

PART IV

Renewal



Habit 7—Sharpen the Saw
It's "Me Time"

Keep Hope Alive!
Kid, You'll Move Mountains

H A B I T



Sharpen the Saw



It's
"Me Time"

The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining.

U.S. PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

Do you ever feel imbalanced, stressed-out, or empty inside? If so, you're going to love Habit 7, because it was specially designed to help you deal with these problems. Why do we call it "Sharpen the Saw"? Well, imagine that you're going for a walk in the forest when you come upon a guy furiously sawing down a tree.

"What are you doing?" you ask.

"I'm sawing down a tree," comes the curt reply.

"How long have you been at it?"

"Four hours so far, but I'm really making progress," he says, sweat dripping from his chin.

"Your saw looks really dull," you say. "Why don't you take a break and sharpen it?"

"I can't, you idiot. I'm too busy sawing."

We all know who the real idiot here is, now, don't we? If the guy were to take a fifteen-minute break to sharpen the saw, he'd probably finish three times faster.

Have you ever been too busy driving to take time to get gas?

Have you ever been too busy living to take time to renew yourself?

Habit 7 is all about keeping your personal self sharp so that you can better deal with life. It means regularly renewing and strengthening the four key dimensions of your life—your body, your brain, your heart, and your soul.

BODY



The Physical Dimension

Exercise, eat healthy, sleep well, relax.

BRAIN



The Mental Dimension

Read, educate, write, learn new skills.

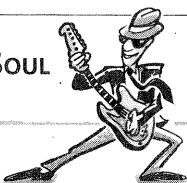
HEART



The Emotional Dimension

Build relationships (RBA, PBA), give service, laugh.

SOUL



The Spiritual Dimension

Meditate, keep a journal, pray, take in quality media.

● BALANCE IS BETTER

The ancient Greeks' famous saying "Nothing overmuch" reminds us of the importance of balance and of keeping in touch with all four dimensions of life. Some people spend countless hours building the perfect body but neglect their minds. Others have minds that can bench-press 400 pounds but let their bodies waste away or forget about having a social life. To perform at your peak, you need to strive for balance in all four areas.

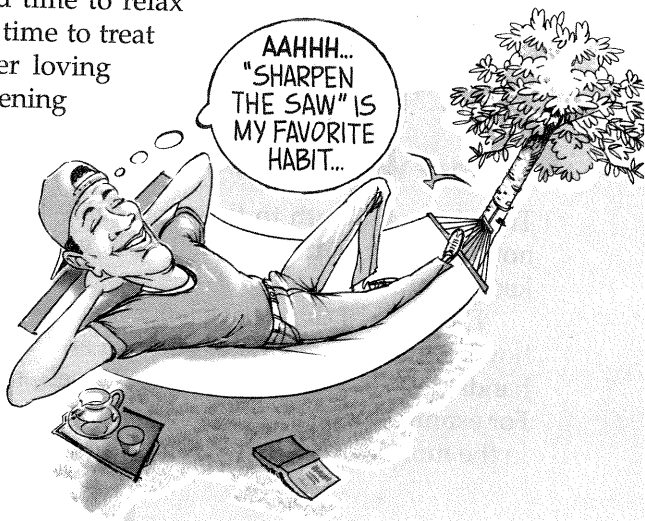
Why is balance so important? It's because how you do in one dimension of life will affect the other three. Think about it. If one of your car's tires is out of balance, all four tires will wear unevenly, not just the one. It's hard to be friendly (heart) when you're exhausted (body). It also works the other way. When you're feeling motivated and in tune with yourself (soul), it's easier to focus on your studies (mind) and to be more friendly (heart).

During my school years, I remember studying many of the great artists, authors, and musicians, like Mozart, van Gogh, Beethoven, and Hemingway. So many of them seemed to be emotionally messed up. Why? Your guess is as good as mine, but I think it was because they were out of balance. It seems they focused so hard on just one thing, like their music or art, that they neglected the other dimensions of life and lost their bearings. As the saying goes, *Balance and moderation in all things.*

● TAKE TIME FOR A TIME-OUT

Just like a car, you too need regular tune-ups and oil changes. You need time out to rejuvenate the best thing you've got going for yourself—you! You need time to relax and unstring your bow, time to treat yourself to a little tender loving care. This is what sharpening the saw is all about.

Over the next several pages, we'll take a look at each dimension, the body, mind, heart, and soul, and talk about specific ways to get that saw of yours razor sharp. So read on!



Caring for Your Body



I hated junior high. I felt awkward. I was unsure about who I was and how I fit in. And my body started undergoing all sorts of weird changes. I remember my first day in gym class. I had bought my first jock ever, but I had no idea how to put it on. And all of us boys were so embarrassed at seeing each other naked for the first time that we just stood around in the showers and giggled.

During your teenage years, your voice will change, your hormones will run rampant, and curves and muscles will begin springing up all over. Welcome to your new body!

Actually, this ever-changing body of yours is really quite a marvelous machine. You can handle it with care or you can abuse it. You can control it or let it control you. In short, your body is a tool, and if you take good care of it, it will serve you well.

Here is a list of ten ways teens can keep their physical selves sharp:

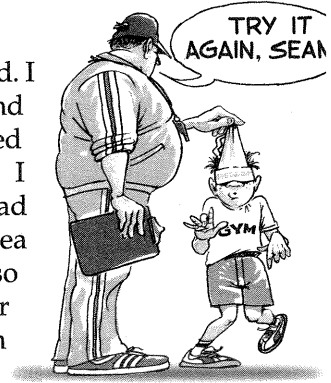
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| 1. Eat good food | 6. Practice yoga |
| 2. Relax in the bathtub | 7. Play sports |
| 3. Bike | 8. Take walks |
| 4. Lift weights | 9. Stretch out |
| 5. Get enough sleep | 10. Do an aerobics workout |

The four key ingredients to a healthy body are good sleeping habits, physical relaxation, good nutrition, and proper exercise. I'll focus here on nutrition and exercise.

● YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

There's much truth to the expression "You are what you eat." I'm not an expert in nutrition, but I have found two rules of thumb to keep in mind.

First rule of thumb: Listen to your body. Pay careful attention to how different foods make you feel and from that develop your *own* handful of do's and don'ts. Everyone responds differently to food. For example, whenever I eat a big meal right before bed I feel horrible in the morning. And whenever I eat *too many* french fries, nachos, or

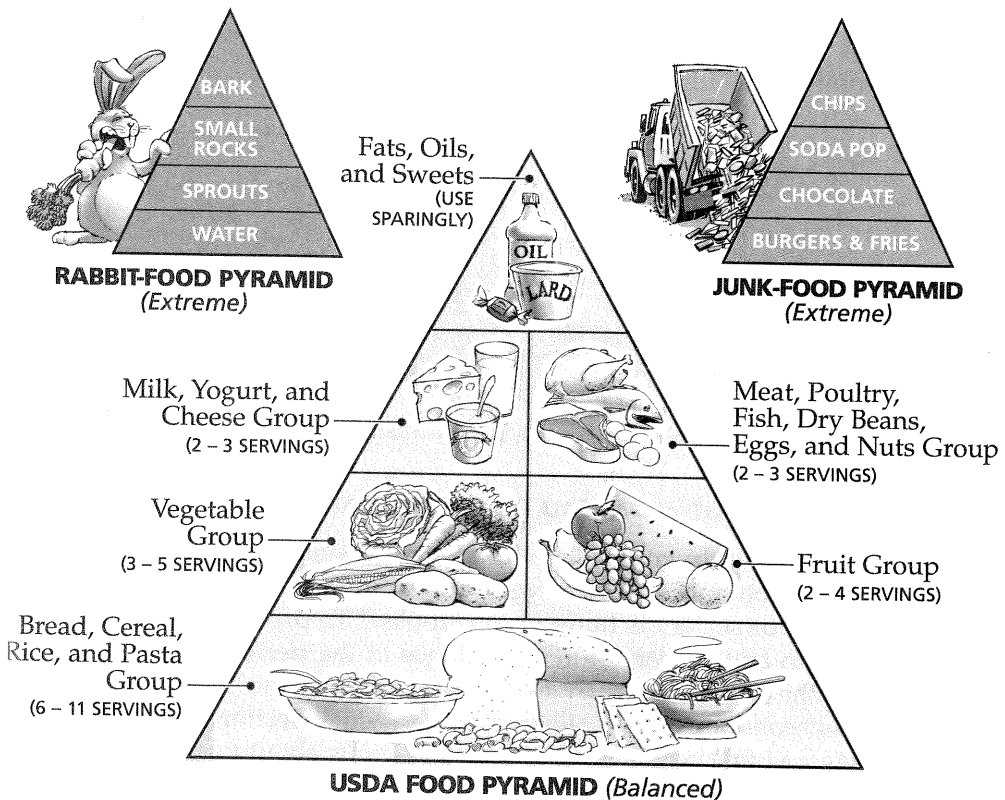


pizza I get a “grease rush.” (Have you ever had one of those?) These are my *don'ts*. On the other hand, I've learned that eating lots of fruits and vegetables and drinking tons of water makes me feel sharp. These are my *do's*.

Second rule of thumb: Be moderate and avoid extremes. For many of us (me included), it's easier to be extreme than to be moderate, and so we find ourselves jumping back and forth between eating a rabbit-food and a junk-food diet. But extreme eating habits can be unhealthy. A little junk food on occasion isn't going to hurt you. (I mean, what would life be like without an occasional Slurpee?) Just don't make it your everyday fare.

The USDA food pyramid is a balanced and moderate approach to nutrition that I highly recommend. It encourages eating more whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy products and eating less fast food, junk food, and snacks, which are often loaded with fat, sugar, salt, and other gook.

Remember, food affects mood. So eat with care.



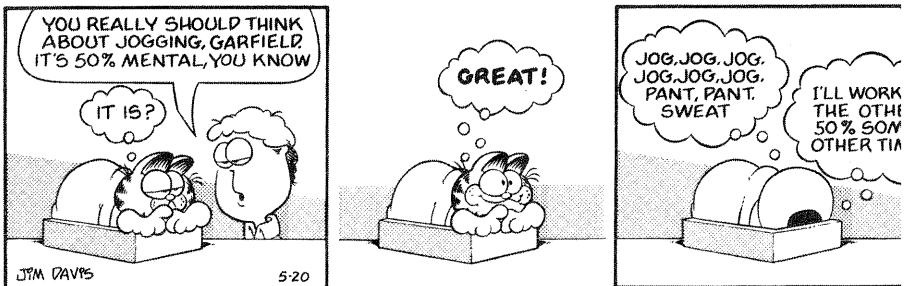
● USE IT OR LOSE IT

One of my favorite movies is *Forrest Gump*. It's the story of a naive young man from Alabama with a good heart who keeps stumbling into success in spite of himself. At one point in the movie, Forrest is frustrated and confused about his life. So what does he do? He starts to run, and keeps on running. After running back and forth from one coast to the other two and a half times, Forrest feels better and is finally able to sort his life out.

We all feel depressed, confused, or apathetic at times. And it's at times like these when perhaps the best thing we can do for ourselves is to do what Forrest did: exercise ourselves better. Besides being good for your heart and lungs, exercise has an amazing way of giving you a shot of energy, melting stress away, and clearing your mind.

There is no single best way to exercise. Many teenagers like to play competitive sports. Others prefer running, walking, biking, in-line skating, dancing, stretching, aerobics, or lifting weights. Still others just like to get outside and move around. For best results, you should exercise for twenty to thirty minutes a session at least three times a week.

Don't let "pain" be the first thing that comes into your mind when you hear the word "exercise." Instead find something you enjoy doing, so that it's easy to maintain.



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● IT'S ALL ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL, NOT HOW YOU LOOK

But be careful. In your quest for a better physique, make sure you don't get too obsessed with your appearance. As you've probably noticed, our society is hung up on "looks." To prove my point just walk into any grocery store and glance at the perfect people who adorn the covers of nearly every magazine. It kind of makes you feel self-conscious about all your physical imperfections, doesn't it?

As a young boy, I was very self-conscious about my fat cheeks. My dad told me that when I was born my cheeks were so fat the doc-

tors didn't know which end to spank. I clearly remember a neighbor girl making fun of my cheeks one time. My brother David heroically tried to defend me by saying they were made out of muscle. It backfired and "Muscle Cheeks" became my least favorite nickname of all.

In eighth grade my dad sent me on a long survival trek (a nice way of saying we hiked forever and starved) to try to toughen me up. The unexpected by-product was that I lost my cheeks. But as my teenage years unfolded, I became self-conscious about many other things, such as not having a perfect smile like some of my friends did or those zits that kept resurfacing like a bad habit that won't go away.

Before you start comparing yourself to the babes and hunks on the covers of *Cosmopolitan* and *Muscle and Fitness* and begin hating everything about your body and looks, please remember that there are thousands of healthy and happy teens who don't have high cheekbones, rock-hard abs, or buns of steel. There are many successful singers, talk show hosts, dancers, athletes, actors, and actresses who have all kinds of physical imperfections. You don't have to pop steroids or get your chest enlarged to be happy. If you don't have the "look" or body type our society has stamped "ideal," so what? What's popular today will probably change tomorrow anyhow.

The important thing is feeling good physically—and not so much your appearance. Talk show host Oprah Winfrey said it best: "You have to change your perception. It's not about weight—it's caring for yourself on a daily basis."

Real Life or Art?

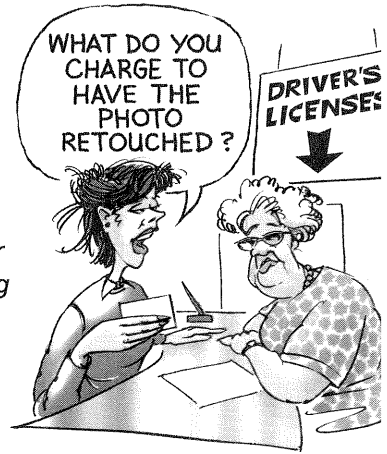
Besides, if you didn't already know it, what you see on the covers of magazines isn't real. They're "images." Many years ago, actress and beauty queen Michelle Pfeiffer was featured on the front of *Esquire* magazine with the caption, "What Michelle Pfeiffer needs ... is absolutely nothing."

She actually needed more help than meets the eye, as author Allen Litchfield revealed in *Sharing the Light in the Wilderness*:

But another magazine, Harper's, offered proof in its edition the following month that even the "beautiful people" need a little help. Harper's had obtained the photo retouchers' bill for Pfeiffer's picture on the Esquire cover. The retouchers charged \$1,525 to render the following services: "Clean up the complexion, soften smile line, trim chin, soften line under earlobe, add hair, add forehead to create better line, and soften neck muscles." The editor of Harper's printed the story because we are, he said, "constantly faced with perfection in magazines; this is to

remind the reader ... there's a difference between real life and art."

This is why you shouldn't be comparing your yearbook or driver's license photographs with the magazine cover faces. The photographer who is shooting your picture is getting paid minimum wage, is bored, is in a hurry, and may even hate you. Little wonder your picture comes out looking awful.



Remember, our fetish with chiseled bodies hasn't always been the trend. Wouldn't it be nice to have lived in eighteenth-century Europe, when being overweight was the "in" thing, or during the Dark Ages, when everyone wore baggy robes and no one really knew what your body looked like? Boy, those were the days!

Of course, we should work hard to look our best and be presentable, but if we aren't careful, becoming obsessed with "looks" can lead us to severe eating disorders such as compulsive eating, bulimia, or anorexia or to addictions to performance-enhancing drugs such as steroids. Treating your body like a prisoner of war in order to be accepted by someone else is never worth it.

If you're struggling with an eating disorder, don't feel alone. It's a very common problem among teens. Admit you have a problem and get help. (At the back of the book I have listed some organizations that can help.)

● I CAN QUIT WHENEVER I WANT

Just as there are ways to care for your body, there are also ways to destroy it. And using addictive substances such as alcohol, drugs, and tobacco is a great way to do it. Alcohol, for example, is often associated with the three leading causes of death among teens: car accidents, suicide, and homicide. And then there's smoking, which has been proven to cloud your eyes, cause your skin to prematurely age, yellow your teeth, cause bad breath, triple your cavities, cause receding gums, discolor the skin on your fingertips, create tiredness, and cause cancer. (It's a wonder anyone dares smoke.) Moreover, it isn't popular. I ran across an ad by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health that drove this point home:

Okay, there's (insert name of person you want to get with here) standing alone. The perfect opportunity. You check your clothes, your hair, light

a cigarette, check your hair again and slowly walk towards them. You smile as they begin to speak, "Could you do me a favor?" You lean a little closer, hanging on their words, "Could you go smoke somewhere else?"

Smoking isn't as attractive as you think. In a study, 8 out of 10 guys and 7 out of 10 girls said they wouldn't date someone who smokes. So if you smoke, you better get used to kissing that cigarette.

Just remember, tobacco companies spend \$500,000 every hour of every day promoting and advertising cigarettes. They want your money. A pack of cigarettes a day adds up to \$1,000 a year. Just think about how many CDs you could buy for \$1,000. Don't let them sucker you!

Now, of course, no one plans on getting addicted. It all starts so innocently. Yet too often playing with "gateway drugs" like alcohol and tobacco leads to marijuana and then on to other deadly drugs like cocaine, LSD, PCP, opiates, and heroin. Many begin drinking, smoking, or doing drugs in an attempt to display their *freedom*, only to find that they eventually develop an addiction that *destroys* their freedom. Believe me, there are better ways to assert your individuality.

Perhaps the worst thing about picking up an addiction is this: You're no longer in control—your addiction is. When it says *jump*, you *jump*. You react. Say good-bye to the whole idea of being proactive. I always feel sorry for people at work who have to go outside to smoke because it's not allowed in the building. It's sad to see them standing outside in the heat of summer or the freeze of winter, puffing away, unable to control their urge.

We always think that addiction is something that happens to someone else and that we could quit anytime. Right? In reality, it's hard. As an example, only 25 percent of teen tobacco users who try to quit are successful. I like what Mark Twain said about how easy it was for him to quit smoking: "I've done it a hundred times."

Here's a story of the struggle one teenage guy went through to overcome his drug addiction:

The first time I used any kind of drug or alcohol was when I was fourteen. I didn't even know what drugs were. I really didn't care. Everyone just told me how bad they were. My friend said, "Here, take this. It's pretty cool." So I took it. When I started, I wanted to be cool. After that, it wasn't peer pressure anymore. It was just me.

I started doing drugs and drinking more and more and my schoolwork started slipping. My relationships started to decrease. I was losing touch with my family, and I hated that. My attitude toward things turned around, you know—just a lot of negativity. I also started to see my girlfriend less.

Right after I started drinking and drugging, I noticed some physical problems, too. I felt real tired all the time. I also lost a lot of weight, about thirty pounds in two months.

The other thing was that I would go home and run out of toothpaste or something like that, and I'd cry. I was overreacting big time. My temper was really short.

About a month after my seventeenth birthday, I got caught with drugs in school. They suspended me for a week, and I knew that was the time I needed to get myself back together. So I tried to stop, but I couldn't. It's like when you smoke cigarettes. You can put one down and say you're going to quit, you're going to quit, but it is real hard to stop.

So I stopped hanging around my old friends and started going to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings and I got a sponsor. AA is a life-long thing. You take one drink and it messes up everything you had built up to that point. A lot of my friends who came to AA have relapsed. But my sponsor really helped me out. Without this program, I know I wouldn't have stopped.

Since I've been in this program, it's been the greatest life. I don't drink. I don't drug. My schoolwork is going back up. My family is closer than ever now. Before, I worked at almost every fast-food place there is in town because I'd quit within two weeks at each one. Now, I've had just one job for about two months. I came back to school and I started to care. I was nice to people even when they weren't nice to me. I've totally changed my life around. I'm starting to think about college and doing all these things I would never think of before. It's real confusing to me why anyone would spend their high school years drinking. It's a scary life.

● THE REFUSAL SKILL™

Staying away from drugs of all kinds is a lot easier said than done. Here are *The Refusal Skill*™* steps that you might want to consider the next time you feel pressured to drink, smoke, or do drugs, and don't really want to.

1. *Ask questions.* Ask tough questions that really make you think about what you're doing.

"Why would I want to smoke?"

"What will happen to me if I get stoned tonight?"

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2. Name the trouble. Try to put a face on what you're doing.
 "Smoking pot is illegal."
 "Smoking will ruin my breath."

3. State the consequences. Think through the consequences of your actions.

"I could get arrested if I'm caught with drugs."
 "If I get wasted tonight, someone might take advantage of me."

4. Suggest an alternative. Have your own list of fun alternatives ready to go whenever you're being lured in.

"Hey, why don't we go see a movie?"
 "I'd rather play basketball."

5. Take off. If you get caught in a situation that just doesn't look good, don't worry about what everyone might think of you, just get away ... fast.

"Sorry, everyone. But I'm out of here."

If you're creative enough, you'll be able to develop your own approach to avoiding the entire scene, as Jim did:

My friends and I just didn't want all that trouble that came from drinking and doing drugs, so we formed a group. We were about ten people who were committed to helping our friends stay out of trouble. We hung out a lot together, and weekly would go to pasta dinners and plan how we could support each other. The support mostly came in the form of talking to others when we saw them being tempted or floundering, and assuring them that they really didn't need to do those things to be cool, and then inviting them to come join us in our fun instead. It worked and really was very powerful.

Believe me, you're not missing out on anything if you stay away from this stuff. "Life itself," said TV chef Julia Child, "is the proper binge." You don't need to even experiment. The short-term bang is never worth the long-term devastation that often follows. If you don't smoke, drink, or do drugs, why even start? If you do, why not get help and quit? There are much better and more natural ways to get high. Why not give them a try? (See Info Central in the back of the book for more information.)



Caring for Your Brain



Once heard a folklore story about a young man who came to Socrates, the great wise man, and said, "I want to know everything you know."

"If this is your desire," said Socrates, "then follow me to the river." Full of curiosity, the young man followed Socrates to the nearby river. As they sat on the bank, Socrates said, "Take a close look at the river and tell me what you see."

"I don't see anything," said the man.

"Look closer," replied Socrates.

As the man peered over the bank and leaned closer to the water, Socrates grabbed the man's head and shoved it under the water. The man's arms flailed wildly as he attempted to escape, but Socrates' strong grip kept him submerged. About the time the man was about to drown, Socrates pulled him from the river and laid him on the bank.

Coughing, the man gasped, "Are you crazy, old man? What are you trying to do, kill me?"

"When I was holding you under the river, what did you want more than anything else?" asked Socrates.

"I wanted to breathe. I wanted air!" he replied.

"Don't ever make the mistake of thinking wisdom comes so easily, my young friend," said Socrates. "When you want to learn as badly as you wanted air just now, then come to me again."

The point here is clear. Nothing in life comes easy. You have to pay the price! Everyone has to pay the price. Write that down. Memorize it. Underline it. I don't care what people say, there are no free lunches!

What a naive young man to think that he could gain a lifetime of learning without paying the price. But are we any less naive when we

THAT SOCRATES
SURE HAS A WAY
WITH KIDS!

think that we can secure a good job and a promising future if we haven't paid the price to develop a strong mind?

In fact, getting a good education may just be the most important price you can pay—because, perhaps more than anything else, what you do with that mass of gray material between your ears will determine your future. In fact, unless you want to be flipping burgers and living with your parents when you're thirty years old, you'd better start paying the price now.

The mental dimension of Habit 7, Sharpen the Saw, means developing brain power through your schooling, extracurricular activities, hobbies, jobs, and other mind-enlarging experiences.

The Key to Unlocking Your Future

I once asked a group of teenagers in a survey “What are your fears?” I was surprised by how many spoke about the stress of doing well in school, going to college, and getting a good job in the future. Said one, “What can we do to be certain that we can get a job and support ourselves?” The answer is really rather simple. You could try to win the lottery. Your chances of doing that are about 1 in 1,000,000. Or you could develop an educated mind. By far, this offers your best chance of securing a good job and making a life for yourself.

What's an educated mind? It's much more than a diploma on a wall, even though that's an important part of it. A better definition is: An educated mind is like a well-conditioned ballerina. A ballerina has perfect control over her muscles. Her body will bend, twist, jump, and turn perfectly, according to her command. Similarly, an educated mind can focus, synthesize, write, speak, create, analyze, explore, imagine, and so much more. To do that, however, it must be trained. It won't just happen.

I'd suggest you get as much education as you can. Any further education beyond high school—a college degree, vocational or technical training, an apprenticeship, or training in any of the armed forces—will be well worth your time and money. See it as an investment in your future. Statistics have shown that a college graduate earns about twice as much as a high school graduate. And the gap



seems to be widening. Don't let a lack of money be the reason you don't get more education. "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance," said Derek Bok, a former president of Harvard University. Even if you have to sacrifice and work your tail off to pay for your education, it's well worth it. You'd also be amazed at the number of scholarships, grants, loans, and student-aid options that are available if you search them out. In fact, millions of dollars of grant and scholarship money goes unclaimed each year because no one bothered to apply for it. (Refer to the back of the book for more information on grants and scholarships.)

● SHARPEN YOUR MIND

There are numerous ways to expand your mind. However, the best approach may simply be to read. As the saying goes, reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. Reading is foundational to everything else and doesn't cost that much, unlike other methods, such as traveling. The following are twenty possible ways to sharpen your mind. I'm sure you can come up with another fifty if you try.

- Read a newspaper every day
- Subscribe to *National Geographic*
- Travel
- Plant a garden
- Observe wildlife
- Attend a lecture on an interesting topic
- Watch the Discovery Channel
- Visit a library
- Listen to the news
- Research your ancestors
- Write a story, poem, or song
- Play challenging board games
- Debate
- Play a game of chess
- Visit a museum
- Comment in class
- Attend a ballet, opera, or play
- Learn to play a musical instrument
- Have stimulating conversations with friends
- Solve crossword puzzles

● FIND YOUR NICHE

While you may need to endure some subjects you don't enjoy at school, find the subjects you do enjoy and build upon them. Take additional classes, check out books, and see movies about the topic. Don't let school be your only form of education. Let the world be your campus.



You should expect to have some trouble in some classes. Unless you're an Einstein, every subject won't be easy for you. Actually, I take back what I just said. The famous Albert Einstein actually failed math and was thought a fool for years.

If you ever get discouraged by school, please don't drop out. (You'll live to regret it.) Just keep plugging away. You're bound to eventually find something you enjoy about it or something you can excel at.

I once interviewed a heavily right-brained kid named Chris who shared how long it took him to fit in at school and find his niche:

Up until I went to school I was a happy child. Then kids found out that learning was difficult for me and they would point and call me names. I was slow at math, English, and grammar. I remember sitting in class one day, divided up into groups, when a girl in my group stood up and said, "I'm not going to work with that retard," pointing to me. It made me feel terrible.

Through grade school and middle school, I could hardly read. A professional came to our home one day and after putting me through a number of tests told my mother that I would never be able to read. My mother was so angry that she told him to leave the house.

Years later, as a new high school student, I picked up a science fiction book one day, and to my surprise it was suddenly easy to read. The stories in the book stimulated my imagination and then the words weren't words anymore but became pictures in my head. I read all the subsequent volumes and then I started to read other books and really got excited about reading and learning. I gained a big vocabulary. I started speaking better and using larger words.

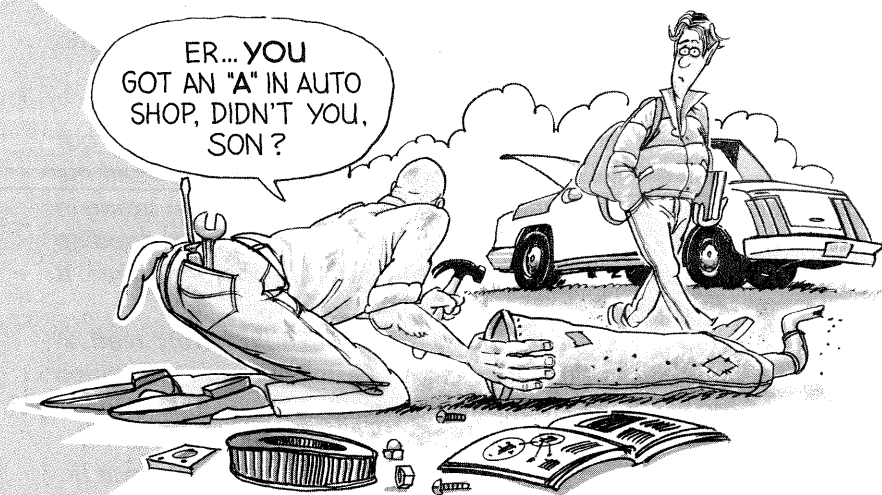
It was about at this time that I began to excel at the arts. I learned that I have an incredible eye for shapes and color. I've become gifted with watercolor, oil, painting, drawing, and design. I can also write well. I write about my experiences. I write poetry. Toward the end of high school, I won a lot of art gallery shows and gained a lot of confidence.

● DON'T LET SCHOOL GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR EDUCATION

Grades are important, especially because they lead to future job and education options. But there is so much more to an education than grades.

My family is composed of a bunch of technical incompetents. I blame the bad gene on my dad. Several times I've seen him in "tech-

nically challenging” situations, like when he lifts up the hood of the car (as if he could actually fix something) or when he attempts to change a light bulb. I’ve watched how, in these tough situations, his brain literally shuts down and ceases to function. It’s a phenomenon! Being the proactive person that I am, I decided I wanted to overcome my inherited weakness and so I signed up for an auto mechanics class during my senior year of high school. I was going to learn how to do an oil change if it killed me.



Believe it or not, I got an A in that class. But I’m ashamed to admit that I hardly learned a thing. You see, instead of really paying the price to learn, I did a lot of watching and not a lot of doing. I never did my assignments. And I crammed for all the tests, only to forget what I had learned two hours after taking them. I got the grade, but I failed to get an education.

Although grades are important, becoming truly educated is more important, so make sure you don’t forget why you’re going to school.

Over the years, I’ve seen so many people sacrifice their educations for so many stupid reasons, like thinking they don’t need an education, or becoming obsessed with a part-time job, a girlfriend, a car, or a rock group.

I’ve also seen many athletes sacrifice their education on the altar of sports. I’ve often been tempted to write letters to young athletes who become so sports-centered that they completely trash school. In fact, I actually wrote one, to an imaginary athlete. Though written to an athlete, it could apply to anyone who couldn’t care less about developing their mind.

A LETTER TO AN

UNKNOWN
ATHLETE

Dear _____:

I'm a big believer in the benefits of athletics. However, after visiting with you, I am shocked to learn about your attitude toward school.

You say you're banking on a pro career and don't feel the need for an education. I say your chances of making the pros are about as good as my dad's chances of growing his hair back. "A youngster gambling his future on a pro contract is like a worker buying a single Irish Sweepstakes ticket and then quitting his job in anticipation of his winnings." Senator Bill Bradley, a former NBA star, said that. Studies have shown that only one out of every one hundred high school athletes will play Division I college sports, and that the chances of a high school player making the pros are one in ten thousand.

Of the hundreds of college athletes I played with in college who hoped to make the pros, I can think of only a handful who made it. On the other hand, I can think of many who wasted their minds in the name of sports, and who were then thrown into the workforce without a chance or a clue.

I'll never forget the time one of my teammates delivered a psyche-up speech to our team the night before we played a rival university. Having neglected his education and having never learned to express himself, all he could do was uncork a barrage of vulgarities that could have cut down a forest. In a matter of three minutes it seemed he managed to use the f-word as a noun, a verb, an adjective, a pronoun, a conjunction, and a dangling participle. I left that meeting thinking, "Man, get a brain!"

Open your eyes! Your education is the key to unlocking your future.

You say you don't like school. I say, What does that have to do with it? Does anything good in life come easy? Do you like working out every day? Does a medical student enjoy studying for four years? Since when does liking something

determine whether or not you should do it? Sometimes you just have to discipline yourself to do things you don't feel like doing because of what you hope to gain from it.

You say that you try to sit down and study but can't because your mind begins to wander. I say that unless you learn to control your mind you won't amount to squat. The discipline of the mind is a much higher form of discipline than that of the body. It is one thing to train your body to perform at peak levels; it is quite another to control your thoughts, to concentrate for sustained periods, to synthesize, and to think creatively and analytically.

At times saying "I try" is a lame excuse. Imagine how absurd it would sound if I asked you, "Are you going to eat today or are you going to try to eat?" Just discipline yourself to do the thing.

You say you can get by without studying, that by cramming and finding ways to beat the system you can pull out passing grades. I say you reap what you sow. Can the farmer cram? Can he forget to plant his crops in the spring, loaf all summer long, and then work real hard in the fall to bring in the harvest? Can you improve your bench press by lifting weights once in a while? Your brain is no different than your bicep. To improve the strength, speed, and endurance of your mind, you must work it out. There are no shortcuts. Don't expect to show up one day in the Land of Oz and have the Wizard hand you a brain.

Imagine five sets of hands. One set belongs to a concert pianist who can enthral audiences with beautiful renditions of the classics. Another to an eye surgeon who can restore lost vision through microscopic surgery. Another to a professional golfer who consistently makes the clutch shot under pressure. Another to a blind man who can read tiny raised markings on a page at incredible speeds. Another to an artist who can carve beautiful sculptures that inspire the soul. On the surface, the hands may all look the same, but behind each set are years and years of sacrifice, discipline, and perseverance. These people paid a price! Do you think they crammed? Did they beat the system?

One of my biggest regrets in life is that instead of reading 100 novels during high school, I read a bunch of Cliff Notes

summaries. In contrast, I have a friend who during his teen years must have read hundreds of books. His brain can bench-press over four hundred pounds. Why, I would cut off one ... no, two toes for such a brain.

If you don't pay the price you will earn a degree but fail to get an education. And there is a big difference between the two. Some of our best thinkers were degreeless, self-educated men and women. How did they do it? They read. It's only the single greatest habit you could ever develop. Yet few do it regularly. And many stop reading and learning when they finish school. That spells brain atrophy. Education must be a lifelong pursuit. The person who doesn't read is no better off than the person who can't.

You say you live for today and don't think about the future. I say the major difference between you and your dog is that you can think about tomorrow and he can't. Don't make long-term career decisions based on short-term emotions, like the student who chooses his or her major based on the shortest registration line. Develop a future orientation; make decisions with the end in mind. To have a good job tomorrow, you must do your homework tonight.

The Proverb sums up the whole matter: "Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life."

You seem to be saying you don't need a brain. I say, get one!

I hope I haven't offended you. I mean well. It's just that ten years from now, I don't want you to find yourself singing, as did our friend the Scarecrow:

*I would not be just a nothin',
My head all full of stuffin',
... If I only had a brain.*

Think about it,



SEAN

● POST-HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

Don't get too worried about your major or area of focus in school. If you can simply learn to think well, you will have plenty of career and education options to choose from. Admissions offices and companies that are hiring don't care so much about what you majored in. They want to see evidence that you have a sound mind. They will be looking at several different areas:

1. *Desire*—How badly do you want to get into this particular school or program? How much do you want this job?

2. *Standardized test scores*—How well did you score on your ACT, SAT, GRE, LSAT, etc.?

3. *Extracurricular*—What other activities (sports, outside work, clubs, student government, church, community, etc.) were you involved in?

4. *Letters of recommendation*—What do other people think of you?

5. *Grade point average*—How well did you do in school?

6. *Communication skills*—How well can you communicate in writing (based on your application essays) and verbally (based on an interview)?



If you can simply learn to think well, you will have plenty of career and education options to choose from.

Most important, they just want to see evidence that you will succeed at the next level. If your GPA and standardized test scores are lower than you would like, don't feel like you have to settle for second best. You can still get admitted to great programs or get an A1 job if you're strong in other areas.

Also, don't be scared off by rumors about how hard it is to get into college or other schools. It's usually not as hard as you might think if you're willing to put some effort into your application. However, it will be harder than the following college entrance exam would lead you to believe. (Hey, since I was a football player, I have the right to poke fun at myself.)

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAM*(Adapted for Football Players)*

1. What language is spoken in France?

2. Would you ask William Shakespeare to
 - build a bridge
 - sail the ocean
 - lead an army
 - WRITE A PLAY
3. What religion is the pope?
 - Jewish
 - Catholic
 - Hindu
 - Polish
 - Agnostic
4. What are the people in America's far north called?
 - Westerners
 - Southerners
 - Northerners
5. Six kings of England have been called George, the last one being George the Sixth. Name the previous five.

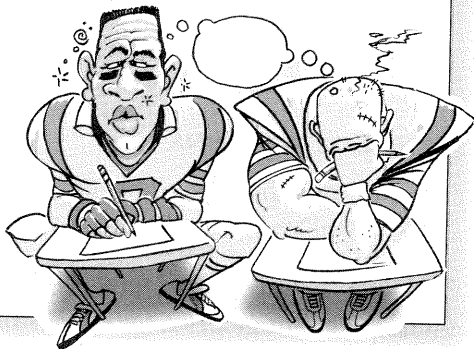
6. How many commandments was Moses given (approximately)?

7. Can you explain Einstein's Theory of Relativity?
 - yes
 - no
8. What are coat hangers used for?

9. Explain Le Chatelier's Principle of Dynamic Equilibrium or spell your name in CAPITAL LETTERS.

10. Advanced math: If you have three apples, how many apples do you have?

You must correctly answer three or more questions to qualify.



● MENTAL BARRIERS

As you attempt to build a brain, you will need to overcome a few barriers. Here are three to consider:

Screen time. Screen time is any time spent in front of a screen, like a TV, computer, video game, or movie screen. *Some* time can be healthy, but *too much* time chatting on the Web, playing video games, or watching TV can numb your mind. Did you know that the average teen watches over twenty hours of TV a week? That equates to forty-three days each year and a total of eight years over a lifetime. Good thing you're not average! Just think what you could do with those forty-three days annually if you were to spend them doing something productive like studying French, ballroom dancing, or computer programming.

Set guidelines for yourself regarding screen time, and don't let it get out of hand. Or try losing your remote control. That works too.

The Nerd Syndrome. Interestingly, some teens don't want to do too well in school because others might think they're too studious (nerds), and studious isn't cool. I've also heard girls tell me that they don't want to come across as "brains" because it intimidates guys. What will we think of next, for crying out loud?! If having a mind intimidates someone, that probably tells you something about their own lack of neurons. Take pride in your mental abilities and the fact that you value education. I, for one, know a lot of wealthy and successful people who were once considered nerds.

Pressure. Sometimes we're scared of doing well in school because of the high expectations it creates. If we bring home a good report card and get praised for it, we've suddenly established the expectation that we'll do it again and again. And the pressure builds. If we do poorly, there's no expectation and no pressure.

Just remember this: The stress that results from success is much more tolerable than the regret that results from not trying your best. Don't sweat the pressure. You can deal with it.

● YOU GOTTA WANNA

In the end, the key to honing your mind will be your desire to learn. You've gotta really want it. You've gotta get turned on by learning. You've gotta pay the price. The following story is an example of someone who had an irresistible drive for learning and who paid a huge price for the simple joy of reading. Reading to this person was "air."

The kitchen door opened—and I was caught, cold. It was too late to hide the evidence; the proof was in the open, plain as could be, right there in my lap. My father, drunk, his face flushed, reeled before me, glowering, menacing. My legs started to tremble. I was nine years old. I knew I would be beaten. There could be no escape; my father had found me reading ...

An alcoholic like his parents before him, my father had hit me before, many times and harder, and in the years that followed he would hit me again, many times and harder, until finally I quit high school at sixteen and left home. His persistent rage about my reading when I was a boy, though, frustrated me more than all other abuse; it made me feel squeezed in the jaws of a terrible vise, because I would not, I could not, stop reading. I was drawn to books by curiosity and driven by need—an irresistible need to pretend I was elsewhere ... Thus I defied my father—and, as I've recalled here, sometimes I paid a price for that defiance. It was worth it.

This account was written by Walter Anderson in his book *Read with Me*. Walter is now a successful editor, serves on the boards of many literacy organizations, and is the author of four books. Walter goes on to write:

When I was a child, I lived in a violent household, in a violent neighborhood. But there was a place that I could go—a library—and all the librarians did was encourage me to read. I could open a book, and I could be anywhere. I could do anything. I could imagine myself out of a slum. I read myself out of poverty long before I worked myself out of poverty.

In the back of the book, I have compiled a list of fifty great books for teens. Take a look.

If you haven't paid the price to educate yourself so far, it's never too late to start. If you can learn to think well, the future will be an open door of opportunity. It's all about brain waves. Get some.

EXERCISE YOUR MIND..

READ READ READ READ READ READ

Caring for Your Heart



Late one afternoon there came a knock at the door.

"Who could that be?"

I opened the door and there stood my nineteen-year-old younger sister, heaving and sobbing.

"What's wrong?" I asked, leading her in, although I knew exactly what was wrong. This was the third sob-episode that month.

"He is so rude," she sniveled, wiping her red, swollen eyes. "I can't believe he did that to me. It was so mean."

"What did he do this time?" I asked. I had heard some pretty good ones and couldn't wait to hear if this one was any better.

"Well ... you know, he asked me to come over to his house to study," she whimpered. "And while we were studying some other girls came to visit him. And he acted like he didn't even know me."

"I wouldn't worry about it," I said wisely. "I used to do that kind of thing all the time."

"But I've been dating him for two years," she blubbered. "And when they asked him who I was, he told them that I was his sister."

Ouch!

She was devastated. But I knew that in just a matter of hours or days she'd be thinking he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. Sure enough, a few days later she was crazy about him all over again.

Do you ever feel that, like my sister, you're riding an emotional roller coaster, up one day and down the next? Do you ever feel that you're the moodiest person in the world and that you can't control your emotions? If you do, then welcome to the

club, because those feelings are pretty normal for teens. You see, your heart is a very temperamental thing. And it needs constant nourishment and care, just like your body.

The best way to sharpen the saw and nourish your heart is to focus on building relationships, or in other words, to make regular deposits into your relationship bank accounts and into your own personal bank account. Let's review what those deposits are.



Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.

MOTHER TERESA

RBA (Relationship Bank Account) Deposits

- Keep promises
- Do small acts of kindness
- Be loyal
- Listen
- Say you're sorry
- Set clear expectations

PBA (Personal Bank Account) Deposits

- Keep promises to yourself
- Do small acts of kindness
- Be gentle with yourself
- Be honest
- Renew yourself
- Tap into your talents



As you might have noticed, PBA and RBA deposits are very similar. That's because deposits you make into other people's accounts usually end up in your own as well.

As you set out each day, look for opportunities to make deposits and build lasting friendships. Listen deeply to a friend, parent, brother, or sister without expecting anything in return. Give out ten compliments today. Stick up for someone. Come home when you told your parents you'd be home.

I like how Mother Teresa put it: "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile." If you approach life this way, always looking for ways to build instead of tear down, you'll be amazed at how much happiness you can give to others and find for yourself.

As you think about caring for your heart, here are a few other points to consider.

● **SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS**

Said one young girl, "I don't care what kind of relationship you are in or how devout you are ... sex is always in the air. No matter if you are sitting in the car alone with that person or at home watching TV—the question hangs in the air."

Sex is about a whole lot more than your body. It's also about your heart. In fact, what you do about sex may affect your self-image and your relationships with others more than any other deci-

sion you make. Before you decide to have sex or to continue having it, search your heart and think about it ... carefully. The following excerpt from a pamphlet, published by Journeyworks Publishing, should help.

Think you're ready to go all the way? Are you sure? Sexually transmitted infections, unplanned pregnancy, and emotional doubts are all good reasons to wait! Before you go too far, take a look at this list. Or make up your own ways to finish the sentence:

You're not ready to have sex if ...

1. You think sex equals love.
2. You feel pressured.
3. You're afraid to say no.
4. It's just easier to give in.
5. You think everyone else is doing it. (They're not!)
6. Your instincts tell you not to.
7. You don't know the facts about pregnancy.
8. You don't understand how birth control works.
9. You don't think a woman can get pregnant the first time. (She can.)
10. It goes against your moral beliefs.
11. It goes against your religious beliefs.
12. You'll regret it in the morning.
13. You feel embarrassed or ashamed.
14. You're doing it to prove something.
15. You can't support a child.
16. You can't support yourself.
17. Your idea of commitment is a 3-day video rental.
18. You believe sex before marriage is wrong.
19. You don't know how to protect yourself from HIV—the virus that causes AIDS.
20. You don't know the signs and symptoms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs, also called STDs).
21. You think it will make your partner love you.
22. You think it will make you love your partner.
23. You think it will keep you together.
24. You hope it will change your life.
25. You don't want it to change your life.



26. You're not ready for the relationship to change.
27. You're drunk.
28. You wish you were drunk.
29. Your partner is drunk.
30. You expect it to be perfect.
31. You'll just die if it's not perfect.
32. You can't laugh together about awkward elbows and clumsy clothes.
33. You're not ready to take off your clothes.
34. You think HIV and AIDS only happen to other people.
35. You think you can tell who has HIV by looking at them.
36. You don't think teens get HIV. (They do.)
37. You don't know that abstinence is the only 100% protection against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.
38. You haven't talked about tomorrow.
39. You can't face the thought of tomorrow.
40. You'd be horrified if your parents found out.
41. You're doing it just so your parents will find out.
42. You're too scared to think clearly.
43. You think it will make you more popular.
44. You think you "owe it" to your partner.
45. You think it's not OK to be a virgin.
46. You're only thinking about yourself.
47. You're not thinking about yourself.
48. You can't wait to tell everyone about it.
49. You hope no one will hear about it.
50. You really wish the whole thing had never come up.

It's OK to Wait.

Excerpted from *You're Not Ready to Have Sex If ...* Copyright 1996 Journeyworks Publishing, Santa Cruz, CA. Reprinted with permission.

You're Gonna Make It

It's totally normal to feel depressed at times. But there is a big difference between a case of the blues and sustained depression. If life has become a real pain for a long period of time and you can't seem to shake off that feeling of hopelessness, things are serious. Fortunately, depression is treatable. Don't hesitate to get help, either from medication or from talking with someone who is trained to deal with these issues.

If you are having thoughts of suicide, please listen closely to what I'm saying. Hold on for dear life. You're gonna make it. Life will get

better ... I promise. You are worth millions and you are needed. Bad times will pass ... they always do. Someday you will look back on your situation and be glad you held on, as was the case with this young lady:

I am one of the many young people who comes from a wonderful home and really don't have any reason to have gotten into trouble. But I did. Friends became very important to me in junior high and high school, and home life seemed very boring. I couldn't wait to get out of there every day just to be with my buddies and hang out. Within two years I probably tried every vice in the book, and it didn't make me feel any better. On the contrary.

I began having trouble even coming home. It was almost too painful to walk into that sunny, peaceful house with aromas of good cooking. They all seemed so darn good and perfect, and I felt like I couldn't fulfill their expectations. I somehow didn't fit in. I was not living a life they were proud of, and I would just make them unhappy. I began to wish I was dead. Then the thought led to actual suicide attempts.

I kept a journal and it really scares me today to see how close I came to ending it all. Today, just a few years later, I am in college getting straight A's, I have a happy social life, I have a boyfriend who loves me very much, and I have a great relationship with my family. I have so many plans, so many things I am going to do. I love life, I have so much to live for, I cannot believe that I ever felt different, but I did. It took several serious wake-up calls to make me realize that I could be different. Thank heavens I'm still here.

Remember that the struggles you are now facing will eventually become a great source of strength for you. As the philosopher Kahlil Gibran wrote: "That self-same well from which our laughter rises was often times filled with our tears. The deeper that sorrow carries into our being, the more joy it can contain." (Please refer to the hot-lines and Web sites in the back of this book if you need help.)

● LAUGH OR YOU'LL CRY

After all is said and done, there is one last key to keeping your heart healthy and strong. Just laugh. That's right ... laugh. *Hakuna matata!* Don't worry, be happy! Sometimes life just stinks and there's not much you can do to change it, so you might as well laugh.

It's too bad that as we age we tend to forget what made childhood so magical. One study showed that by the time you reach kindergarten, you laugh about 300 times a day. In contrast, the typical adult laughs a wimpy seventeen times a day. No wonder chil-

dren are so much happier! Why are we so serious? Maybe it's because we've been taught that laughing too much is childish. To quote the great Jedi master, Yoda, "You must unlearn what you have learned." We must learn to laugh again.

I read the most fascinating article by Peter Daskoch about the power of humor in *Psychology Today*. These were some of his key findings:

Laughter:

- Loosens up the mental gears and helps us think more creatively
- Helps us cope with the difficulties of life
- Reduces stress levels
- Relaxes us as it lowers our heart rate and blood pressure
- Connects us with others and counteracts feelings of alienation, a major factor in depression and suicide
- Releases endorphins, the brain's natural painkillers



Laughter has also been shown to promote good health and speed healing. I've heard several accounts of people who healed themselves from serious sickness through heavy doses of laughing therapy. Laughter can also help heal injured relationships. As entertainer Victor Borge put it, "Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."

If you're not laughing much, what can you do to start again? I suggest developing your own "humor collection," a collection of books, cartoons, videos, ideas—whatever is funny to you. Then, whenever you're feeling down, or taking yourself way too seriously, visit your collection. For example, I like stupid movies. There are a few actors who make me laugh just at the thought of them. I have bought many of their low-budget movies and watch them whenever I need to "lighten up." Similarly, my brother Stephen has one of the largest collections of *The Far Side* cartoons ever known to man. He claims that these cartoons have kept him from going insane during high-stress periods.

Learn to laugh at yourself when strange or stupid things happen to you, because they will. As someone once said, "One of the best things people can have up their sleeve is a good funny bone."

Caring for Your Soul



What is it that moves your soul? A great movie? A good book? Have you ever seen a movie that made you cry? What was it that got to you?

What deeply inspires you? Does music? Art? Being in nature?

By soul, I mean that inner self that lurks far below the surface of your everyday self. Your soul is your center, wherein lie your deepest convictions and values. It is the source for purpose, meaning, and inner peace. Sharpening the saw in the spiritual area of life means taking time to renew and awaken that inner self. As the famous author Pearl S. Buck wrote, "Inside myself is a place where I live all alone and that's where you renew your springs that never dry up."

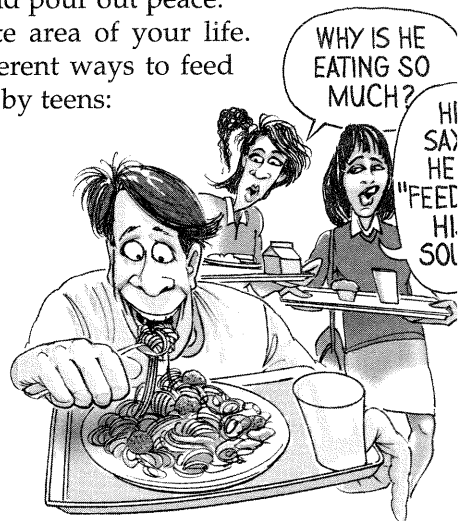
How to Feed Your Soul

As a teenager, I got strength from writing in my journal, listening to good music, and spending time alone in the mountains. This was my way of renewing my soul, although I didn't think of it that way at the time. I also got strength from inspiring quotes, such as this one by past U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Taft Benson:

"Men and women who turn their lives over to God will find out that He can make a lot more out of their lives than they can. He will deepen their joys, expand their vision, quicken their minds, strengthen their muscles, lift their spirits, multiply their blessings, increase their opportunities, and pour out peace."

Your soul is a very private area of your life. Naturally, there are many different ways to feed it. Here are a few ideas shared by teens:

- Meditating
- Serving others
- Writing in my journal
- Going for a walk
- Reading inspiring books
- Drawing
- Praying
- Writing poetry or music
- Thinking deeply



- Listening to uplifting music
- Playing a musical instrument
- Practicing a religion
- Talking to friends I can be myself with
- Reflecting on my goals or mission statement

Here are a couple of soul-nourishing techniques to especially consider.

● **GETTING BACK TO NATURE**

There is something magical about getting into nature that just can't be matched. Even if you live in a downtown area far removed from rivers, mountains, or beaches, there will usually be a park nearby that you can visit. I once interviewed a young man named Ryan who learned about the healing powers of Mother Nature in the midst of a really messed up home life.

At one point during high school, I went through a dark period where it seemed that everything just caved in. That's when I found the river hole. It was just a bank off in some trees in the back of an old farmer's place and didn't look like much. But it became my escape. There was no one around, you couldn't hear people. It was beautiful. Just swimming around made me feel at peace with nature. Anytime I was stressed out I'd go there. It was like my life could come back to normal.

Some people turn to organized religion for direction, but it's been hard for me to turn to religion. I do have a religion and I'm strong in it. But sometimes it's just hard for me to get up and go to church, because I go and everyone says, "Oh, just be happy. It will all work out. Just have faith. Things will work out with your family." I just think that's bull. C'mon. Families don't always work out. My family's all messed up.

But by going to the river, that place didn't judge me. That place didn't tell me what to do. It was just there. And by following its example, the peacefulness and the serenity that existed there, that's all I needed to calm things down. It made me feel like everything was going to work out.

● **A TEEN'S BEST FRIEND**

Like getting into nature, keeping a journal can do wonders for your soul. It can become your solace, your best friend, the only place where you can fully express yourself no matter how angry, happy, scared, love crazed, insecure, or confused you feel. You can pour your heart out in your journal and it will just sit there and listen. It

won't talk back. And it won't talk behind your back. Writing down your unedited thoughts can clear your mind, boost your confidence, and help you find yourself.

Keeping a journal will also strengthen your tool of self-awareness. It's fun and enlightening to read past entries and realize how much you've grown, how stupid and immature you once sounded, or how caught up you were with some boy or girl. One girl told me about how reading her old journal entries gave her the insight to keep from returning to her former abusive boyfriend.

There is no formal way to keep a journal. Feel free to paste in mementos, ticket stubs, love notes, and anything else that will preserve a memory. My old journals are full of poor art, bad poetry, and strange smells.

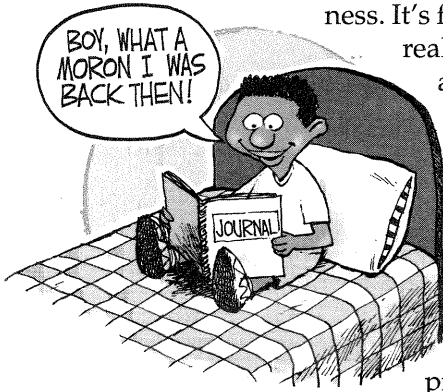
A journal is just a formal name for putting your thoughts down on paper. There are other names and forms. Allison writes little notes to herself that she keeps in a special box she calls her sacred box. Kaire renews herself by keeping a "gratitude book":

I have a book that helps me to be more positive in life. I call it my gratitude book. In this book, I write down something I'm grateful for or something positive that happened to me during the day. This book has changed my life and totally put things into perspective, because I try to pick out all the good things that happen and not the bad. This is not like a journal where you write what happens, both good and bad. I still keep a journal, but this is different. I have a page of my favorite songs, favorite touches (brother's hug), favorite sounds (Mom's laugh), favorite feels (cool breeze), and so on. I also write down small things like, "Brian offered to clear the table for me," or "John went out of his way to say hello to me today." These things make you feel good. I look back at this book and remember these good things and the bad things are forgotten, erased and gone. They can't affect me anymore.

I've given a book to others and they say it has really helped them. It's my way of saying, "You're the only one who can make you happy—no one else can."

☪ YOUR SPIRITUAL DIET

I've often wondered what would happen to someone who drank and ate only soft drinks and chocolate for several years straight.



What would they look and feel like after a while? Probably like scum. But why do we think the result would be any different if we fed our souls trash for several years straight? You're not only what you eat, you're also what you listen to, read, and see. More important than what goes into your body is what goes into your soul.

So what is your spiritual diet? Are you feeding your soul nutrients, or are you loading it with nuclear waste? What kind of media do you allow yourself to take in? Have you ever even thought about it?

You see, we swim in a world of media and don't even know it. Try going "media-free" for just one day and you'll see what I mean—one day without listening to any music, watching any TV or videos, reading any books or magazines, surfing the Web, or reading a billboard (that's media too). You'll find it's virtually impossible, and you may even develop severe withdrawal pains.

Take music, for example. Studies show that the average teen listens to four hours of music a day. That's a lot of tunes! When you wake up in the morning, what do you do? You turn on your radio or stereo. Then you jump into your car and what do you do? You get angry with your parents, run to your room, and what do you do? Can you imagine watching a commercial, TV program, or movie that isn't accompanied by music?

Now, if you think the media doesn't affect you, just think about your favorite song and what it does to your emotions. Or think about the last time you saw half-naked members of the opposite sex wiggling all over the screen or pictured on the page. Or think back to the last bottle of shampoo you bought. Why did you buy it? Probably because of the influence of a thirty-second TV commercial or a one-page magazine ad. And if a one-page ad can sell a bottle of shampoo, don't you think a full-length movie, magazine, or CD can sell a lifestyle?

Like most things, there is a light and a dark side to the media. And you need to choose what you're going to allow in. My only suggestion is to follow your conscience and to treat your soul with the same respect that an Olympic athlete would treat his or her body. For example, if the music you listen to or the movies you watch make you feel depressed, angry, dark, violent, or like you're in heat, then guess what? That's probably a sign that they're trash, and you don't need trash. On the other hand, if they make you feel relaxed, happy, inspired, hopeful, or peaceful, then keep taking them. You'll eventually become what you view, hear, and read, so continually ask yourself the question "Do I want this to be part of me?"

● YOU'RE DISTURBING MY SLEEP

I ran across a letter from the YO! (Youth Outlook) Web site written by a girl named Ladie Terry who was fed up with all the trash on music television. She addressed the letter to "the sisters who like to grind their way across my TV screen." By permission, I've included parts of it here.

I guess it's exciting being in a music video. But do you know how you are affecting the minds and lives of your sisters? Do you think about the younger sisters, who learn fast and emulate you? Have you noticed the 12- and 13-year-olds dolled up to look like 20-year-olds? Or are times so hard that you don't care who you hurt?

I used to argue with my ex-boyfriend about watching BET and MTV, because the majority of the videos consisted of not-even-half-naked girls wiggling and jigging like a bowl of Jell-O ... it hurt me to see my ex-boyfriend in a daze with his eyes moving up and down ...

My neighbor used to tell me when she would watch music videos with her boyfriend he would say to her, "That's how your body should look." Another friend, who is 16, says boys ask her, "Why can't you dance like that?"

Why are you on TV in tight, short clothing, moving your bodies around like you are freaks? ... You sisters are very, very beautiful. You don't have to undress for success, or to get some attention. You want brothers to respect you? Show them why they should through your elegant, conservative dress—then back up your reasoning with your words. The way you dress tells people what is on your mind ... when you upgrade your appearance and your mind set, a lot of brothers will upgrade their treatment of you.

So stop competing to see who is freakier than the next, and get your mind out of the bedroom, because you are disturbing my sleep.



● FRIED FROGS

Addictions of all kinds—whether it's to drugs, gossiping, shopping, overeating, or gambling—have common characteristics.

Addiction:

- Creates short-term pleasure
- Becomes the primary focus of your life
- Temporarily eliminates pain
- Gives an artificial sense of self-worth, power, control, security, and intimacy
- Worsens the problems and feelings you are trying to escape from

One of the more subtle but dangerous addictions is pornography, and it's available everywhere. Now, you can argue all you want about what pornography is and isn't, but I think that deep in your heart you know. Pornography may taste sweet for the moment, but it will gradually dull your finer sensitivities, like that inner voice called your conscience, until it's smothered.

You may be thinking, "Take it easy, Sean. A little skin isn't going to hurt me." The problem is that pornography, like any other addiction, sneaks up on you. It reminds me of a story I once read about frogs. If you put a frog in boiling water, it will immediately jump out. But if you put it in lukewarm water and then slowly turn up the heat, the frog will get cooked before it has the sense to jump out. It's the same with pornography. What you look at today may have shocked you a year ago. But because the heat was ever so slowly turned up, you didn't even notice that your conscience was being fried.

Have the courage to walk away, to turn it off, to throw it away. You are better than that. A boy shared this:

During the summer between my junior and senior years of high school, I worked for a construction company. One day the boss asked me to check on something with the building supervisor who had his office on the job site in a work trailer.

When I walked into the trailer there were pornographic pictures posted on all the walls. For a minute, I forgot what I had gone in there to ask the guys, because my attention was drawn to the pictures. It struck an interest in me. When I left the trailer I started thinking, where can I buy this stuff so I can see more of it? I soon found a place that sold them.

At first, when I looked at them, I felt very nervous and uneasy inside, like what I was doing was wrong, but it didn't take me long to get addicted to it. It began to consume me to the point where I was not thinking of anything else—my family, or work, or sleep. I started to think and feel lower of myself.

During breaks at work, we would go to someone's vehicle, and

someone would pull out a magazine, and we would laugh about it and carry on. The guys that were deeply involved in it were not satisfied with just looking. They would talk about all the girls they had slept with and they didn't seem to care about anything else in life. That was all their conversations were about, the magazines, films, and sex.

Late one afternoon, as I was working, I heard some of my co-workers start whistling and calling out rude sexual remarks. I looked up to see what the commotion was, and there was my younger sister just getting out from her Volkswagen bug, looking for me. I overheard someone say, "I'd like to get a piece of that!" I turned angrily and said, "Shut up! That's my little sister!"

I was so disgusted. I left the job, just before quitting time, and drove around for a while by myself. I just kept thinking about how hurt my sister looked, to be treated so horribly when her intentions had been so innocent.

The next day, when I went back to the job, and the guys passed around the magazines, I got up and moved. At first it took a lot of strength, but as I did it more and more, it became easier. When conversations started that were crude and distasteful, I would walk away and go someplace else. I didn't think it was amusing anymore. I realized they were talking about somebody's sister.

● GET REAL

As we close this chapter, let me just share a couple of final thoughts. I once was talking to a girl named Larissa about sharpening the saw, and she gave me an earful. "Get real, Sean. Who has time? I'm at school all day, I have activities after school, and I study all night. I need to get good grades to get into college. What am I supposed to do, go to bed early and then fail my math test tomorrow?"

Let me just say this. There is a time for everything. A time to be balanced and a time to be imbalanced. There are times when you'll need to go without much sleep and push your body to its limit, for a day, a week, or a season. And there will be times when eating junk food out of the vending machine is your only alternative to starving. This is real life. But there are also times for renewal.

If you go too hard for too long, you won't think as clearly, you'll get cranky, and you'll begin to lose perspective. You may think you don't have time to exercise, build friendships, or get inspired. In reality, you don't have time not to. The downtime you spend sharpening your saw will pay you back immediately, 'cause when you resume your normal routine, you'll cut that much faster.

You Can Do It

You're probably already doing a lot of saw sharpening without even knowing it. If you're working hard at school, you're sharpening your mind. If you're into athletics or fitness, you're caring for your body. If you're working to develop friendships, you're nourishing your heart. Often you can sharpen the saw in more than one area at once. Melanie once told me how, for her, horseback riding did this. The physical nature of riding exercised her body. Thinking deeply while riding exercised her mind. And being in nature nurtured her soul. I then asked her, "What about relationships? How does riding develop your heart?" She said, "I get closer to my horse." Well, I guess horses can be people too.

Sharpening the saw won't just happen to you. Since it's a Quadrant 2 activity (important but not urgent), you have to be proactive and happen to it. The best thing to do is to take out time each day to sharpen the saw, even if it's only for fifteen or thirty minutes. Some teens set apart a specific time each day—early in the morning, after school, or late at night—to be alone, to think, or to exercise. Others like to do it on the weekends. There's no one right way—so find what works for you.

Abraham Lincoln was once asked, "What would you do if you had eight hours to cut down a tree?" He replied, "I'd spend the first four hours sharpening my saw."



COMING ATTRACTIONS

You'll like the next chapter because it's real short. You might as well just finish the book right now!


Body

- 1 Eat breakfast.
- 2 Start an exercise program today and do it faithfully for 30 days. Walk, run, swim, bike, rollerblade, lift weights, etc. Choose something you really enjoy.
- 3 Give up a bad habit for a week. Go without alcohol, soda pop, fried foods, donuts, chocolate, or whatever else may be hurting your body. A week later, see how you feel.

**Mind**

- 4 Subscribe to a magazine that has some educational value, such as *Popular Mechanics* or *National Geographic*.
- 5 Read a newspaper every day. Pay special attention to the headline stories and the opinions page.
- 6 The next time you go on a date, visit a museum or eat at an ethnic restaurant you've never been to before. Expand your horizons.

Heart

- 7  Go on a one-on-one outing with a family member like your mom or your brother. Catch a ball game, see a movie, go shopping, or get an ice cream.
- 8 Begin today to build your humor collection. Cut out your favorite cartoons, buy hilarious movies, or start your own collection of great jokes. In no time, you'll have something to go to when you're feeling stressed.

Soul

- 9 Watch the sunset tonight or get up early to watch the sunrise.
- 10 If you haven't already done it, start keeping a journal today.
- 11 Take time each day to meditate, reflect upon your life, or pray. Do what works for you.

