non-necessary activities. Learn to discern which activities take more than they give.

Emotional issues are varied and complex; there’s no quick fix. Solutions take time, so work at your own pace. It’s not likely to wake one day feeling “balanced.” It happens little by little. Slowly, you’ll note a decrease in anxiety, frustration, and the unhealthy feeling of being overwhelmed.

Seeking solutions is always a positive step toward the goal of wellness. Have patience with your progress and above all, be kind to yourself.

*Change your thoughts and you change your world.*

– Norman Vincent Peale
About the author…

SUE INGEBRETSON

Sue Ingebretson is an author, speaker, Certified Holistic Health Coach and the director of program development for the Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Research and Education Center at California State University, Fullerton.

Ingebretson has been featured in FIRST for Women magazine as well as making guest appearances on the nationally syndicated health TV program, Know the Cause! Her writing has appeared in numerous health and wellness publications.

Ingebretson is a contributing author to The Gratitude Book Project: Celebrating 365 Days of Gratitude.

Her bestselling book, FibroWHYalgia, details her own journey from chronic illness to chronic wellness. When Sue found her health spiraling out of control, she wanted to know why. Her tenacious research into the causes of chronic illness led her through a maze of traditional and nontraditional healing methods. Ingebretson eventually connected the dots and found wellness. FibroWHYalgia is a half diary/half tutorial guide that exposes the facts, fibs, and fairytales of failing health and offers practical solutions.
Sue has also authored many books for Playbooks, Inc., a children’s publisher of instructional classroom books. Her Playbook, *Fabulous Food Detectives*, teaches students to read food labels and discern the differences between whole and packaged foods.

Sue offers workshops and lectures on topics such as, Holistic & Healthy Nutrition, Making Lifestyle Changes Easy, Healthy Eating for Students, Healing from Chronic Illness, Taking the Sabotage out of Self-Talk, Motivations for Fitness Fun, Meal Planning Quick & Simple, the *Genesis Approach* series (8 weeks), the *FibroWHYalgia Workbook* Workshop series (8 weeks).

Learn how you can benefit from Sue’s Health Coaching services and schedule your own FREE health consultation by contacting Sue at [www.Sue-Inge.com](http://www.Sue-Inge.com).

To find out more about her book, events, workshops, and for blog posts, news, and encouragements geared to promote healthy lifestyle changes, go to [www.RebuildingWellness.com](http://www.RebuildingWellness.com).