

Chasing Wellness

*A Journey Through my Autoimmune
Disease into Remission*

Amira Sultan



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“Wellness is a
lifestyle
of self love”

-Amira Sultan

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Acknowledgments

In the honor of Zaher Al Hosni. May your kind soul
rest in peace.

All proceeds from the
sale of this book will be donated to charities.

Preface

This book is dedicated to anyone who is experiencing ill health or, enduring a difficult time and who is trying to find the strength to keep going. It is also for anyone who is trying to improve their quality of life.

Within this book, I take you on a journey as I fight my autoimmune disease and share with you my insights and new understanding of what I have learned. From being undiagnosed to treatments and so much more.

I have also included some of my favorite recipes which have helped me throughout and I share some of my favorite quotes to inspire you. I really hope that you will find some enlightenment and perhaps, comfort within the pages of this book. I hope it encourages you to live a healthier lifestyle.

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Introduction

*“The preservation of health is easier than the
cure of disease”*

-Unknown

Pizzas and hot wings with ranch, followed by delicious tubs of ice-cream is what we called a fun night in during my university days. Buckets of fried, crispy chicken along with delicious coleslaw and fries and topped with a moist bun was often a first choice. Equally, we loved chicken nuggets with barbeque sauce and mayonnaise as an alternative and this made our weekends special during school days. At least, I thought that all these fast food delights were making me happy, after all, ice-cream and greasy food were my rewards whenever I accomplished anything.

The downside?

I struggled with my weight. I tried every diet, from calorie counting to fasting. You name it, I tried it. I was desperate to lose the excess weight so to feel happy. Junk food may have made me feel happy at the time,

but my body was far from content. Yet, I couldn't stop going back to the same old unhealthy cycle of eating time and time again.

Many of you may be the same.

I was tied to an emotional need to eat and yet, hating the physical outcome. Sometimes, it seemed as if there was no answer as to why I put myself through this cycle. What I have discovered is that there may be many factors when it comes to emotional eating including how we think. Psychology looks at those memories and experiences associated with food and childhood. It could be cultural or, a trend but we are also influenced by the media. There is no doubt that we are encouraged to eat, drink and even think in certain ways. Or, perhaps all those additives and toxic ingredients make us addicted, so, that we want more and more of the same.

Our bodies are so resilient. To keep functioning, it takes a lot. Our heart beats, lungs breathe and kidneys and liver filters, while the stomach digests all the food we keep on eating. Our cells continue to regenerate, and all this happens without pause even while we

abuse our bodies through bad diets or, poison it with cigarettes and other toxic substances.

The human body is amazing. It is more advanced than any technology of modern medicine but, we must stop taking our bodies for granted and instead, start giving it all that it deserves i.e. love, care, and good nutrition. Let us stop testing it to see when it will stop surviving. Let it work and do its thing without us confusing it constantly. We don't need to feed it junk food or to poison it with unnecessary drugs.

Let us start the change.

“Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always.”

-Brad Meltzer

Undiagnosed

It’s amazing how life twists and turns. Sometimes, life takes us through the toughest and most awkward situations. Since I was young, I have always tried to understand what life was about. I had so much curiosity. Now at 32, I have come to the conclusion that life is what we make it. We choose to live our lives the way we want, and it is our choices and our decisions that alter our fate.

I got so sick in my early twenties. It started out of the blue; I woke up one morning feeling extreme pain in my right ankle. At first, I thought I had maybe sprained it without noticing, but a few weeks later, I realized both ankles were hurting.

I could not move or walk without feeling extreme pain in both my feet. In fact, the pain was so immense, I couldn’t even place my feet in any shoe or have

anything touch it; even a piece of cloth or a blanket would trigger a painful response. I felt pain all the time, every second of the day; even in my sleep. It was one of the most excruciating times of my life.

From doctor to doctor, from country to country, each medical practitioner had a completely different opinion and, a totally different solution. I tried various painkillers. I tried Ayurveda medicine, different types of oils, and, I tried body alignment through lying on a hard, wooden bed for an hour every day. This treatment, over a 30-day period meant lying with sandbags tied on my ankles. It, along with other treatments, were supposed to make me feel better. Nothing worked.

Some doctors felt I was making it all up. That was cruel. Why would I invent an illness? I would have rather been out shopping and enjoying myself in that country than be stuck in a hospital enduring a million tests. All I needed was a diagnosis. Yet, all the results from the many testings' done came out normal. I felt desperate and needed help. I just wanted to know what I was dealing with, so I could get the right treatment and be able to move without pain!

Now that I look back, I realize that seeing those doctors and having to deal with them made me so much stronger. It didn't diminish my hopes for recovery, not even when one doctor told me to just stop what I was doing and to accept that I might be in a wheelchair. I was devastated. I would never recover, that was the message. A wheelchair would be my only way of having pain-free movement for the rest of my life. Can you imagine how I felt?

When this information finally seeped into my brain, I felt so angry and not just for myself. My parents were reeling from hearing this too. I of course, refused to follow his advice. I told them that this was not the end, and I would find a way out of my situation even if the doctors could not do so. Maybe this was false bravado, I don't know. I certainly did not even know what I was suffering from. Every test seemed to be negative and yet, something bad was happening.

A couple of months later, I became pregnant and amazingly, I felt so much better. At first, I was so worried. How could I carry a child if I couldn't even carry myself! But something about the pregnancy (which later, I found out is common with my disease) was enabling me to walk again. I had

physiotherapy and had one pair of shoes with custom-made insoles. During the entire pregnancy, I was able to move with greater ease although, there was still pain. It was at least, bearable pain.

Giving birth to my baby boy was truly a miracle. I never knew how it was possible to love someone so much and so selflessly. He taught me so much in life and I was so very thankful that he was a source of hope. He made me smile even on those days when my pain was unbearable. I still had to take painkillers every now and then but tried to limit this as much as possible because I was breastfeeding. I didn't want the medication to affect my baby.

A year and three months later, I was blessed with another pregnancy. Three months after my second baby was born, I had severe pains in my body and was rushed into the ER, I was given so much medication and I couldn't be with my newborn or even, breastfeed her. That was truly devastating. A couple of weeks later, my scalp started itching. It was so bad. When I scratched, and believe me, I couldn't stop, my whole shirt was covered with flakes. At first, I thought it was dandruff, after all, there are many hormonal changes after delivery, but it didn't take me too long to realize

that it was something far more serious. I went to the dermatologist who confirmed I had psoriasis.

Psoriasis is a noncontagious, chronic skin condition that produces plaques of thickened, scaling skin. Psoriasis is usually found on the elbows and knees (which explained the mystery of my patches a few years prior), and it affects the scalp too. It can also appear on the legs, trunk, and nails. In fact, psoriasis may be found on any part of the skin.

The dermatologist gave me a shampoo to use which helped a bit, but three months later, we moved to another country (my husband's job relocated us to Houston, USA) and the change of weather possibly made my situation worse. I visited a dermatologist there and she prescribed some medicinal drops that my husband used to put on my scalp every night for a month once we had put our babies to bed.

The treatment was successful, and I was finally free from psoriasis on my scalp!

I was very excited to see my dermatologist so that she could see the treatment had worked, and of course, she was thrilled! After the visit, I sat happily in the waiting room ready to make my payment and

started to read all the leaflets which were on the table in front of me. One leaflet was all about psoriasis, I flipped it over and continued to read but, suddenly, my heart started pounding.

I felt emotional, no, tearful. In fact, I couldn't stop the tears from falling. The symptoms on the literature were the same as mine – exactly. I'd been desperate for a diagnosis for several years with doctors telling me I would be wheelchair bound or, that I would need a leg brace or, that they would have to operate. There were so many other suggestions too but deep down, I hadn't believed in them.

Now, I could see what was wrong.

Psoriatic arthritis. It was there in black and white. My exact symptoms were of an autoimmune disease. As much as I was shocked, I felt a big sense of relief because at least now I knew what was wrong. The diagnosis was obvious. I just needed to figure out what to do next.

*"I've seen better days, but I've also seen worse.
I don't have everything that I want, but I do have
all I need. I woke up with some aches
and pains, but I woke up. My life may not be
perfect, but I am blessed."*

-Unknown

Autoimmune Disease Journey

Psoriatic arthritis as the leaflet had described is a chronic autoimmune disease characterized by a form of inflammation of the skin (psoriasis) and joints (inflammatory arthritis). It's also incurable. Approximately 15-25% of those with skin psoriasis are susceptible to developing an associated inflammation of their joints. Psoriatic arthritis is a systemic rheumatic disease that can also cause inflammation in body tissues away from the joints or the skin. It can affect the eyes, heart, lungs, and kidneys. Psoriatic arthritis shares many symptoms with other arthritic conditions such as ankylosing spondylitis, reactive arthritis, and arthritis associated with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

I found out that I needed to see a rheumatologist. This is a specialist physician who has expertise in diagnosing and treating arthritis and other musculoskeletal conditions and autoimmune diseases. I kept wondering how I had never once been advised to see a rheumatologist.

While I was searching online for the best rheumatologist in the area, I couldn't help but research more about psoriatic arthritis. I was bombarded with so much information and this was very stressful. Everything sounded so scary to me. I felt very nervous and at a complete loss as I had never heard of an autoimmune disease before except for cancer.

I was lucky enough to find a very nice and understanding rheumatologist who really took her time to explain everything and put up with me repeatedly asking for confirmation about my diagnosis. Test after test and then, she prescribed me with many painkillers and anti-inflammatory medications which made me numb to many things but my real physical pain.

She changed my medication so that it was stronger

until I started to feel that my heartbeat was becoming irregular. I knew there must be something else. My condition had advanced, and according to my doctor, there was only one option left that could lessen its severity, and that was a biologic medication which blocks the chemical messenger known as tumor necrosis factor (TNF). These medications are given intravenously or by injections. There is an increased risk of infection while taking biologic medication and it is known for horrible side-effects (death and lymphoma cancer were the first two side-effects). It was a worrying time.

I felt nervous about taking it even though the doctor tried to convince me to start it before my condition worsened. I had reached a point where my body was in so much pain that I found myself rushed into the ER a few times. I couldn't lift my arms, cooking was an accomplishment, driving was a mission and doing day to day things were almost impossible. I was living in the states during this time, and all the family I had with me was my husband and two toddlers. There were times where I had to drive myself to the ER because it was in the middle of the night and my husband and I couldn't leave the kids asleep alone at the apartment. So really, I had no choice but to

toughen up, put a smile on my face and finish my chores and go on living day to day and just hope for the best.

One day, when I was at my lowest trying to research for any type of answers as I simply didn't know what to do next, an elderly lady in my yoga healing class said that she had the same disease. Her biggest regret was that she didn't take the biologic medication (TNF blocker) sooner. She kept on taking painkillers until her condition worsened so much that she'd had to undergo many surgeries and was still suffering. She still had to take biologic medication in an injection form but unfortunately, the injection could not fix the issue. It simply prevented it from worsening. She had finally convinced me.

Taking the injection was one of the worst things for me. Every other week, my husband had to inject me and it was so painful. It literally felt like a gunshot going through my veins. For two days afterwards, I would feel nauseous, breathless and dizzy although those side-effects lessened with time. The day after the injection, I would often wake up in the middle of the night fighting for my breath which I later realized were panic attacks. Every week someone from the

resource center called me to make sure I was “still” alright.

It took around six months until the medication started to work and I finally began to feel ‘normal’ again! I could do more things and lift my arms higher. I was so happy even though I still had many bad days when I would flare up. I also had to turn to painkillers on many days just to cope, but I was happy. Just living a ‘normal’ life made such a difference. I had less pain and could feed, play with, and bath my baby and toddler with greater ease.

“As I look back on my life, I realize that every time I thought I was being rejected from something good. I was actually being redirected to something better”

-Steve Maraboli

Holistic Path

Two years after taking the injection, I realized that my life was not how I envisaged living. Fighting to survive through medications and toxins is not what I wanted for the rest of my life. I had so many plans, so many visions. I craved for good health, so I could watch my kids grow and be there for and with them. I felt that my body deserved better than to stuff it with toxins and medications just to get through life. Then, one day, a family friend advised me to go to a holistic health retreat which completely changed my life. I was introduced to a whole new world from the moment I arrived. I learned that all the diseases start in the gut. By eating clean foods and living a holistic lifestyle, I realized it was possible to become healthier.

Living a holistic lifestyle means choosing to live and

heal your body with natural remedies. It also means having minimal or no medicinal intervention unless advised by a professional. The holistic approach sees the body as a whole and treats it as such rather than focusing on a certain illness. They believe that when you heal, everything heals. The holistic approach emphasizes the connection of the mind, body, and spirit to improve the level of wellbeing.

I had to take many tests there. I was surprised at how poor my health condition was, and how many toxins were in my body due to all the medications (and probably other lifestyle factors as well). I had food allergies to almost everything, which was the cause of a leaky gut syndrome. I was also diagnosed with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and other gut issues. Toxin levels in my body were too high and I also had some active viruses in my autoimmune system which was one of the doctor's main concerns.

In order to start with my holistic journey, I had to let go of all medications. In this retreat, their approach is based on the health of the gut and intestine. This meant undergoing a very serious detox plan there for a few weeks to reset my gut. Their extensive program consisted of many therapy

sessions including massages, detox baths, infusions, and a designed energy cuisine to suit my specific needs. It also included educational lectures about living holistically and there were many activities to choose from. There was also a bonus cooking class which prepared me to continue to live this way once I'd leave the health retreat.

Coming back home to Oman was truly a challenge. I had to completely change my food habits, and really, my whole lifestyle had to change. I had to cut out every type of food that I was sensitive to, and it was almost everything! The first few months were difficult. I had to be very strict with my food as I was still detoxifying and trying to heal my gut. Being so strict restricted my social life, in fact, I had none. I didn't go to restaurants fearing any hidden ingredients in the food and, I couldn't attend any social gathering because I couldn't eat any other foods than the ones I had prepared. I was now off my toxic medications and had started with homeopathy remedies, so I really couldn't take the risk of falling back into my old eating habits and lifestyle.

I have had so many issues with dieting since I was in my early teenage years and had tried almost every

diet there was so I could lose weight which was why my weight was never consistent. I will not go into lengthy details about my weight issues throughout my life because that would fill a book on its own. But let us just say, I loved 'good food.' I went through many struggles with my weight and it was a drastic change in terms of cutting out almost all my favorite foods at that time, well, it was a very big and challenging step.

The first few months were hard, but once I started seeing results and getting more into the holistic way of living, I realized how much easier it was becoming. It made me learn how to love vegetables and fruits and to identify the good foods for my body. I also started meditating and practicing yoga which really helped me with my breathing and flexibility since my muscles were so tight from all the inflammation. It taught me how to take care of my body, to listen to it, and to respect it. I started to invent and create meals that tasted really good being inventive with whatever ingredients I could have at the time.

It has been two years now since I started with my homeopathy remedies and stopped my medications. At the beginning, I was a bit skeptical and had doubts that the holistic approach would work, especially

since I had never heard of it before. I think the element that scared me the most was stopping the biologic injection, as there is a very real risk that if it was needed again, my body might not accept it. Then, I would be kind of stuck. But I had to convince myself and really believe in the process. Fears and doubts threatened to hold me back, so, instead, I had to be brave by allowing nature to take its route. I had to believe that my body could heal itself by giving it the tools and the respect and nurturing it needed - the natural way. It was a big commitment and later, proved to be the right step in the healing process.

It's been quite a rollercoaster ride. I still have flare-ups if I stress too much or drastically change my eating habits. It takes time to get cured the natural way, but it is totally worth it. Since I made the commitment to start living a holistic life, I have never looked back. I still keep fighting and striving to heal and have a more valuable life.

Living with pain really takes a lot of your energy and changes you drastically. But it is up to you to decide if you want to defeat the disease and be strong or let the disease weaken you. It took many ups and downs to get to where I am today. This journey has taught

me many valuable lessons in life. It has made me who I am. It has taught me how beautiful life is, and how it is often taken for granted.

Here are a few things that I learned along the way.

"We are so often caught up in our destination that we forget to appreciate the journey, especially the goodness of the people we meet on the way."

-Unknown

Angels or Messengers in Life

I believe that God sends us signs in life. There are always signs to direct us, but we are often so busy that we tend to not notice them or sometimes, may choose to ignore them. Signs may materialize in any form; it could be a leaflet or a magazine that directs you in some way. It could be your inner voice talking back to you when you really surrender for an answer, or, a feeling experienced after prayer or meditation. Perhaps, it is those people who randomly cross our paths and make us realize that there is some sort of connection relevant to our personal situations? These are people I consider as angels or messengers in life. We may meet them just once or twice, but some become friends for life. These people are there for us just at the times when we need them the most.

While living abroad and during my sickness, I met with someone who had so many issues herself. We fought our battles together, both of us supporting each other in an amazing and uplifting way. We may have been completely different and yet, we learned so much from the other. Our connection made a difference. Through her, I saw that life is unpredictable. It is transient and what we have in one moment, may not be there in the next. Her experiences taught me to appreciate and be grateful for what we have now.

During one of my weakest times, another person was sent to me. We talked after a yoga class, and she's the one who finally convinced me just from one conversation (I never saw her again) to start taking my biologic injection. If I hadn't, I could have eventually been in a much more critical condition. Then, just when I felt like I wanted a way out; one day, unexpectedly, a family friend appeared who had told me about holistic healing and how it changed his life and many others.

Later, signs and people continued to appear, and still do. They inspire me, show or teach me things that benefit life in one way or another. I believe that they are angels or messengers that help us to get through

life. We all have them, but sometimes, we just don't see or value them enough. We become so wrapped up in our own lives and so, miss out on these messages.

“What screws us up most in life is the picture in our head of how it’s supposed to be.”

-Socrates

Expectations

I always had so many expectations. I believe it’s partly because I love to plan and love perfection. The downside to this is if my plans fail or, if they do not turn out the way I envisage. At those times, I would be so disappointed. I had to work hard at reducing my expectations – consider that a plan of action as I am still trying.

When you are close to others, it’s easy to expect things from them or, perhaps, to feel as if you own them in some way. An example of this is when your children misbehave or, if you feel let down through their actions. Of course, there is nothing wrong in children making mistakes, we are there after all, to guide and teach them. We don’t own them. They are beings of God, ones that you have created to nurture and guide throughout their lifetimes so that they could become the best versions of themselves.

We expect many things that we don't even notice, but even so, when things do not happen, we feel the intensity of emotion all the same. We may expect certain people to visit or call on a routine basis but if that doesn't happen, we feel hurt. Instead, wouldn't it be better to appreciate those times when that person visits or calls? This way, you will feel happy rather than disappointed.

When you set expectations, it merely trains you to feel disappointment. Sadly, this is built within us from childhood. We should teach our children to appreciate rather than to expect and, we must practice this, and to lead by example.

*“Love yourself first, and everything else will
fall into place”*

-Unknown

Love and Support

Having support from your partner, parents and children is so important. But it is more important to learn how to deal with any disease yourself. When ill, you may find that you depend a lot on those around you, and unfortunately, many are not committed to this kind of lifestyle. But this is when you realize who is in it for the ride and who isn't. You certainly discover if loved ones are worth being in your life, or not.

If you do have your loved ones around, then consider yourself lucky. I know I was blessed with a husband who literally supported me through every single step of my journey. He has helped me to see the light through the darkest of my times. It is not easy during these times of dependency, especially when you are in physical pain. You start to feel a lot of guilt and you

fear that loved ones will become bored and sick of the situation. But you must stay positive and believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. This helps both you and your loved ones to get through those times of darkness more easily. However, many people don't commit to such lifestyles and let go; so, it is vital to always start by loving yourself first no matter where you are in life.

Love yourself, trust in yourself and most importantly never feel sorry for yourself. Feeling sorry for your plight often happens when disaster befalls you. You don't believe that this should have happened to you. But why not? Does it mean that it's ok for it to happen to someone else, but not to you? What makes you so different? These are the questions that my mother asked me when I went through this self-pitying stage and she pulled me out of it right away.

Only you can deal with the situations you must go through.

My mom also taught me about self-care and this was long before I was diagnosed. She taught me that in order to take care of others, I must take care of myself first. I had to set my priorities straight and schedule

in time to pamper myself with massages, walks in the park, exercising and so on. Then, I could be the best I could be for my family.

I had to start my daughter at a nursery at an early age while we were in the States, just so I could have some time to finish running errands and to have time for self-care. At the start, it felt selfish, but then I realized that what my mom had taught me all along was true! Not only was my daughter so happy to be in the nursery, but it was during those occasions where I could nurture myself and reserve my energy levels that enabled me to give more energy to my children when it was needed.

Try to find ways to practice self-care and to allow time just for you. Self-care is important. There is nothing wrong with asking for help and looking for resources to help you with childcare, household chores and other things.

*“Be thankful for what you have.
Your life, no matter how bad you think it is,
is someone else’s fairytale.”
-Wale Ayeni*

Gratitude

Gratitude is so important. In fact, it is the key to happiness because it makes you appreciate all that you have and everything that is around you. You start to appreciate life fully. Everyone is born as they are - to the parents that have been chosen for them, so it’s not our place to judge people. We should have gratitude for everything around us. We all have something that someone else yearns for. Since you can read this book, you are blessed that you have the time to read it as there will be others who do not have that time and so on.

Being thankful is so important. The best and simplest way to start practicing gratitude is to wake up every morning or to find time every night before you sleep and list one thing that you are grateful for. It could be anything at all. You may feel grateful that you have

your family around you or, you feel grateful that you had a delicious and nutritious homemade meal.

If you have children, you could start by asking them what they are thankful for each night as part of their bedtime routine, or perhaps, get them a journal so they can write down everything they are thankful for. It is very important to introduce gratitude to children and for them to practice it whenever possible. This helps them to appreciate all they have in life as early as possible. In turn, they will have a brighter future, greater life satisfaction, greater positivity, self-love and, it will also make them more connected to their community.

*“Every day is another chance to get stronger,
to eat better, to live healthier, and to be
the best version of yourself”
-Unknown*

Educating Myself

During the last year of high school, most of my classmates already had an idea of what they wanted to study. I felt lost as I really had no clue as to what I wanted to be. I went to a university abroad at the United States of America, and there, the first two years are general education which gives you time to choose exactly what major you want to focus on.

After a year of taking many classes and still trying to decide what I wanted to major in, I decided to become a teacher! Since young, I had always played “Teacher, Teacher.” This is where I would pretend that I was teaching imaginary students in my class. I loved this so much that my dad bought me a huge whiteboard - like the ones in the classrooms and this was my most favorite thing.

So, there I was at university, thinking, is this really what I want to do?

However, that thought didn't last too long as I was advised by family members that it was not a good idea and that it would be disadvantageous in some ways. They convinced me to study business as it would be better for my future especially as our family ran a family business corporation. I could see there was a future in their opinion. Without much thought, I majored in Self Sector Management, did an internship there as well and finally, came back home to Oman.

I didn't get a chance to work as I got engaged, married and had two beautiful babies back to back. But even if I had, I didn't really feel as if I belonged in the corporate world, especially marketing which is what I was advised to get into. I was lucky enough that my husband and I were relocated to live in the States for the next couple of years and so, I didn't have to think of my career goals for the time being.

After my disease kicked in, I'd had to see over 30 doctors in more than 5 countries and not one had been able to diagnose my condition. I'd received so many different suggestions which didn't feel right

to me and, I'd had to research everything by myself because I had lost my trust in the medical world. I then realized that it was not about losing faith in doctors but about wanting to do my own research and seeing what worked best for my body.

We need to be vigilant about our healthcare because there is too much misinformation. As lucky as we are to be able to find any information that crosses our mind on the Internet, we must research sufficiently so to find the right answer. For everything that we find, there are so many pros and cons which ultimately leads you to evaluate the information you have, and you need to trust your gut instincts.

Since the beginning of my journey, I never quit exercising even if I was in pain as it made me feel 'normal'. I started going to many classes such as Pilates, yoga, and other aerobic classes so that I could strengthen myself and to release the tension in my muscles and mobilize better. But I was always scared to give too much as I didn't want to suffer from pain afterwards. Fitness is important and so, I decided to train with several personal trainers but didn't get the results that I wanted as they, like myself at times, always placed limitations on the training. I knew I

needed to educate myself, so to understand how my body worked and how to utilize it to its maximum performance potential.

I took an intensive course while I was pregnant with my first child in the states and became a certified personal trainer and nutritionist. I must say that the personal training part was very beneficial because it taught me how to train safely and effectively. However, I felt the nutrition part lacked information. I wanted to find out more and began to take other nutrition courses. I took these courses for myself really, just so I could be knowledgeable about my own health and well-being. Exercise and nutrition are a big part of my life. Although I had not realized there was this much passion for nutrition before.

When we were transferred back to our home in Oman, in 2014, I was taking my biological injections and painkillers from time to time. We were also building our house and I was so busy with my two children and all that was happening around me. My mother told me that there was someone who was related to us and who was in real need of personal training, so I decided to give it a shot and train her. That's how my personal training venture began! One client became

two and then, two more and so on. I would take in clients during those times when my children went to nursery/school. I made sure to give myself lot of time for resting because through my studies, I came to understand that stress played a major role in treating and stabilizing chronic illnesses and autoimmune disorders.

A year later, I stopped personal training because we were ready to move into our new house. I guess that's when my holistic journey truly began. I was hungry for more information about a holistic approach to life and started attending seminars, taking many intensive courses and did a lot of online research so I could heal myself without medication - the holistic way.

I also started a blog with the recipes I created when I was first introduced to the holistic world. At that time, I cut out many foods that I was allergic to and which were in part, responsible for inflammation in my body. I initially started the blog just, so I had a record of my diet and changes within. Plus, I wanted to keep my records safe. I was then advised by family members to open an Instagram account, so I could share my recipes with others. I did that, in the

hopes of inspiring others who were going through something similar and who, needed motivation, healing recipes or quotes to help them through the day.

As for nutrition, I had changed my views completely and altered our lifestyles in a way that felt right for us. There is always something new to learn about nutrition and it is such an important part of life. I believe in bio-individuality where every single person is unique. No two bodies are completely the same and we all react differently. So, what works for you might not work for another.

We often feel bloated and constipated and tend to ignore these feelings and keep on going with our eating habits. The body keeps on changing too, so, if something worked for you for years, it might not work for you over the next few years. You must listen to all that your body is saying. In fact, listening to your body is probably the most valuable thing you can do.

For my own healing process, I ate a whole-food, plant-based diet that was low in refined carbohydrates and processed foods with a limited amount of animal

proteins, and, no refined sugars or dairy. It worked wonders for my body at that time, and it has also helped tremendously with many other chronic and autoimmune diseases. I know that my current regime may not work for my body forever. Even the aging process can impact the body differently. I may need to alter the nutrients I take but I do know that I listen to my body now and I nurture it.

There are many diets nowadays. Some work well and some don't, it really depends on the needs of your body. If you can add natural, plant-based whole foods, this will ultimately increase your quality of life. I don't like labeling myself to being on a certain diet - paleo, vegan, Atkins, keto, etc. as I may have to adjust my diet at some point. So, I prefer to be in tune with my body, to detox every now and then and to lead as healthy a lifestyle as is possible. My diet is filled with a variety of color without refined sugars and this approach helps to enrich and nurture my body with whatever it needs at that time.

My drastic change in eating habits really helped me and enabled me to become free of toxic medications. I understand how hard it is for most people to change, but change, along with desire,

starts in the brain. Your body achieves what your mind believes.

Changing your lifestyle into a healthier one should be about eliminating quick fixes and identifying the actual source of your issues. It should be about adopting a new healthier lifestyle and not trying out quick fixes so to lose a couple of pounds.

Cravings will happen, but instead of satisfying cravings with unhealthy options, you can choose healthier alternatives as they do exist for almost every type of food craving. The healthier alternative will not be an exact substitution, as some of the alternatives will not taste the same, some will taste different and some will even taste better! Taste is acquired, and taste buds change over time. They will eventually crave the good stuff that your body actually needs rather than foods filled with additives, food coloring, refined sugars and junk ingredients.

Sometimes, you will need to cook the same thing a few times before you really start to like it, and that is totally fine! Just as some children need to see the same meal numerous times to even have the desire to taste it. We train ourselves.

It is unfortunate that many people start to depend on medication and supplements to fix their conditions just so that they continue their current lifestyles and bad habits. Supplements should be a resource so to help improve yourself, but they are not the solution.

I truly believe that there is no better way of living than to embark upon a holistic lifestyle. This is not only about avoiding inflammatory foods but also, about living a quality lifestyle and including peace, meditation and love while lessening stress, anger and negative attitudes in life.

I believe the best way of healing yourself is to educate yourself about your condition. Experiment but make sure you do your research as to what will help you optimize your health and not jeopardize it. I tried many things from meditation, different types of workouts, and supplements to using herbs and essential oils. I tried to ground myself and to remove as many toxins as I could. Some worked, and others didn't.

Optimal health is the state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. It is all connected. Relationships, careers, physical activity and

spirituality are as important, or, even more important than nutrition itself. It's the balance between those aspects of life which can lead us to live a healthier lifestyle.

Epilogue

*"In three words I can sum up everything I've learned
about life: it goes on"*

-Robert Frost

I hope that my journey inspires you to live life to its fullest and to never give up. Most importantly, I hope I have encouraged you to lead a healthier lifestyle. Why wait for a disease to visit you if you can prevent it from coming in the first place?

It is very important to be committed and dedicated to continuing a healthy lifestyle if you are healing yourself from any disease holistically. Once you slide back into your old ways, your symptoms will come back to you. It is a life change, not a trend.

A healthy lifestyle is defined differently to everyone. To me; a healthy lifestyle is about focusing on eating real, natural whole foods that are right for your body while avoiding refined sugars, processed foods, and additives. It is about removing toxins, managing stress, and giving the body time to rest, recover and heal. A healthy lifestyle is about balance. It is about improving physical health by utilizing exercise – yoga,

breathing, meditation and of course, getting quality sleep. It is also about loving, being kind, practicing gratitude and following your instincts.

Start counting your blessings instead of focusing on your stresses. Believe that sometimes; it's through the darkest times of your life where you will shine. Always remember, there is light at the end of that tunnel. It is the toughest struggles that makes you stronger. Don't wait for illness to value wellness.

3-Day Recipe Starter Plan

"Healthy eating isn't a diet, it's a lifestyle"

-Unknown

Day 1

BREAKFAST

Avocado pudding

- 1 avocado
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of coconut milk or almond milk
- 1 tsp raw cacao powder (optional)
- 1 tsp honey (optional)

Blend and add your favorite toppings.

Note: *Avocado is an incredibly nutrient-dense fruit. It is a fiber rich source of potassium and healthy monounsaturated fat which will keep your full for longer. It's also anti-inflammatory and supports heart, brain and eye health.*

LUNCH

Sweet Potato, Zucchini & Mushrooms with Tahini Sauce

- 1 teaspoon of coconut oil
- ½ celery stick, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 teaspoon of ginger, grated
- 3 button mushrooms (chopped)
- ½ Portobello mushroom (sliced)
- ½ sweet potato, very thinly sliced or spiraled
- 1 zucchini, spiraled
- ¼ cup spinach
- Pinch of salt
- ½ tsp of brown rice miso paste (optional)
- ¼ tsp chili flakes

***Note:** Mushrooms are low in sodium and high in potassium which makes them great in reducing blood pressure and fighting diabetes. They are also great for boosting the immune system and have powerful antioxidants which helps them in lowering body inflammations.*

Tahini Sauce

1&1/2 tbsp Tahini sauce

5 teaspoons almond milk

½ tsp tamari

½ tsp chili flakes

½ lemon

Blend all ingredients.

Method

Heat the coconut oil.

Sauté the garlic, ginger & celery and add a pinch of salt.

Leave it on low until the celery is very soft.

Add mushrooms for a couple of minutes.

Add the spiraled sweet potatoes and zucchini.

Let it all cook for 10 minutes or until the sweet potatoes are soft enough. Add spinach.

Add the Tahini sauce.

Note: Tahini is made from ground sesame seeds. It is packed with essential nutrients. It is a great source of protein, essential fatty acids and is very high in calcium. Tahini helps in liver detoxification, helps promote healthy cell growth and prevents anemia.

DINNER

Broccoli soup

- ½ a broccoli
- ¼ onion
- 3 cups of vegetable broth
- Salt & pepper
- Pinch of chili flakes

Boil the broth, add the onions and broccoli and simmer for 20 minutes on low fire until the broccoli is soft.

Add your seasonings & Blend.

Note: *Broccoli is very high in dietary fiber and proteins and is a good source of vitamin C which makes it an excellent addition to many meals. It also contains antioxidants and is an anti-inflammatory.*

Day 2

BREAKFAST

Chia pudding

- 3 Tbsp chia seeds
- 1 Tbsp hemp seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of homemade almond milk
- 1 Tbsp raw cacao powder (optional)

Keep in the fridge for 15-30 minutes. Add your toppings (fruits, nuts, seeds).

Note: *These gluten-free seeds are a balanced blend of fiber, essential fatty acids, carbohydrates, protein and many other phytonutrients. Chia seeds are rich in antioxidants and contain high amounts of calcium, magnesium, zinc and iron.*

LUNCH

Coconut Curry

- 1tsp Coconut oil or avocado oil
- 1tsp cumin seeds
- ½ a small onion (thinly sliced)
- 1 clove of garlic (crushed)
- 1 potato diced into cubes
- ¼ sweet potato diced in two cubes
- ½ a bell pepper cut into cubes
- 1.5 cups of coconut milk
- 1 cup of water
- ¼ cup boiled chickpeas
- 1/8 cup peas
- 1/8 cup corn
- 1 cup of kale

Note: Coconut milk is the liquid that comes from blending the meat of a coconut with water. The principle medium chain fatty acid in coconut contain lauric acid which is also found in breast milk; thus supports the immune system, brain and digestion. Coconut milk is very nourishing, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory and healing to the digestive system.

Seasonings

- ¼ teaspoon of each:
- Turmeric
- Cumin
- Coriander
- Paprika
- ½ tsp Himalayan salt
- Pinch of black pepper

Note: Turmeric has powerful anti-inflammatory effects & is a strong antioxidant. It also aids in digestion. Tip: adding a pinch of black pepper makes it much more beneficial.

Method

Heat the oil in a saucepan.

Add the garlic & onion until its translucent. Stir in the potatoes and sweet potatoes.

Mix in the bell peppers.

Add the coconut milk and water. Add the seasonings.

Cover on medium heat for around 20 minutes until the vegetables are cooked. Add in the peas, corn and spinach.

DINNER

Parsnip & Cabbage soup

- ½ onion
- 1 garlic clove
- 10 slices of parsnips
- 2 & ½ cups of cauliflower
- 2 & ½ cups of cabbage
- 3 cups of vegetable broth

- Chili flakes
- Salt & pepper to taste
- Handful or parsley
- Drop of coconut oil

Method

Slice all the vegetables into thin slices.

Add a teaspoon of coconut oil and sauté the onion and garlic (you can omit the coconut oil and sauté in water, it will just take a few minutes longer). Add the vegetables and sauté for 5 minutes.

Add the vegetable broth and let it boil. Simmer for 20 minutes.

Blend in the blender.

Add parsley.

Add salt, pepper and chili flakes to taste.

Note: All the white vegetables in this soup contain essential nutrients such as fiber, potassium, vitamin C and magnesium.

Day 3

BREAKFAST

Smoothie Bowl

- 1 frozen banana
- ½ a cup of mixed frozen berries
- ¼ cup frozen spinach
- 1 teaspoon of each: acai powder, hemp powder & spirulina (optional)

Blend in a food processor to reach to a thick creamy consistency. You can add water if you want to drink it like a smoothie.

Top with a spoonful of your favorite nut butter or your favorite toppings of choice.

Note: *Spinach has very high nutritional values and is rich in antioxidants. Any extra servings of vegetables are always a bonus!*

LUNCH

Mixed Vegetable Cauliflower Rice

Cauliflower rice

- 1/4 of a Cauliflower (florets only without the greens)

Make sure you wash and drain it very well in the strainer, so it is very dry. Mix it in the food processor and set aside.

Mixed Vegetables

- 1 Tbsp of coconut oil for stir-frying the vegetables
- 1/4 of an onion
- Handful of string beans
- 1 carrot
- 1 cup of organic peas
- Bunch of spring onions

Note: *Cauliflower rice is an excellent substitute for rice. Cauliflowers are rich in vitamins and minerals. They are also good for detoxification, have many digestive benefits and contain anti- cancerous effects. They are known to boost brain and heart health as well.*

Sauce

- 2 Tbsp of Tamari Sauce
- A small piece of grated ginger
- ½ tsp chili flakes

Mix in a small bowl and set aside

Method

Sauté the onions, then add the rest of the vegetables (except for the spring onions). Leave it on

Low/medium heat covered for 10-15 minutes. Add the Sauce to the vegetables and mix well.

Add the cauliflower rice and mix in (not more than a minute!)

This dish will be great served with grilled salmon or even just by itself.

DINNER

Celery & Corn soup

- 4 celery stalks (diced)
- ½ a cup of organic frozen corn
- 1 tsp coconut oil
- 1 diced onion
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 tsp nutritional yeast
- 2 cups of vegetable broth

Method

In a pan sauté the onion & garlic in coconut oil on medium fire.

Add the celery and corn.

Add the nutritional yeast, salt & pepper.

Add the broth.

After it boils, lower the heat and let it simmer for 10 minutes.

After it cools down, blend in the blender.

Reheat and serve.

Note: Celery is a very low caloric vegetable that aids in weight loss and digestion. It also reduces inflammation and is filled with antioxidants and other important minerals and vitamins for the body.

GUILTLESS TREATS

Hazelnut Date Balls

- ½ cup of roasted hazelnuts
- 1 cup of dates
- 2 Tbsp cacao powder
- Pinch of salt

Blend all ingredients in a food processor.

Take a teaspoon and roll it into a ball with your hands. Roll it into some roasted hazelnuts.

Note: *Date is an excellent natural sweetener as it contains many nutrients, antioxidants and is high in fiber.*

Cacao Peanut Butter Nice cream

- 2 frozen bananas (sliced)
- 1 Tbsp raw cacao powder
- 2 Tbsp crunchy peanut butter

Blend the frozen bananas in a food processor for a few minutes until its creamy. Add the rest of the ingredients.

Freeze for one hour.

Scoop and add your favorite toppings.

***Note:** Raw cacao is the pulverized unroasted seed of the Cacao tree with all its enzymes intact. It's a rich source of minerals and antioxidants.*

Matcha Cookies

- 1 cup of almond flour
- 1.5 Tbsp coconut oil
- 1.5 Tbsp maple syrup
- ½ tsp vanilla
- Pinch of salt
- ¼ tsp of baking powder
- ¾ tsp of Matcha powder

Preheat the oven to 175c.

Mix all ingredients in a bowl.

Scoop 1 TBSP of the mixture and place on parchment paper on a baking tray. Bake for 15 minutes.

Note: *Almond flour is a great alternative to gluten and wheat containing flours. It is very versatile and can be used in many cooking and baking dishes. It is a good source of vitamin E, iron, manganese, magnesium, potassium & calcium.*

“Be the change
you want
to make”

-Amira Sultan



About the Author

Amira Sultan is a mother of two children and a wife. Her family, the source of her strength, inspired her throughout her journey. She is a graduate of Service Sector Management from the California State University and a certified master-level nutritionist, a wellness consultant, a holistic health coach and a personal trainer. She lives in Oman with a mission to inspire people to lead a healthier lifestyle through nutrition, the gateway to truly enjoying life.

Amira has had to battle with an undiagnosed disease for many years in her early twenties only to diagnose herself with an autoimmune disease and it is this that encouraged her to self-educate and to now share many of her findings in the book.

For more information, you can visit her website: www.amirasultan.com



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