




Get Started in Lifestyle Medicine


Empowering clinicians to restore health, prevent disease,
and reconnect with purpose

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Redefining the Role of the Clinician

Today's clinicians face an ever-increasing burden: rising rates of chronic disease, burnout, and a fragmented healthcare system.

Yet there is a path forward with the American College of Lifestyle Medicine (ACLM) — one that reconnects clinicians with the core purpose of medicine: to treat, reverse and prevent chronic disease through the power of evidence-based lifestyle changes.

Lifestyle medicine is the clinical application of six pillars. It empowers both patients and clinicians to engage in meaningful health transformation through therapeutic lifestyle interventions.

In this guide, you'll discover:

- How the six pillars work together to create real change
- The basics of patient activation and motivational interviewing
- How lifestyle medicine can help clinicians rediscover joy in practice
- A simple 3-step path to get started

"Every patient deserves to know when lifestyle change is a viable option to address the root causes of their diseases."

- Padmaja Patel, MD, FACLM, DipABLM, CPE, ACLM President

The Interconnection of Six Pillars

Optimal nutrition

Eat more whole foods and focus on minimally processed, plant-predominant, nutrient-dense meals and snacks.

Physical activity

Move every day and incorporate strength, flexibility, and aerobic activities into your routine.

Stress management

Develop healthy coping skills to meet the ever-changing demands of life and bolster resilience.

Restorative sleep

Create the right conditions to get 7-9 hours of quality sleep every night to allow the body to reset and recover.

Connectedness

Foster supportive relationships and build connections that bring meaning and purpose to life.

Risky substance avoidance

Avoid behaviors that include the consumption of or exposure to harmful substances.



What makes lifestyle medicine unique?

These pillars are interconnected. Improvements in one often amplify gains in another. For example:

- Enhancing sleep improves energy and reduces emotional eating.
- Increased movement boosts mood and sleep quality.
- Better nutrition supports cognitive function and resilience.

When applied in therapeutic doses, these pillars work in synergy to prevent and reverse conditions like type 2 diabetes¹, hypertension, cardiovascular disease², and even early dementia.³



Patient Activation - Empowering the Individual

Behavior change is the foundation of lifestyle medicine. To succeed, we must move beyond prescribing and start partnering.

Patient activation refers to the degree to which individuals understand, engage in, and feel confident managing their own health. A critical tool in this approach is Motivational Interviewing (MI)—a patient-centered counseling style that enhances intrinsic motivation.

Motivational Interviewing Basics:

- **Ask open-ended questions**
- **Express empathy through reflective listening**
- **Support autonomy and confidence**
- **Help patients resolve ambivalence**

Motivational interviewing has been shown to improve health outcomes in conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and addiction.⁴

Empowering patients fosters long-term adherence and deeper engagement with their care. As a clinician you are no longer the sole driver of the plan—you become a guide, coach, and ally.



Clinician Satisfaction - Reconnect with Purpose

The burnout crisis in healthcare is real, but clinicians who practice lifestyle medicine report a renewed sense of purpose and satisfaction.

Why?

- You witness real health transformation—not just symptom management.
- You build meaningful relationships grounded in trust and collaboration.
- You shift from “managing disease” to restoring health.

A study in the American Journal of Health Promotion (2023)⁵ concluded that “Implementing lifestyle medicine (LM) as a greater proportion of medical practice was associated with lower likelihood of burnout among LM practitioners.”

**Practicing lifestyle medicine isn’t just good for your patients—
it’s good for you.**

Your Simple 3-Step Path to Get Started

Step 1: Join ACLM

Access a supportive network, evidence-based tools, and cutting-edge research.

lifestylemedicine.org/membership

Step 2: Take a Course

Build your foundation with CME-accredited courses designed by leading experts.

lifestylemedicine.org/education

Step 3: Apply What You Learn

Start small. Integrate motivational interviewing. Ask about sleep. Recommend plant-predominant meals and snacks. One step at a time, you can transform your practice—and your patients' lives.





Resources & References

Explore lifestylemedicine.org:

- Enroll in an online continuing education course. Start with just 1-hour and access an AJLM article/quiz.
- Webinars – ACLM hosts monthly complimentary webinars on a variety of topics from community integration to GLP-1 optimization. Archive sessions are on our YouTube channel.
- Annual Conference – LM2025 is offered in-person and online. November 16-19, 2025. Attending, even online, is an immersive experience that is a great start to your lifestyle medicine journey.
- Member Groups – ACLM member groups explore specific interests and disciplines and how to integrate more lifestyle medicine. We have 25+ groups including some focused on fitness, geriatrics, neurology, cardiology, nursing, etc.

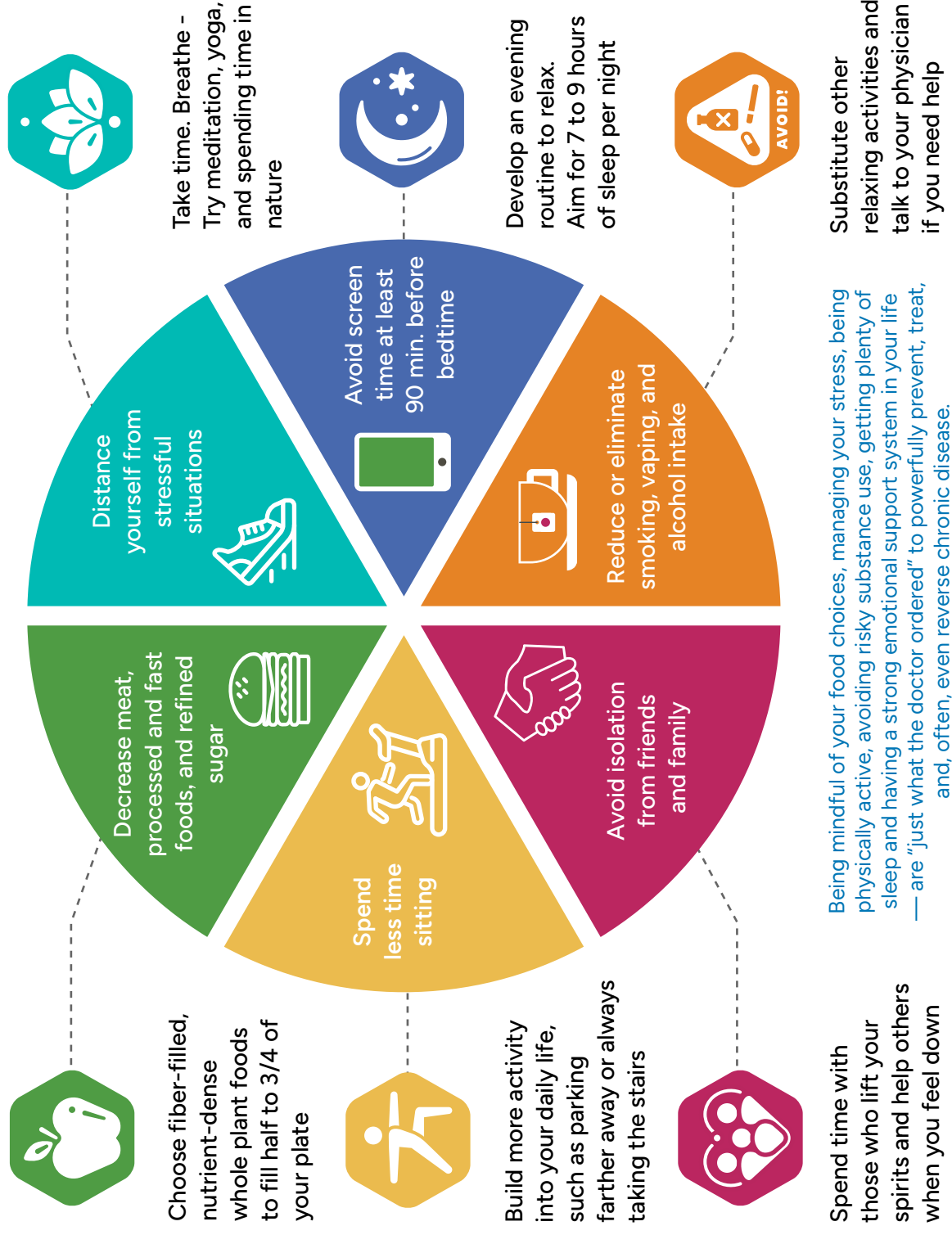
Other Resources:

- Book available at Amazon – Lifestyle Medicine Handbook by Beth Frates, MD
- Book available at Amazon – Lifestyle Medicine by James Rippe, MD and colleagues
- American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine (AJLM) - Free subscription with ACLM Membership
- **NEXT Pages** - Free Patient Handouts for immediate use.

References:

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2. Ornish, D., et al. Intensive lifestyle changes for reversal of coronary heart disease. *JAMA*. 1998; 280(23), 2001–2007.
3. Ornish D, et al. Effects of intensive lifestyle changes on the progression of mild cognitive impairment or early dementia due to Alzheimer's disease: a randomized, controlled clinical trial. *Alzheimer's Res Ther*. 2024;16(1):122.
4. Rubak, S., et al. Motivational interviewing: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *British Journal of General Practice*. 2005; 55(513), 305–312.
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Lifestyle Medicine is the use of evidence-based therapies such as a whole food, plant-predominant dietary lifestyle, regular physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, avoidance of risky substances and positive social connection for the treatment and reversal of chronic disease.



ADDITIONAL TIPS

- Drink water to quench thirst
- Choose a fitness activity you enjoy, such as walking, moving in water or biking, Build up slowly, with a goal of at least 30 min. 5 days/week
- For the best quality of sleep, make your room cool, dark, quiet and comfortable.
- Understand the well-documented dangers of any addictive substance use can increase risk for many cancers and heart disease.
- Recognize stress that leads to improved health and productivity vs. stress that leads to anxiety, depression, obesity, immune dysfunction and more.
- Set regular times to engage with others. Social connectedness is essential to emotional resiliency.

6 WAYS TO TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH



Lifestyle medicine is the therapeutic use of six lifestyle pillars—a whole-food, plant-predominant eating pattern, regular physical activity, restorative sleep, stress management, connectedness, and the avoidance of risky substances—to treat, reverse, and prevent chronic conditions such as heart disease, type-2 diabetes, obesity and more.



LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

lifestylemedicine.org

1

NUTRITION

Extensive scientific evidence supports the use of a whole-food, predominantly plant-based diet as an important strategy in prevention of chronic disease, treatment of chronic conditions and, in intensive therapeutic doses, remission of chronic illness. This eating pattern is fiber-filled, nutrient-dense, and antioxidant-rich. It consists of a variety of minimally processed vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

2

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular and consistent physical activity combats the negative effects of sedentary behavior. It is important that adults engage in both general physical activity as well as purposeful exercise on a weekly basis as part of overall health and resiliency. Aim for at least 150 minutes per week.

3

RESTORATIVE SLEEP

Sleep is necessary for human life. Adults with chronically insufficient or fragmented sleep can experience impaired memory, cognitive processing, mood, reaction time, a high risk of dementia onset, weight gain, uncontrolled glucose, and cardiovascular issues. Most adults should get 7-9 hours of quality sleep per night.

4

STRESS MANAGEMENT

The chronic stress of modern society has made it more difficult to practice healthy lifestyle habits and can exacerbate health issues such as cardiovascular disease, insulin resistance, sleep deprivation, depression, anxiety, weight gain, and more. Recognizing and replacing negative stress responses with healthy coping mechanisms and stress reduction techniques leads to improved wellbeing.

5

SOCIAL CONNECTION

Positive social connections affect our physical, mental and emotional health. Leveraging the power of relationships and social networks can bring meaning and purpose to life, while also helping to reinforce healthy behaviors.

6

AVOIDANCE OF RISKY SUBSTANCES

Use of tobacco and alcohol have been shown to increase the risk of chronic diseases and death. Treatments often take time, different approaches and many attempts. Patience and support are an important part of breaking risky substance habits.

Using SMART as a guide for goal setting can help you incrementally improve your health. Making sustainable lifestyle change is more likely to occur if you can stage your progress in steps that lead to attainable results.

An example of a SMART goal related to substance use is: "I will swap my morning cigarette with chewing gum at least 5 days this week for the next four weeks. I will ask my partner to help keep me on track and use a texting service for more support." Another example of a nutrition goal is: "I will add 1 cup of berries to breakfast and a small apple or orange as an afternoon snack at least five days this week."

Try using the SMART acronym to guide your goal setting today.



Specific: Goals need to be clear and specific.

Measurable: Goals need to be able to be measured and tracked so you can see your progress.

Achievable: Can you take action toward your goals? You should be able to take steps toward your goal to achieve them?

Realistic: What can you actually do? (improvement over perfection)

Time-Bound: How frequent? How long will you commit?

How I Eat

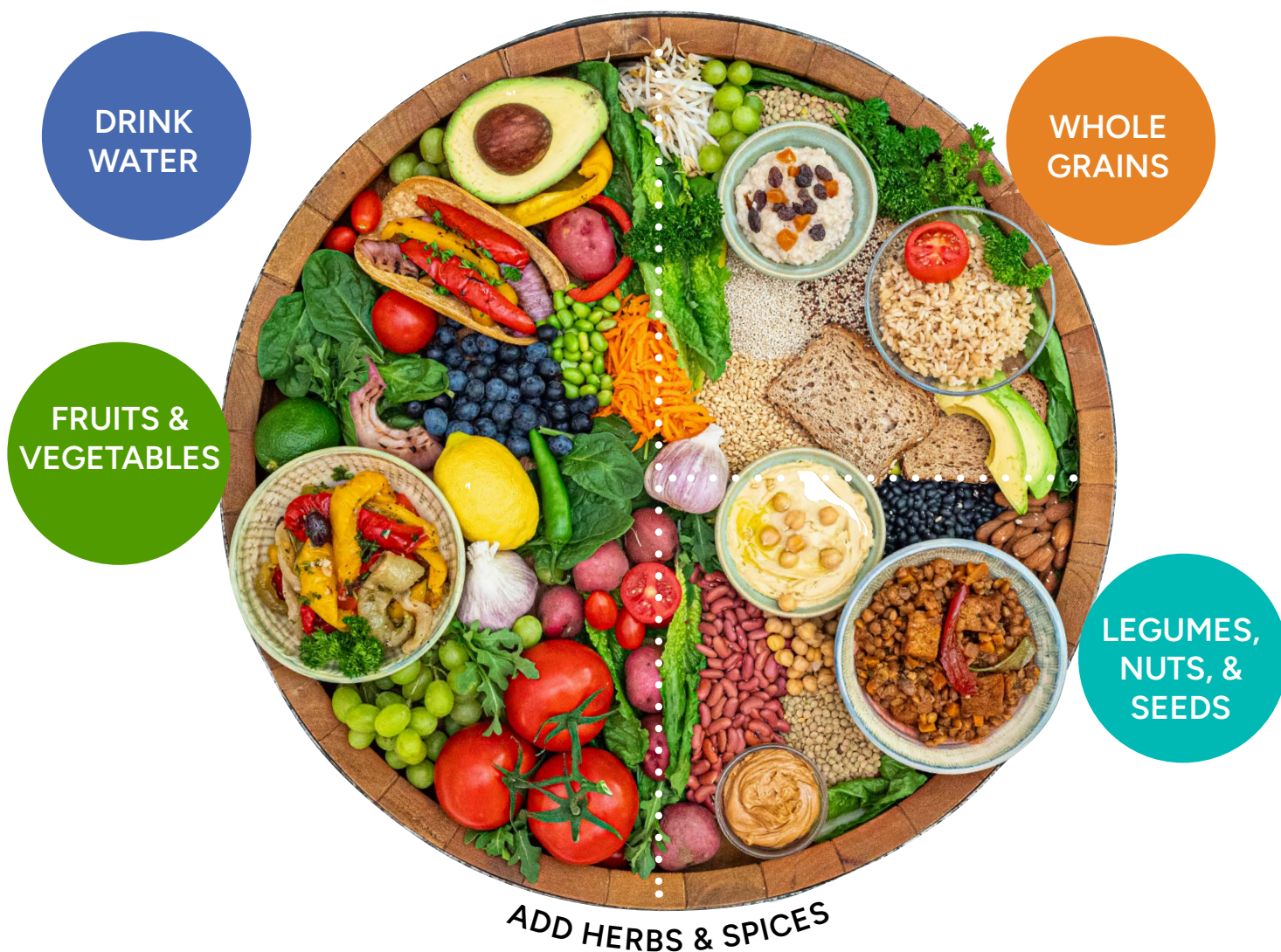
How I Sleep

How I Move

How I Stay Calm

How I Connect

A WHOLE FOOD, PLANT-BASED PLATE



Include a wide array of fiber-filled, nutrient-dense, and antioxidant-rich whole plant foods at every meal. Use a variety of herbs and spices to enhance flavors.

- **Focus on whole fruits and vegetables and eat a rainbow of color**

Vegetables: Dark leafy greens (spinach, kale, arugula, etc.), broccoli, squash, zucchini, carrots, tomatoes, beets, peppers, mushrooms, onions, celery, cauliflower, cucumbers, white and sweet potatoes, green peas, cabbage, whole plant fats (avocados, olives), and more

Fruits: Apples, bananas, grapes, citrus fruit, berries, peaches, pears, pineapple, kiwi, plums, watermelon, mangoes, just to name a few

- **Drink water for hydration**





- **Choose whole grains**

Amaranth, barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, popcorn, rye, quinoa, whole oats, whole grain bread/tortillas/cereals/flours, to name a few

- **Eat a variety of protein-packed plant foods.**

Legumes: Peas and beans, including kidney beans, pinto beans, white beans, black beans, lima beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), split peas and lentils, edamame, tofu, and tempeh

Nuts and seeds: Almonds, pistachios, walnuts, pecans, cashews, peanuts, nut butters, pumpkin, sunflower, chia, flax and hemp seeds



Dietary Position Statement: For the treatment, reversal, and prevention of lifestyle-related chronic disease, ACLM recommends a dietary pattern based predominantly on a variety of minimally processed vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds. To learn more about the benefits of plant-based eating visit: [The Benefits of Plant-Based Nutrition - American College of Lifestyle Medicine](#)


TIPS TO START EATING MORE WHOLE PLANT FOODS



Take your journey to a healthy lifestyle step-by-step.

- **STEP 1: Enjoy**—Keep plant-based meals you already enjoy in your meal rotation.
- **STEP 2: Adapt**—Give your favorite recipes a plant-based makeover.
- **STEP 3: Explore**—Begin incorporating new whole plant foods each week.

Plan ahead.

- 
- Use meal planning apps or a simple calendar to plan meals in advance.
 - Set aside time to batch prepare ingredients so meals can be thrown together quickly on busy weeknights. Pre-chop vegetables and cook large portions of grains and beans.

Make the “healthy choice” the easy choice.

- Keep fresh produce in a bowl on the counter and at eye-level in the fridge so it is the first thing you reach for when wanting a snack.
- Stock your pantry with staple ingredients that can be assembled into a quick meal.

Work with a registered dietitian nutritionist or your regular health care provider when transitioning to a more whole food, plant-predominant dietary pattern.

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Cara KC, Goldman DM, Kollman BK, Amato SS, Tull MD, Karlsen MC. Commonalities among Dietary Recommendations from 2010 to 2021 Clinical Practice Guidelines: A Meta-Epidemiological Study from the American College of Lifestyle Medicine. *Advances in Nutrition*. 2023;14(3):500-515.






“Game plan” for eating away from home and traveling.

- Check menus ahead of time. Pair side dishes together to create a hearty meal.
- Ask if the kitchen is willing to make a dish with vegetables, beans, and whole grains.
- When traveling, pack your own meals or stop at grocery stores instead of fast food.

Include the entire family.

- Allow children to pick a new fruit or vegetable to try each week.
- Start a tomato plant on the porch and have children water and take care of it.
- Assign age-appropriate kitchen tasks to everyone in the family.

Set goals each week on your journey to improved nutrition.

- Identify specific, measurable, and attainable steps you can take each week. Instead of “eat more vegetables,” set a SMART goal to “make half your dinner plate vegetables five nights this week.”
 - Celebrate success each and every step of the way!
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