

Hey, everyone,

The Play Tip for this week is ... er ... working play into your daily or weekly routine.

I will come right out and say that of all the diet and lifestyle practices that I know are beneficial and that I incorporate into my life, this is the one I struggle with the most.

In my book I included an entire chapter on the importance of play. I reviewed research by Dr. Stuart Brown and others indicating that play is not simply a frivolous luxury or a childish waste of time, but a crucial part of our evolutionary heritage as humans. Play keeps our minds and brains flexible, helps us to adapt to a changing and unpredictable world, and is associated with several positive behaviors, like creativity, productivity, flexibility, optimism, and the capacity to handle stress. It also encourages cooperation, promotes problem solving, and fosters a sense of community and belonging.

I know all of this intellectually, and I've even experienced it firsthand. When I was really sick, at one point I kind of hit a brick wall. Nothing I was doing in terms of diet and supplements was having much effect. So I decided to focus my attention on bringing more pleasure, play, and joy into my life. I committed to surfing at least a couple times a week, spending more time with friends, watching funny movies regularly, and going to some live comedy shows. I also took an improv class locally. During this time I really relaxed the restrictions on my diet and didn't take any supplements at all.

After just two months of this approach I was amazed to see how much better I was feeling. And while it wasn't the only thing that returned me to health, it was a major part of the process.

Yet despite this, I still struggle to find time for play each week. Maybe it's the deep conditioning I think we all have as Americans, our puritanical work ethic that values work and productivity much more than leisure and play. Those beliefs are pretty deep and hard-wired and sometimes difficult to overcome.

Here are a few tips that have been helpful for me in order to bring more play into my life. It's still a work in progress, but I find that if I don't take intentional steps like this, it's just too easy for me to ignore play.

1. Take a play history. Think about the things you loved as a child or when you had more play in your life. What got you excited? What gave you the most joy? What activities did you lose yourself most in?
2. Make a list of play activities. Using the results of your play history above, make a list of ways you love to play and put it somewhere you will see it every day. It's easy to get wrapped up in the hustle and bustle of life, and sometimes a quick glance at this list will be enough to remind you to do something playful.
3. Create opportunities for play. Play is all about perspective. If you look for chances to play, they're everywhere: throw a ball for a dog, play hide-and-seek with your kids, improvise on

the piano, have a board-game night, carry a sketchbook with you, or simply go on an aimless walk in the woods.

4. Make play a priority. If you're busy with work, family, and other obligations, it can be difficult to find time for play. Schedule time for play just as you schedule time for other necessities in your life. If this seems daunting, start small—perhaps just thirty minutes a week.

Okay, that's it for this time. See you next week!