

You Can Beat the Odds

The Surprising Factors Behind Chronic Illness
and Cancer

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Chapter 1

Launching Your Program for Optimal Immunity

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.

—Susan Sontag

“Houston, we have a problem.” Those now famous words brought the plight of the three astronauts on Apollo 13 onto televisions and radios around the world and sparked a miracle of engineering teamwork that would bring those men home alive.

Although we’ll never know most of their names, the best and the brightest minds were put to use that day to save the lives of the astronauts hurtling through space at thirty-five thousand miles per hour in a jury-rigged spacecraft. There were no faces or names for the legion of ground-bound engineers, just those of the men whose lives were at risk: Jim Lovell, Jack Swigert, and Fred Haise.

The historic flight had been uneventful until, halfway to the moon, an unexpected rumble was followed by crystallized particles floating in space. The astronauts knew then that the two oxygen tanks had ruptured and their air supply was falling, venting out into space, and their lives were in danger. The momentous success of the rescue mission required a novel application of scientific principles and the collective wisdom of the experts on the ground.

The moon landings had so many elements that must perform perfectly together that hundreds of rocket scientists were required to determine the weakest links and strategize backup measures. My father was one of them. As he explains it to me, at the time of the crisis, experts in engineering, science, and physics worked together at a frantic pace to create a plan that would bring the astronauts back to earth. And in only eight hours they had one. Teams of brainy pencil pushers, working behind the scenes, were going to tell the men whose lives were at stake what they needed to do. The astronauts put their trust in these scientists and engineers and the plan was implemented. The lunar landing module had oxygen; the young men crawled into their new spaceship and used the gravity of the moon to sling shot them back to earth.

Most of the failures on the moon missions, as well as other complex missile systems, involved some of the simplest components—a wiring connection or a loose part—that might otherwise seem inconsequential. Like these spacecraft with so many fragile and sensitive parts, our own health and vitality can be upended by a single glitch in any one of a number of systems, and the smallest defect in the smallest body part can yield hazardous results. Our physical bodies are far more complex than a missile or a spacecraft and healing our body can require miracle workers similar to those involved in that great and famous Apollo space rescue mission. When fighting for your life or facing a challenging diagnosis, you deserve nothing less than the greatest minds working together on your behalf. Part chance, part science and design—not a piece of evidence can be overlooked—the great and the small must all come together in a remarkable way and in record time. A health crisis is a time when clear information and attention to detail offer distinct benefits (something you really want on your side when you’re battling the odds), as this is a time when the colossal impact of all the possibilities cannot be underestimated.

This challenge demands a resource to guide us through this time of turbulence and change, capitalizing on the teamwork of the best and the brightest, for a time-proven shortcut to beating the odds. In a six-week program outlined in this book, strategies from leading experts in multiple disciplines help put the odds back on your side, so you can harness all the available technologies quickly and easily. Here, you can gain an advantage with up-to-the minute information about a rapidly building body of discoveries that can enhance your healing potential on the deepest possible level. The program features life-changing discoveries by pioneering psychoneuroimmunologists, epigeneticists, psychobiologists, scientists, physicians, medical researchers, epidemiologists, and stress researchers, among others.

The result is a compendium of practical and essential information for a lifelong program of what to do to stay strong. If you already enjoy great health, the program outlined here can help you keep it—you'll see that even small changes now can lead to a huge impact later. But if you are facing a health challenge, every piece of information makes a difference, as nothing can be left to chance or be overlooked.

Beyond Diet and Exercise

Aside from a general awareness of prevention through diet and exercise, current thinking in health care is changing in ways that are both startling and not generally understood by those outside of the research fields. Nearly all aspects of our health and well-being are impacted by the momentous implications of these changes. For example, in the highly charged realms of genetics and microbiology, frontier science sparked the exciting new awareness that even our genetic inheritance is not as fixed as we may have thought. In fact, only five percent of cancer and cardiovascular patients can attribute their disease solely to heredity. Compelling new evidence shows we can even enhance our DNA!

While writing this book, I was asked to give a brief presentation about my work to a group of philanthropists. Afterwards, almost giddy with relief, a woman said, "Finally, a health book that's not about diet and exercise!" We all laughed. But while sound nutrition and exercise cannot be overlooked, new research shows that there are other factors at play—risks greater than even smoking, obesity, or cholesterol—that affect our very lives.

Particularly persuasive are findings from a landmark study at the CDC (Centers for Disease Control) establishing that factors *other* than diet and exercise contribute the greatest risks associated with some of our biggest killers, including heart and lung disease. The peculiar difficulties encountered by the lead authors of the study shed light on why you may not know about their astonishing results. Other obscure but well-established factors have also been proven to increase mortality rates of virtually every disease.

This new information hasn't intentionally been swept under the rug. In medical settings, time is often critical, making it extremely difficult to adequately address such issues, and as a result, the risk factors hover on the sidelines. This situation is gradually changing. For example, the program described in this book is provided at a cancer center and a primary care practice, while Harvard's medical centers, MD Anderson, and Memorial Sloan-Kettering, have similar programs for cancer and chronic disease.

As testament to the effectiveness and enormous cost-saving potential of programs like this, insurance companies have added codes for reimbursement of these new methods for treatment of heart disease, diabetes, autoimmunity, pain management, and overall wellness. Still other insurers offer discounted rates for individuals who complete programs similar to this one.¹ Even so, concerned physicians tell me that while the evidence is robust, these risk factors—and what to do about them—remain in the background. This book is a response, in part, to the challenge of bringing life-enhancing strategies into standard medical settings and into your life. Each component works in tandem with the rest, as research-based skills and techniques allow you to take charge of your health in new and powerful ways.

Being willing to take charge of one's health opens the door to some pretty amazing things. The evidence is breathtaking. Technologies, skills, and behaviors, above and beyond diet and exercise, influence gene expression, hormone levels, bone density, blood pressure, and other processes once thought to be beyond our control. Crucial findings reveal that chemicals released in the emotional part of your brain (called the limbic system) attach directly to your white blood cells—the backbone of your immune system—in a lock and key fashion. This means that the way we think, feel, and behave has a direct effect on the way these cells operate—whether they swim rapidly and detect invader cells, go awry and attack healthy tissue, or become confused and allow unhealthy cells to proliferate. From brain to body and back again, the outcome of cell-to-cell communication is monumental: Its result could be a healthy immune system as well as the beginning of a malignant tumor or an autoimmune disease.

Myths and Medicine

As we begin this new century, newfangled interventions, genetic engineering, and smart cells are leading us into ground-breaking territory, ripe with promise. But what we do today can make or break our ability to participate and respond to these promises of tomorrow. Exposing medicine's myths allows you to focus on what works rather than becoming side-tracked by misinformation and misconceptions.

Our universal quest for health and wellness—and accurate information—is an ancient one. As evidenced by the two thousand Egyptian prescriptions recorded on papyri to the first pharmacopoeia, *De Materia Medica*, compiled in 50 AD, people have searched for ages for an edge to beating the odds. The historical record demonstrates some recommendations were more effective than others—applying beetle dung to a wound may have given little benefit, but the medicinal value of foxglove was later found to be a true tonic for people with heart conditions and is now prescribed as digitalis. The laws of the Israelites recorded in the Bible—such as hand washing, and quarantining the ill and the dead—had to be rediscovered in the nineteenth century before their implementation could save lives in the western world. Because a treatment enjoyed popularity didn't mean it had merit—bloodletting, with leeches or knives, was an undisputed remedy for nearly any ailment for more than a millennium, reaching its peak at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and finally dying out (forgive the irony) by that century's end.

In science, nearly everything is provisional. It wasn't all that long ago that the appendix was believed to be vestigial, or basically useless, but now we know it's actually a component of the immune system in the gut. Until recently, lupus, chronic fatigue, Hashimoto's Disease, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer were not thought to be

related, each a separate entity operating under its own banner or coat of arms, as it were. But as our world family can now be traced to a single set of parents, cutting edge science reveals that each of these diseases shares a common origin—chronic inflammation²—and the world’s pharmaceutical giants have their financial resources leveled at this linchpin.

The brutal impact of this single trigger, chronic inflammation, is astounding in the numbers affected: over one hundred twenty-eight million people. Of those, according to the World Health Organization, nearly seventeen million people around the globe die each year of cardiovascular disease alone, while another twenty million survive but deal with the aftermath of heart attacks and strokes. They join ten million others who are cancer survivors. But it doesn’t stop there: In the United States alone, over twenty million people have diabetes, while another fifty-four million have prediabetes, and over eight million are managing an autoimmune disease at any given time. This new way of thinking about how we stay healthy—and how we get sick—can affect how we approach almost any illness or condition.

The Crucible

As with any rescue mission, whether it’s from space, a burning building, or a threatening diagnosis, the heroes are the ones whose lives are on the line and a remarkable rescue requires determination and imagination from all the players involved. When I first met Frank Hawkins, he told me that he hadn’t been particularly concerned when he experienced a mysterious pain in his side and a bit of indigestion. But despite being treated for ulcers, the discomfort didn’t entirely disappear and eventually intense back pain on a business trip stopped him in his tracks. Returning home from Florida, his wife teased him about his great tan. As it turned out, he wasn’t tan, but was jaundiced. Exploratory surgery revealed pancreatic cancer too far advanced for treatment of any kind. When Frank asked about his options the doctor replied that there weren’t any. “We’ll make it as easy on you as we can but you need to just go home and get your affairs in order,” adding that Frank had a few weeks to live—maybe six, maybe more.

Frank determined then that no one person was going to dictate the outcome and gave himself options that the doctor had denied. Frank explains, “After I picked myself up off the floor I went back to my original physician and asked for a referral to another cancer specialist.” So, along with his wife Sarah, Frank consulted medical oncologist Gerald Goldklang, M.D., who spoke about perspectives like “will to live” and “fighting spirit.” Formerly fuzzy concepts like these have made their way into laboratories and research projects around the globe and while much remains mysterious about their effects, Frank was convinced that Dr. Goldklang would champion and support him in his fight for life—regardless of the outcome. As Frank puts it, “I wasn’t going down without a struggle.” Along with offering a new chemotherapy, Dr. Goldklang recommended that Frank and Sarah attend my six-week program (which meets once a week) at the cancer center.

Like the Apollo 13 astronauts, from the crucible of diagnosis, Frank had little to lose. Although fatigued, he began chemotherapy and attended his first class with me the following week. I was stunned at his jaundice and pallor. Yet despite losing an astonishing amount of weight, he continued with his medical treatment, his job, and the activities that he and Sarah loved—spending time in the mountains, gardening, attending street-rod car shows and craft exhibits. Four weeks went by, then six, then eight, with

each week becoming a celebratory milestone. A few months later scans revealed that the chemotherapy had greatly reduced the size of the tumor and an innovative surgical procedure was cautiously offered. The surgeon met with Frank and openly shared his concern. He had only performed one other procedure like it and the results were not good. But Frank was willing to try. As he recovered from the operation, just six months after being told to get his affairs in order, the specialist walked into the room and pronounced Frank cancer free. More than eleven years later, that is still the case. Recently Frank and Sarah dropped in on one of our classes just to say hello. While there is no standard cure for pancreatic cancer, the science behind that story is both eye-opening and practical. What you are about to read shows you how to use that science to your great advantage in everyday life.

*Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism.
It is not the conviction that something will turn out well,
but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.*

—Vaclav Havel, writer, President of the Czech Republic

Personalizing Your Program: How it Works

With research in science and medicine on your side and backed by a solid relationship with your medical team, you'll find that there is much you can do personally to enhance your health. But life is complicated and dealing with a chronic, life-challenging illness makes it more so. With our busy lives, we need strong reasons and compelling evidence to make the effort to learn something new. My goal in writing this book is to streamline that process. Designed to complement a busy lifestyle and based on over a decade of feedback, you can quickly take advantage of life-enhancing thinking.

Book chapters are broken down into “weeks” just as I present them in the six-week program. (For example, Chapters 2 and 3 are covered in Week Two of the program and so on.) Flush with evidence, the science behind each concept is presented clearly under the *How We Know* headings so you'll understand what that particular technique or technology can do for you. A no-nonsense approach delivers the research in an easy-to-understand way so you can see how these methods are linked with improved outcomes and positive whole-body effects. Based on over a decade of feedback, you'll find plenty of practical examples of how others have used these strategies. And each week in the program you'll meet a physician, scientist, or other medical professional who has personally used that concept in his or her own life. If you'd like more information on a particular topic, the *Resource Guide* at the back of the book can help. (For ease of reading convenient endnotes are used rather than footnotes.)

Under the headings *Get Started Now*, you'll see how to put the research into action so you can begin using it right away. Here, interactive features such as quizzes, website questionnaires, and worksheets help you integrate the new insights you've gained so you can personalize your program and jump-start your healing potential. There may be more *Get Started Now* exercises than you can do in one week, so you can treat them like handouts and set some aside for later. For example, in the very first week of the program you will discover how the chemicals in your mind affect not only your immune system,

but also all the glands and hormones of your body, including your intestines and the lining of your blood vessels. You'll find out how you might (unknowingly) be working against yourself and you'll be given a simple technique to reduce inflammation and protect your brain, bones, blood pressure, gut, and genes.

Subsequent chapters bring you up to speed, progressively revealing hidden risk factors and how you can combat them with proven research-based strategies that enhance our health and well-being. You may choose to read all the way through the book and then go back and spend a week reflecting on a particular aspect of the program. There are no rules for moving through the program but the research is presented progressively, so it will make more sense if you review it in the order it is presented. As each chapter builds upon the knowledge of the last, you'll gain momentum exponentially as every action, no matter how small, has an effect. Whether learning to use sound as medicine, reduce damaging stress hormones, or how to tip the scales of genetic expression in your favor, you'll find an abundance of self-care strategies to choose from or combine, along with plenty of practical suggestions, reliable research, and powerful stories that provide a personal side to the science.

Stacking the Deck

I often say I teach what I need to know. I was twenty-one when I lost the feeling in my feet. At the time I thought it was temporary and just switched to shoes that I wouldn't slip out of. Odd flashes of light at the periphery of my sight and other visual distortions I couldn't ignore sent me to my physician; and when I lost sensation on one side of my body, I was referred to a neurologist. After a lumbar puncture, scans, an MRI, and loads of blood work, I was sent home with a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis.

On the whole I did quite well, but kidney infections—and later lung infections—became so chronic that as a preventive measure, I was prescribed a maintenance antibiotic that I took every day for five years. About that time, routine blood work came back looking suspiciously like Scleroderma and I was sent to another specialist who wanted to tack that on top of the diagnosis of MS. Frustrated and more than a little freaked out, it seemed like a good time for an evaluation by the team approach at the Mayo Clinic. There, specialists diagnosed that I had neither MS nor Scleroderma, but Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) all along. As I read up on this new condition I happened upon an emerging field of study, called psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI for short. This compelling science takes a close look at the foundations of disease, and specifically, how chemicals in our mind impact our immune system.

I was intrigued. With kidney and central nervous system involvement I had little to lose. Immersing myself in research and connecting with expert guidance, my physician at the Mayo Clinic, Scott Percellin, M.D., provided careful monitoring and support as I applied what I was learning to my own life. (For details see the Acknowledgements.) Shortly thereafter, as the clinical assistant to the national PNI (psychoneuroimmunology) program, *Getting Well*, I witnessed firsthand how certain skills and behaviors could alter or heal physical processes.

Remarkable recoveries met me every step of the way and I learned to respect that while principles were at play, there was no one *correct* way to heal. Men and women from teenagers to seniors employed these modalities in their own unique and very individual way and experienced benefits. When the feeling in my feet returned, I knew I

was on to something. A few months later I was off antibiotics completely—and I’ve not had a kidney or lung infection since. The result has been a clinical and serological remission that has lasted over fifteen years. (At times I’ve been a remedial student, so fortunately or unfortunately, I’ve had other reminders to practice what I preach!)

The science behind the rescue mission of Apollo 13 wasn’t new but it was clever. The teams of experts used available knowledge and applied it in a remarkable way to an unprecedented situation for a near miraculous result. In the same way, some of what helped Frank and me wasn’t necessarily new, but the application was novel to us. The next chapter opens the door to recent findings that shed light on recoveries like ours.

Since my own healing experience, I have witnessed many “miracles” even more profound, and learned that living longer isn’t as important as living well, yet living well often results in living longer. The heroes of the book—the everyday people whose lives are on the line—furnish a face to the mystery and majesty of remarkable recovery, bring to life its research and theories, and lend substance to statistics with stories that resonate with all who wish to beat the odds. I hope that you may be as inspired by their indomitable spirits, courage, and strength of wills as I have been. Unless otherwise indicated, I know these people personally and although most of their identities are cloaked, the medical specifics and what they did about their health challenges are all very real. (As a key, when a last name is listed, as in Frank’s case, the identity is intact and unaltered.)

Getting Well

The program at *Getting Well* required a residential stay of ten days to one month and so was out of reach for some. Working with busy people, it became important to me to design a “how-to” program, linking expert guidance with strategies proven to positively influence health for maximum effect in the shortest possible time. Later, as the Program Director for Yale surgeon Bernie Siegel’s Exceptional Cancer Patients’ (ECaP) organization in Connecticut, I had the opportunity to put the program into play and bring it to life. It was accepted by the president at the time of the American Cancer Society and the chief oncologist of the Helen and Harry Gray Cancer Center, Dr. Andrew Salner, a compassionate and caring physician, dedicated to bringing all possible tools together for the optimal advantage of the tens of thousands who walk through their doors each year.

After relocating to the southeast, I happened upon an article in *Atlanta Magazine* about a cancer specialist, Dr. Gerry Goldklang. I thought to myself that if I were ever to work with a local oncologist, he would be the one. At the time, Tim Albaitis, my co-director at ECaP, and I were putting together weeklong educational programs for folks with chronic illness or cancer. People flew in from all over the world to participate. We had a group (as you can tell, I highly favor the team approach) of wonderful professionals, each with a different specialty and perspective, and had a great time working together. But when it came time to focus closer to home, I called Dr. Goldklang and we set up a time to meet.

On the morning of our meeting, I went the wrong way on Interstate 285 that circles Atlanta. Each loop changes from east, west, north, or south depending on the direction you’re facing. Just thinking about it challenges my already shaky sense of orientation, but this was also back when cell phones were as big as your shoe and I didn’t have one. I had to keep getting off the freeway and hopping out of the car to check with

convenience store clerks to make sure I was going in the right direction. I arrived over an hour late, though in other ways, the timing proved perfect. Dr. Goldklang had just returned from an international conference where this new evidence was presented and he was committed to providing it for patients and the community. And so it began.

Soon the program was introduced to a primary care practice where those with autoimmunity, diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions could apply the research to their advantage as well. As you will see, the techniques and strategies for health and wellness you're about to discover are not meant to replace your medical protocol but to enhance it, working hand-in-glove with whatever treatment modality you've chosen. Applying expert guidance and rallying your ability to heal from within, whether you are using conventional or complementary medicine, or both, will help you gain the most from any treatment. Like the astronauts of Apollo 13 who became instrumental in their own rescue mission, taking personal responsibility for our health enhances the outcome. Each aspect of the program has a cumulative effect and the combinations can tip the odds in your favor. Perhaps most importantly, the program's solid scientific base complements a variety of worldviews.

As one woman put it, patients benefit and doctors appreciate it. But after they attended the program, people wanted something to refer to and were overwhelmed by the many titles on the suggested reading list. They repeatedly requested a book based on the program. While no one book can offer the definitive word on wellness, my goal was to provide a blueprint of the references that have inspired others and myself, along with a practical guide to applying the principles in everyday life. Over the last decade, the program has evolved as exciting new discoveries have come to light. With thanks to the persistence of patients and professionals who have helped me along the way, the result of all these combined efforts is what you now hold in your hands.

The Number Nine Bus

Life is nothing if not unpredictable. In a post 9/11 world of color-coded anxiety, we need real help for real problems and coping strategies for even scarier imagined ones. Whether through a life-challenging diagnosis or rapidly changing world events, we are reminded that we live daily with uncertainty—and always have. People who do all the right things can die far too young while others who seem just too mean, do all the wrong things and outlive everybody.

This truth wasn't lost on Joe Kogel. When I was at *Getting Well*, Joe spoke to a packed auditorium about his diagnosis of metastatic melanoma (a deadly type of skin cancer that had spread) and used a metaphor I've never forgotten. Like Frank, his prognosis was grim and he didn't know anybody personally who had beaten the particular odds he faced, but that wasn't a drawback for Joe. He said that we could all wake up tomorrow and hear that a cure for cancer or heart disease had been discovered; but there's still the number nine bus taking us out on a harmless Thursday afternoon. I've used this metaphor for years and one day a patient asked what my last thoughts would be if I ever saw the number nine bus bearing down on me in the middle of a busy intersection. "It was only supposed to be a metaphor!" was my response. Of course, one day we'll each meet our own metaphor, so to speak; but until then we keep looking both

ways when we cross the street. It doesn't guarantee us safe passage but it definitely increases our odds. By the way, eighteen years later Joe is still cancer free.

The tools, techniques, and methods you'll discover here serve as a complement to your own intuitive wisdom and the knowledge and skills you have already accumulated. In combination they shape and bring to life your own personal program of wellness and assist you in making the most of this time of crisis and change. It is my wish that the information and strategies contained in these six weeks serve as a road map on your journey to optimal health and leave you feeling empowered for whatever the future may bring.

Chapter One:

¹ M Bambling, "Mind, Body and Heart: Psychotherapy and the Relationship between Mental and Physical Health," *Psychotherapy in Australia*, 12 (2006): 52-59. Also J Astin et al., "Mind-body medicine: state of the science, implications for practice," *Journal of the American Board of Family Practice*, 16 (2003): 131-147.

² Multiple sources: William Meggs, *The Inflammation Cure* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004). F Balkwill et al., "Smoldering and Polarized Inflammation in the Initiation and Promotion of Malignant Disease," *Cancer Cell*, 7 (2005): 211-17. Robert Weinberg, *The Biology of Cancer* (Oxford, UK: Garland Science, 2006). G Stix, "A Malignant Flame," *Scientific American*, July (2007).

Chapter Two: