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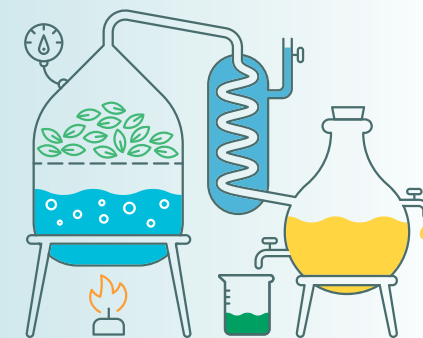
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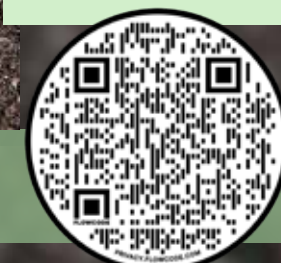


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14  
**KIRTAN IN ATLANTA**



Photo: Perry Julien

# CONTENTS

Natural Awakenings Atlanta  
March 2025

- 16 Cooking With Healthy Oils
- 18 Omega-3 Fatty Acids
- 22 Personalized Nutrition



- 24 Sober Curious
- 26 Surviving the COVID Years
- 30 Fueling Exercise Recovery



- DEPARTMENTS
- 9 Publisher's Letter
- 11 Atlanta Briefs
- 14 Community Spotlight
- 16 Conscious Eating
- 24 Healing Ways
- 26 Yoga
- 30 Fit Body
- 34 Community Calendar
- 36 Community Directory
- 37 Classifieds
- 38 Walking Each Other Home





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## ECHOES

Three articles in this issue recall prior efforts. Our piece on kirtan in Atlanta recalls our cover article in February 2019 on the occasion of ChantLanta's 10th anniversary, and Ian Boccio's contribution on chanting. Yoga editor Patty Schmidt's reflection upon the days of COVID recalls three pieces then-editor Sheila Ewers wrote on the events of the time. And Nichole Dandrea-Russert's recipe for Morning Zen Buckwheat Muesli is the third excerpt we're publishing from her books.



ChantLanta team

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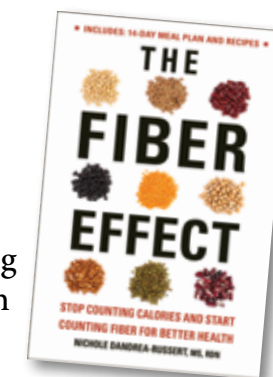
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Index of Display Advertisers

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Atlanta Dental Wellness.....	40	Hope Knosher.....	20	Seek Yoga.....	28
Balancing to Peace.....	25	isaozen.....	10	Share International.....	11
ChantLanta.....	02	iwi Fresh.....	03	Stacey Beth Shulman.....	28
Decatur Estate Vintage Market.....	17	KnoWEwell.....	32, 33	The Well of Roswell.....	39
Divine Spine & Wellness.....	25	Linda Minnick.....	20	Tori McGee.....	04
Elohee.....	06	Lisa Watson.....	10	True Balance of Newnan.....	29
Essentials Health and Wellness.....	23	MOON Organics.....	24	Wellspring Dental.....	19
Etta Hornsteiner.....	20	Natural Awakenings Atlanta.....	39	Writing Doctor.....	16
Forever And A Day.....	04	Naturally Healthy.....	39	Yogardener.....	31
Hands On Wellness.....	25	Northstar Timeless Healing.....	10		

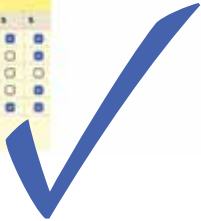
Publisher's Letter



The Motivating Power of Checkmarks



My custom habit tracker on xTiles



Back in January, I wrote about getting better at New Year's resolutions. I ended my letter with three changes I was making in 2025 that should boost the probability of achieving my goals. "The third change ... is to track progress, and it's actually something I already do. However, ... the app I use doesn't provide the satisfaction and encouragement of seeing and being reminded of improvement. So, while I might continue using the app, ... I will make paper versions of my trackers and mount them where I can see them every day."

Shortly after creating paper trackers, I discovered the web-based app xTiles, which I like to describe as "Legos for the mind." According to the company, "xTiles is a visual note-taking tool designed to help you think it over." It offers an "easy-to-use and flexible canvas, based on blocks, tiles, and tabs, allowing you to boost your ideas and store helpful content in the most organized form possible." Elsewhere, it is described as an "easy-to-use solution for task management and planning, collaborations and building knowledge bases."

So, for this letter, I put on an old persona: that of a quasi-geek! It combines the excitement an adolescent has when discovering "the next big thing" with the enthusiasm of an evangelist wanting to tell everyone how great the next big thing is!

I became enamored with computer technology at a young age. I grew up the son of a CIO, although the title didn't exist back then. Before PCs, we often had a Teletype terminal at home so my father could work extra hours out of the office. He also had one of the first electronic four-function calculators, and my introduction to personal computing was his university's Apple II.

Fast forward a few years into my early professional life, which almost always included computer technology. I never got into programming, thus the "quasi" prefix above, but I always dug deep into what applications were capable of and enjoyed learning new programs. As a market analyst, I was thrilled with downloading mainframe data into my PC and dropping it into Lotus 1-2-3—for all you young'uns out there, that was the first mass-market spreadsheet.

Anyway, xTiles is so compelling that I lost a weekend exploring it and creating my ideal resolution/goal tracker. And because we have kept article ideas for *Natural Awakenings* in multiple places, I created an xTiles tab that consolidates all that into one screen.

xTiles has several "bricks"—or "add content" functions—such as text, image, checkbox list, table, URL, embed codes for videos—and on and on. There's a plethora of formatting options to make your work-

space look exactly the way you want it to. You start with an empty canvas and assemble "tiles" of content and functions. Of course, you can short-circuit creating stuff by accessing a sea of free templates that are grouped into planning, productivity, work, education and personal life.

The reason I'm writing about this is two-fold. First, I can imagine that everyone can benefit from using xTiles; there is a free plan. It is *easy* to use, intuitive and highly customizable. After a couple hours of learning how it works, you should be able to build a custom "app" to improve the management of some aspect of your life.

But most importantly, I discovered that a graphical goal tracker that allows me to readily see how I'm progressing is a big motivational tool! I'm pleased to say that I'm actually consistently recording whether I'm hitting my daily goals or not. And because I can see my performance—or lack thereof—I am more motivated to meet goals. In fact, for my three foundational resolutions, I missed just one day in January for two of them and just two days for the third.

While on the subject of apps, let me mention Yuka, an app for conscious eaters. Yuka grades grocery store items by scanning barcodes and assigning quality scores. Products are analyzed and graded on three criteria: nutritional quality, the presence and type of additives, and organic dimension. It has advised me on scores of purchases, and I definitely feel like I'm getting a better deal for my grocery dollars because of it. 🌱



*Publisher of Natural Awakenings Atlanta since 2017, Paul Chen's professional background includes strategic planning, marketing management and qualitative research. He practices Mahayana Buddhism and kriya yoga.*



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## ChantLanta 2025 Promises a Joyful Goodbye

ChantLanta Sacred Music Festival will host a weekend of immersive spiritual experiences and an extensive lineup of musicians, chanting, ceremony, movement workshops and plenty of vendors one last time on March 14 and 15 at Unity North Atlanta in Marietta.

ChantLanta was founded in 2010 and has produced highly successful events since then, with the exception of 2021 and 2022, when it was shut down due to the pandemic. "After 15 years of serving the greater Atlanta spiritual community, this will be ChantLanta's grand finale," says festival co-founder Ian Boccio. "Come out and join us for one more weekend of blissful chanting, meditation and movement in the beautiful space at Unity North."

Friday's Main Stage performances include Sol Dance with Scott Houston and Maya Lemberg, as well as Symphony of Serenity with Kennedy Oneself. Saturday's lineup features Sound Healing Yoga with Margo Gomes and Karen Dorfman, along with music by Douglas Johnson, Nandi Dass, Gershone and Gina, Shonali and the Goddess Choir, Flying Mystics, and The Spirit Messengers.

On Saturday, workshops run throughout the day in two spaces. The Peace Chapel will host Sonic Yogi's Sound Experience with Jonathan Adams, Soulful Breathwork with Plamen Russev, Sufi Trance Drumming with Danny Stern, Shamanic Journey with Lisa Wiggins and Sound Journey with Raye Andrews. Workshops in the Holy Grounds space include Dances of Universal Peace, 5Rhythms with Julie Stuart, Maha Mantra with Radha Rose and Josh, Yoga and Live Drumming with Frani Green and Voice Activation with Brittani Phoenix.

Festival passes are available on a sliding scale for each day or for the full weekend. Workshop registrations require a \$15 donation. All proceeds benefit the Kaleidoscope Child Foundation, a nonprofit organization that builds schools and other critical infrastructure in some of the most poverty-stricken areas of the world.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [ChantLanta.org](http://ChantLanta.org). Unity North Atlanta is located at 4255 Sandy Plains Rd. in Marietta.



Shonali and the Goddess Choir



Flying Mystics



Douglas Johnson

**My need for disciples who realise the dangers of the time is great.**

**I need, also, those who sense My Presence to make known this Promise to their brothers.**

**All who share the hope that mankind should live in peace together work for Me.**

**Peace, Sharing and Justice are central to My Teaching.**

**Wherever the Light of these Truths shines I turn My eye, and through the channel of that Light do I send My Love.**

**Thus do I work.**

**Thus through you do I change the world.**



## Maitreya, the World Teacher



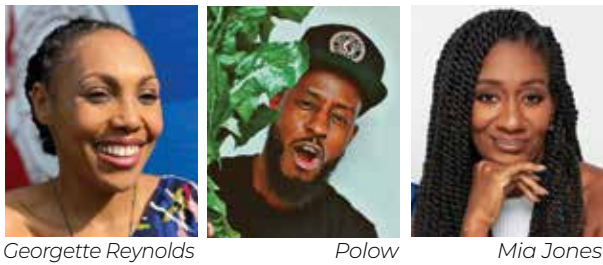
## Cleanse Fest 2025 Features Juicing Workshops

The Veggie Taste presents Cleanse Fest 2025, featuring four juicing workshops for fasting and detox on March 15 from noon to 5 p.m. at KIPP Soul in Atlanta. Designed for everyone from beginners to juicing enthusiasts, the event offers hands-on classes led by four of Atlanta’s top juicers and focuses on the health benefits of fresh juice combinations.

The first session is with Polow (Instagram: @JuiceAtl) on fasting and energy, followed by Barbie Jones (@IAmBarbieJones) on stress management and colon health, Mia Jones (@TheRightGreens) on high blood pressure, diabetes, inflammation and skin health, and Georgette Reynolds (@JuiceDealerDopeHealer) on brain function and gut health.

General admission tickets are \$10, giving visitors access to the Wellness Market and the detox lecture at 4:00 p.m. The juicing workshops are priced at \$135 each or \$500 for all four.

Cleanse Fest 2025 will be held at KIPP Soul, 1445 Maynard Rd NW in Atlanta. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [tinyurl.com/CleanseFest2025](https://tinyurl.com/CleanseFest2025).



## Nuts ‘n Berries Hosts Workshop on Adrenal Fatigue & Blood Sugar



Nuts ‘n Berries Brookhaven will host a free educational event, Natural Solutions for Adrenal Fatigue & Blood Sugar, on March 6. Attendees can enjoy a complimentary mocktail at 6:30 p.m. before joining wellness expert Kelly Clonts for an informative session about managing blood sugar and stress naturally at 7:15 p.m.

Clonts is an experienced speaker and teaches classes in herbalism and aromatherapy. She is passionate about empowering individuals with practical, natural approaches to health. “This is your invitation to wellness,” says Clonts. “By understanding how to balance blood sugar and support adrenal health, we can take meaningful steps toward a healthier, more vibrant life.”

Guests will have the opportunity to sample three alcohol-free beverages designed to support well-being and learn about holistic strategies to improve energy levels, reduce stress and promote overall health.

The event is free, but space is limited, and advance registration on Eventbrite is suggested. For more information or to sign up, visit [bit.ly/nnb-030625](https://bit.ly/nnb-030625). Nuts ‘n Berries Neighborhood Market is located at 4274 Peachtree Road NE in Brookhaven.

## Paths to Integration Opens in Alpharetta

Paths To Integration LLC recently opened its office in Alpharetta, offering holistic healing services designed to promote balance and well-being. Founded by Efrain Brady, a traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, a certified tai chi and qigong master instructor and a biofield tuning practitioner, the center provides a welcoming space for those seeking natural approaches to health and personal growth.

Brady has more than 5,000 hours of teaching experience and specializes in holistic healing, energy work and movement therapy. His vision for Paths To Integration is to create a community where individuals can explore tai chi, qigong and spirituality to enhance their well-being. “We are dedicated to awakening consciousness and empowering people to live with greater balance, awareness and harmony,” he says.

Paths to Integration offers a variety of services, with pricing based on selected healing modalities and packages. Appointments and classes are available now.

Paths to Integration LLC is located at 120 Prospect Pl in Alpharetta. For more information, call 470-281-8645 or visit [PathsToIntegration.com](https://PathsToIntegration.com).



Efrain Brady

## Dr. Garud Joins The Art of Living Retreat Center and Leads Panchakarma Retreat

Dr. Medha Garud has joined The Art of Living Retreat Center in Boone, North Carolina, as Director of Ayurveda Programs at Shankara Ayurveda. A nationally recognized expert in Ayurveda and *panchakarma*, she brings more than 20 years of experience in orthopedic and lymphatic physical therapy. Trained in traditional Ayurveda, she is a licensed physical therapist, a certified yoga therapist, a 500-hour yoga instructor with the Sri Sri School of Yoga and a licensed massage therapist.

Garud earned her Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery from the Sri Sri College of Ayurveda and Research Hospital in Bangalore, India, where she completed more than 3,000 hours of clinical training. She also specializes in *nadi pariksha*, the ancient science of pulse diagnosis.

Garud leads Art of Living’s signature Panchakarma Retreat, which is offered monthly. This traditional Ayurvedic detoxification process aims to release physical and emotional toxins that contribute to disease. Guests will experience the transformative program in the peaceful surroundings of the Blue Ridge Mountains and receive personalized diet and lifestyle plans, post-cleanse guidance, recipes and tools for long-term health.

“Panchakarma is one of the most powerful ways to restore balance and vitality,” Garud says. “Our approach blends time-honored Ayurvedic techniques with individualized care to support each guest on their wellness journey.”



Dr. Medha Garud

Retreat prices start at \$5,200. For more information or to register, visit [Aolrc.org/Panchakarma](https://Aolrc.org/Panchakarma) or call 800-392-6870. The Shankara Ayurveda Wellness Spa is located at the Art of Living Retreat Center.

## Two Area Spas Move to New Locations

Due to a destructive fire at its Lilburn location, Warrior Body Spa has moved to a new space in Norcross. Now located at Noir Salon Suites, 5139 Jimmy Carter Ste 101, the self-described detox spa offers a variety of treatments, including facials, therapeutic massage, body wraps, full-spectrum infrared sauna therapy and detox foot baths, among others.

“We’re very excited about reopening and hope our customers like the new space,” says owner Markenia Smith.

Monthly membership costs \$99, while individual services are priced separately. For more information, call 404-994-4498 or visit [WarriorSpa.com](https://WarriorSpa.com).

BeYOUTiful Skin in Roswell has found its permanent home just four minutes away from its original location. It now resides at the corner of Holcomb Bridge Road and Alpharetta Highway. The spa, designed for relaxation and rejuvenation, offers a wide range of services, including consultations, gold, frankincense and myrrh facials, non-surgical facelifts, Procell microchanneling, laser hair removal and acai berry probiotic peels. Services are offered by appointment only at [CherClark.com](https://CherClark.com).

“Everyone who has visited agrees—it is the place for relaxation and rejuvenation,” says Cher Clark, CHC, ALP, LME, founder, holistic health coach and aesthetician with more than 20,000 hours of clinical experience with laser esthetics. “Deep-dive personal trans-



Photo: Kashi LaHue

Cher Clark

formation services” are coming soon, too, says Clark, including natural weight loss, detoxification and cellular anti-aging treatments.

BeYOUTiful Skin typically operates seven days a week. It is located at 595 East Crossville Rd, Suite 700, Lower Level, in Roswell. For more information, call 678-337-1337 or visit [CherClark.com](https://CherClark.com).



# Kirtan in Atlanta

## Past, Present... And Then What?

by Camille Lueder

ChantLanta, Atlanta’s homegrown kirtan festival, will hold its 13th and final edition this month. Kirtan can be described as a devotional call-and-response chanting practice, rooted in a Hindu devotional tradition, that combines sacred mantras, rhythmic music, and communal singing to invoke spiritual connection.

Since its inception, ChantLanta has helped popularize kirtan in Atlanta as local and traveling artists found growing interest among yoga studios. But with ChantLanta’s impending conclusion, one might wonder about its future in the ATL. As it turns out, a new generation of kirtan artists is hitting the yoga studios while a kirtan mainstay since the 70s—somewhat under the radar—continues stronger than ever.

### Kirtan’s Roots

The roots of kirtan comes from Vedic scriptures, a collection of ancient Hindu texts originating around 2,500 to 3,500 years ago. For the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), located on E Ponce de Leon, kirtan is a powerful way to pray to Krishna, the Supreme God in the ISKCON tradition. ISKCON member Kartik Kripa Bhimsen says the world entered the current age, the *Kali Yuga*, roughly 5,000 years ago. “In each



ISKCON temple in Atlanta

age, there is a different suggested way to worship God and to make spiritual advancement,” he says. “In this age of Kali Yuga, kirtan is the number one way worship should be done. Specifically, [we] practice kirtan by chanting the Hare Krishna mahamantra.”

### ChantLanta Comes to Life

When ChantLanta founder Ian Boccio moved from Philadelphia to Atlanta in 2007, he discovered the few existing kirtan communities in the area were isolated. “It was probably 2009 that I found the right group of people to start a band,” Boccio says. “There were four of us musicians, and we started traveling around the metro Atlanta area and offering kirtan.”

The band, Blue Spirit Wheel, traveled to kirtan festivals and yoga studios to perform. After attending an ecstatic chant festival in New York, Boccio had the idea to start a chant festival at home, bringing ChantLanta to life. “I wanted to create something that was going to be a big public spectacle,” Boccio says. “We were going to try really hard to promote this thing all over metro Atlanta, then on top of it, we made it a free event.”

Boccio and his team convinced local businesses to pay for advertising space to cover the basic festival costs. Staff and musicians worked as volunteers, and attendees could choose to offer a donation. By keeping the costs low, Boccio could donate all of ChantLanta’s profits to local charities and charities in India. “The idea was just to increase pub-



lic awareness of what we were doing, what the benefits of chanting are and how much fun it was going to be,” Boccio says.

ChantLanta was successful from the start in 2010. Boccio felt the festival boosted the understanding of kirtan and inspired many people to create music. ChantLanta took a break in 2021 and 2022 due to the pandemic and wasn’t brought back until September 2023, even though it was usually held in the spring. COVID had thrown the festival off-schedule, and with little time to prepare for a 2024 festival, Boccio decided it would be best to wait until March 2025 to produce the next one.

### Kirtan for Everyone

Like yoga and meditation, one does not need to practice any type of Hinduism to practice kirtan. Kirtan can be a tool for achieving enlightenment and is available to anyone. “These are just good things for human beings to do,” says Boccio. “Chanting is good for human beings; yoga is good for human beings. It’s not just for Hindus.”

Modern kirtan artist Radha Rose says kirtan “is an ecstatic way to pray with the heart and voice.” Rose says she sings to the divine feminine and masculine within her heart, restoring her to unconditional love. “It is a wonderful way to connect with others by raising your voice with love and devotion. There is an ecstatic bliss that you experience.”

Rose and kirtan artist Douglas Johnson have led several kirtan events at Aum Studio for Wellness in Alpharetta. Aum Studio’s founder, Yuliya Stepanov, says yoga studios

offer a non-religious, open-minded environment where people can explore different practices and belief systems.

“I believe kirtan has this ability to give us bliss and inner joy,” says Stepanov. “I strongly believe the studio is here for this purpose—so we can use our body to create experiences without any substances.” Many people are unfamiliar with the practice, but when they try kirtan, they end up loving it, says Stepanov. In fact, the studio’s first kirtan event was a sold-out success.

“The feedback is overwhelmingly positive,” Stepanov says. “Attendees often share how transformative and uplifting the experience is.”

Rose leads kirtan in yoga studios, retreats and festivals with her husband, Josh Klein. “I like to incorporate melodies I hear from maybe more traditional kirtan leaders. I’ll take a little piece of their melody, and then I will arrange it in a new way. That’s how we honor the traditional style in our own unique context.”

### ChantLanta’s Final Round

After organizing 13 festivals, Boccio and his team will close out ChantLanta with one final weekend, March 14-15. Both Boccio and ChantLanta co-founder Karen Dorfman have been on the planning committee since 2010. Taking nine to ten months to plan a festival is no easy feat, says Boccio. “It’s a lot of work. I feel really awesome about how much money we have raised for charity over the years, but I just do not have the energy to keep doing it.” And no one has stepped up to take over the task. “We hoped for more young folks to come forward and want to help put this thing together,” he says. If anyone comes forward to carry on the joyful tradition, the team would be supportive.



Krishna Das, ChantLanta, 2019

### Kirtan’s Future in Atlanta

Boccio watched kirtan’s popularity swell from 2010 through 2016, but it began to fade after that, and he hasn’t seen interest in it pick up since the pandemic. “There was a point in time where kirtan was really popular and a lot of people were flocking to it,” he says. Then, “people moved on to do other things. The people who were dedicated to it stuck with it.”

But while ChantLanta will host its final festival in March, Rose believes another group will step up. The Facebook group Chant Southeast, for example, promotes kirtan for the Atlanta community. “I am hoping one day when we have the time and energy,”

Rose says, “we can gather a team together to continue this tradition in a new, fresh way.”

Rose will co-lead Chant for Love, a mantra meditation and forest therapy retreat, from March 28 through 30. The retreat will be led by Rose, Klein and Bala Yancey through Just Love Forest, a nature preserve in Lyerly, Georgia.

Stepanov, too, believes kirtan is on the rise in Atlanta’s spiritual community and will become more popular as people continue to discover it. Aum Studio for Wellness hosts frequent kirtan events and plans to release educational kirtan YouTube videos. “I hope to see kirtan continue to grow and expand, becoming as popular as other practices, like breathwork and sound healing,” Stepanov says. “Its potential to uplift and transform is immense, and I believe it could become a cornerstone of Atlanta’s wellness and spiritual communities.”

### ISKCON’s Steadfast Presence

In the meantime, ISKCON continues to produce kirtan festivals in Atlanta focused on Hindu tradition and serving God. The Atlanta ISKCON temple was founded in 1972, and its first kirtan festival was held in

June of that year for the Panihati Festival, which continues today. The festival kicks off with a parade through parts of downtown Atlanta. Music starts at noon on the front lawn of the ISKCON temple and goes into the night. The festival is popular among ISKCON devotees, with kirtan artists and attendees arriving from all over the world and with attendance soaring into the thousands. To make the event as accessible as possible, both admission and the food are free.

In 1994, Vedaji, an ISKCON monk, arrived in Atlanta. “Kirtan is a method of prayer, worship and connection with God,” says Vedaji, who is now co-president of the temple. “Our goal is to have a kirtan festival every day, chanting and dancing.” Vedaji feels it is his mission in the world “to bring kirtan to yoga studios and to travel around the world, spreading the word that singing and dancing is a method of connecting to God.”

To that end, he has expanded ISKCON’s festival lineup from just one a year to four. In addition to the Panihati Festival, which takes place in August or September, the Radhastami Festival celebrates the birth of the Goddess Radha and attracts about 1,500 attendees. The Janmashtami Festival is usually the largest event, with 2,000 to 3,000 attendees, celebrating Krishna’s birthday two weeks later. In December, the Kirtan Festival is held for three days and enjoys about 2,000 attendees.


The Atlanta ISKCON temple also offers kirtan every Thursday evening and provides a free vegan meal. And while centered around Hindu tradition, ISKCON is open to all. “We are not here to discriminate against anyone,” says Bhimsen. “It is more that, hey, you have a question? We 100% have an answer for you.”



An Atlanta native, Camille Lueder has a B.A. in Journalism from Berry College. Her passion for travel has led her to work seasonal jobs, including one on a trail crew in Colorado and another at a farm in Hawaii.



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Conscious Eating —  —

# Cooking With Healthy Oils

## The Secret to Anti-Inflammatory Meals

by Marlaina Donato

**H**ealthy oils can quell chronic, systemic inflammation—a condition that significantly exacerbates the risks of cardiovascular illness, autoimmune conditions and neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Beneficial fats are indispensable for metabolic processes, brain function, hormone production and the absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K. For overall well-being, the optimal choices are cold-pressed, anti-inflammatory oils made from avocados, walnuts and flaxseeds, as well as extra-virgin olive oil and modest amounts of virgin coconut oil.

### Inflammatory Fats

The typical American diet of drive-through meals and processed, packaged foods like salad dressing, ketchup, mayonnaise and sweet treats in the cookie aisle contains refined vegetable and seed oils. Whether it's safflower, sunflower, corn, soybean, canola or cottonseed oil, these polyunsaturated fatty acid oils are often bleached, deodorized and chemically extracted with hexane to ensure a greater, more cost-effective yield with a longer shelf life. Such refinement methods destroy the naturally occurring antioxidants. Consequently, a diet high in ultra-processed foods containing seed and vegetable oils can increase systemic inflammation.

"Polyunsaturated fatty acids have multiple double bonds in their carbon chains. This

structure makes them fragile and prone to becoming inflammatory compounds," explains Sara Banta, a health coach and supplement specialist in Newport Beach, California. "They also inhibit fatty acid beta-oxidation, making your body less efficient at using fat for fuel and leading to larger fat cells."

### Healthy Oils

**Avocado Oil:** Rich in monounsaturated fats and vitamin E, avocado oil is a versatile choice for moist muffins, roasted vegetables and flavorful homemade salad dressings. With a high smoke point, avocado oil is perfect for savory stir-fries and mouth-watering, healthy grills. In a study published in *Disease Markers* involving rat subjects, avocado oil was found to partially reverse inflammatory processes and reduce levels of triglycerides and low-density lipoprotein ("bad" cholesterol), without affecting high-density lipoprotein ("good" cholesterol) levels. Banta cautions, "Most avocado oils are cut with seed oils. In fact, over 60 percent of the avocado oils are not pure avocado oil, so buyer beware. Look for a brand you trust that is organic."

**Olive Oil:** Consider using extra-virgin olive oil, an important culinary staple that offers impeccable health properties and delicious flavor to appetizers, dipping sauces, salads and sautés. Studies have reported that regular consumption of olive



merznatalia from Getty Images/CanvaPro

oil may be linked to lower levels of certain markers of inflammation, including C-reactive protein and interleukin-6, as well as a lower risk of dying from cardiovascular disease. Banta notes that olive oil is a heart-healthy choice because of its high levels of monounsaturated fats and antioxidants, and a perfect oil for dressings and low-heat cooking. Organic, cold-pressed olive oil is the best option because it is processed without using high heat or chemical solvents.

**Walnut Oil:** According to a 2023 review published in *Antioxidants*, drizzling walnut oil over a grain bowl or grilled salmon may help prevent chronic inflammatory diseases and cancer. Rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids and prebiotics, it was found to promote the growth of beneficial gut bacteria, as well as urolithin, a potent natural compound with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

**Alpha-Linolenic Acid:** Mayo Clinic suggests that alpha-linolenic acid, a plant-based omega-3 fatty acid found in flaxseed oil, might help individuals with heart disease or women going through menopause. Flaxseed oil offers its powerful nutrients best when used unheated and can be whipped up in smoothies, sprinkled on soup, drizzled

over salads or cottage cheese and added to protein-packed nut butter energy balls.

**Coconut Oil:** When used in moderation, coconut oil is also a versatile option in the kitchen for sautés, desserts, curries and healthy breakfast shakes. Research published in the *Journal of Nutritional Science* in 2024 suggests that this lauric acid-rich oil lowers inflammation and relieves COVID-19 symptoms. "Coconut oil offers numerous health benefits due to its unique composition and stability at high temperatures," says Banta. "Rich in medium-chain triglycerides, coconut oil provides a quick and efficient energy source, supporting metabolism and promoting fat burning."

### Eating Out

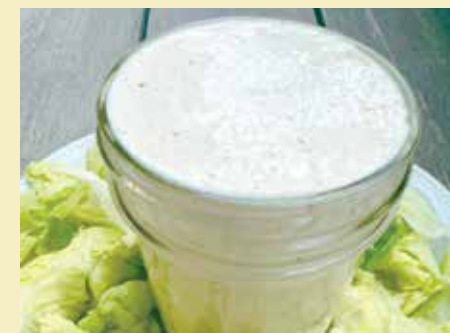
When eating out, be mindful that most salad dressings and marinades are likely to contain highly processed, inflammatory oils. To minimize ill effects, Banta recommends asking for salad dressing on the side or replacing it with vinegar or lemon; requesting that the chef use the healthier option of real butter instead of vegetable or seed oil; and avoiding fried foods. 🌱

Marlaina Donato is an author, painter and composer. Connect at [WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com](http://WildflowersAndWoodSmoke.com).

### SKINNY CAESAR DRESSING

**YIELD: 8 SERVINGS** (about 16 Tbsp)

$\frac{2}{3}$  cup organic fat-free Greek yogurt  
2 Tbsp lemon juice  
1 Tbsp paleo, avocado oil-based mayonnaise (such as Primal Kitchen)  
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard  
2 to 3 anchovies in oil  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp sea salt  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp black pepper  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup shredded Parmesan cheese (optional)  
Pinch garlic powder (optional)



Sara Banta

Blend everything in a mini blender until smooth. Serve over butter lettuce with cucumbers, shredded carrots and bell peppers, or use as a dip for veggies.

Recipe and image courtesy of Sara Banta.

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# Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Excerpted from *Powered By Plants* by Ocean Robbins and Nichole Dandrea-Russert RDN.  
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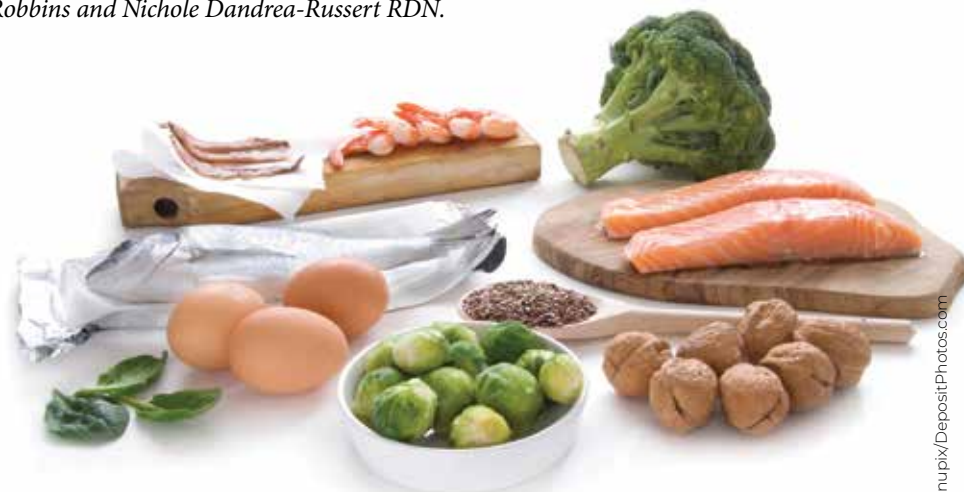
Our next nutrient of concern, omega-3 fatty acids, should be on everyone's radar. It's associated with seafood, so you might think that people who eat a lot of fish have nothing to worry about here. But it's a bit more complicated than that, as we'll soon see.

To begin with, omega-3s are part of the "essential fatty acid" family, meaning that your body can't make them—so you've got to source them from your diet. They appear in the forms ALA, EPA, and DHA. The following are just a few of their benefits.

Omega-3s protect against heart disease by lowering LDL cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure. People with coronary artery disease who consume enough omega-3s have a lower risk of death than those who do not. And these fatty acids are particularly important in preventing sudden death caused by cardiac arrhythmias. They can also raise HDL ("good") cholesterol, reduce inflammation, and prevent coronary artery blockages by inhibiting the formation of blood platelets.

Omega-3s are also critical for early brain development and lifelong cognitive health. Getting enough omega-3s is particularly essential early in life, as the brain grows and develops. Thanks to their potent anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects in the brain, they may also benefit people with mild cognitive impairment by slowing the rate of cognitive decline and reducing the risk of major depression. One form of omega-3, EPA, appears to reduce depressive symptoms, while another, DHA, may reduce suicidal thoughts and lower the risk of suicide.

Omega-3s are highly anti-inflammatory not just in the brain but throughout the



body. In addition to combating dementia, they can help suppress inflammation that could contribute to cardiovascular disease, autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, and other serious conditions.

At the same time, your body needs omega-3 fats to keep your immune system firing on all cylinders. They're considered immunonutrients, meaning they play an essential role in the cellular structure and signaling of the immune system. DHA is anti-inflammatory, which means it can bring down chronic inflammation in the body so the body can "rev up" in response to dangers without being in constant overdrive. It actually appears to boost the actions of the beta immune cells, leading to healthier and more calibrated immune responses.

Omega-3 fatty acids also support eye health. Having enough omega-3s circulating in your body may help prevent age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a common eye condition that can result in vision loss.

## What Are Omega-3s?

Omega-3s are a type of polyunsaturated fatty acid (PUFA). As we've seen, there are three types of omega-3s: ALA, EPA, and DHA. Let's demystify that chemical alphabet soup.

ALA (*alpha-linolenic acid*) fats are needed for energy and are mostly metabolized in your intestines and liver. Your body can also convert ALA into the other two long-chain omega-3s, EPA and DHA.

EPA (*eicosapentaenoic acid*) and DHA (*docosahexaenoic acid*) are long-chain omega-3 fatty acids. In addition to getting EPA and DHA from the conversion of ALA, you can also get them directly from food and supplements.

You might think that since our bodies can convert ALA into EPA and DHA, we can just focus on getting enough ALA. Unfortunately, for most people, it isn't that simple at all.

Harvard Health puts it this way: "The main problem with ALA is that to have the good effects attributed to omega-3s, it must be converted by a limited supply of enzymes into EPA and DHA. As a result, only a small fraction of it has omega-3's effects—10 to 15%, maybe less. A tablespoon of flaxseed oil (with 7,000 mg of ALA) is worth about 700 milligrams (mg) of EPA and DHA."

The good news is your body can likely convert EPA to DHA and DHA to EPA with pretty high efficiency. Also, many people

can get enough ALA from that single tablespoon of flaxseed oil to end up with sufficient EPA and DHA, even with that inefficient conversion percentage.

However, there's another factor that can affect your body's ability to synthesize EPA and DHA: your consumption of a different group of PUFAs called omega-6 fatty acids. Researchers surmise that some omega-6s compete for the same enzymes that turn ALA into the other omega-3s. Omega-6s can promote inflammation, countering many of the positive effects of omega-3s in the body. That's not to say that omega-6s are bad and omega-3s are good; both types are essential for your health. The issue is getting them in the right proportions. The optimal ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 is somewhere between 4:1 and 1:1. In Western diets, it's estimated to be as high as 16:1. So getting enough of the right mix of omega-3s likely means reducing omega-6s as well.

## How Much Omega-3 Do You Need?

The National Institutes of Health recommends that adult females consume 1.1 grams of ALA per day and that males consume 1.6 grams. Since our bodies can convert ALA into EPA and DHA, only ALA is technically essential. But since the conversion rates are low, this is a rare nutritional instance where consuming more than the recommended daily amount is probably better.

That said, it may also be beneficial to consume EPA and DHA directly and not have to rely on your body to synthesize them

from ALA. Research suggests that your combined EPA and DHA intake should be at least 250 to 500 milligrams per day, depending on how much ALA you're taking in and how efficiently your body converts it.

## What about Fish?

Certain kinds of fish, including sardines, anchovies, herring, and salmon, are especially high in DHA and EPA. And indeed, a large body of research has linked consumption of fish with improved health incomes, at least compared to other foods in the modern industrialized diet. For instance, the ongoing Adventist Health Study has so far found that vegetarians outlive omnivores, vegans outlive vegetarians, and pescatarians—people who avoid all animal products except for fish—appear to have the longest life expectancy of all.

But there are some significant problems with using fish as your main source of omega-3s. For one thing, the rampant overfishing and destructive techniques employed by the fishing industry are depleting fish stocks and disrupting marine ecosystems. Commercial fishing industries are harvesting over 160 billion pounds of sea life out of the ocean every year—that's nearly half a billion pounds every day. At this pace, nearly all of the world's fisheries will collapse in the next 30 years.

On the other hand, fish farming, or aquaculture, presents its own set of problems. Despite being touted as a solution to declining wild fish populations, aquaculture often

relies in part on wild fish harvested from the ocean, and it contributes to pollution, disease, and the use of harmful chemicals.

And all ethical and environmental concerns aside, there are health concerns with eating fish too. Most fish are at the top of long food chains, and they tend to bioaccumulate not just omega-3 fatty acids but also mercury, PCBs, and other toxins.

## Plant-Based Sources of Omega-3s

While fish are a rich source of omega-3s, they are not the only source. For fish to contain omega-3s, they must themselves consume omega-3s from the nutrient-rich aquatic plants they eat.

There are many plant-based sources of omega-3s. Some of my favorite sources are flaxseeds (containing 6,000 milligrams of omega-3 per ounce of seeds), chia seeds (5,000 milligrams per ounce), and hemp seeds (2,600). These are easy to add to your diet. Hemp seeds are ready to go right out of the bag, while with flaxseed or chia seeds, it's best to buy them whole and then grind some up in a coffee grinder and refrigerate the ground meal. You can sprinkle your omega-3-rich seeds on just about anything—smoothies, salads, stir-fries, pizza, or soup, to name a few.

Some nuts are also a good source of ALA. Walnuts in particular are rich in the nutrient, delivering 2,500 milligrams per ounce. And flaxseed oil, while not a whole food, is a very rich source of ALA that your body can con-

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vert to DHA and EPA. (Note that flaxseed oil must be consumed raw. It goes rancid quickly, so keep it refrigerated and buy only what you'll use within a month or two.)

While the only form of omega-3 in most plant foods is ALA, there are a few that provide EPA and DHA directly. Sea vegetables and seaweed both contain varying amounts of DHA and EPA—up to 130 milligrams per ounce. There are lots of ways to enjoy sea vegetables. You can make sushi rolls using sheets of dried nori, add dulse or wakame flakes to salads and main dishes for a unique flavor and texture, or enjoy leafy sea vegetables in miso soup.

### When You Might Want to Supplement

Especially if you don't consume any fatty fish or large amounts of flax, chia, and hemp seeds, you may want to consider an omega-3 supplement. Pregnant women and people over the age of 65, who are at greatest risk of deficiency, should especially consider taking a supplement just to be on the safe side. A simple blood test can give you a baseline to see if your EPA and DHA levels are adequate.

Fish oil supplements are made from real fish and come with all the health and environmental drawbacks we've already looked at. Fortunately, you can find vegan omega-3 supplements that are made from algal oil. Studies tell us that they are at least as efficiently absorbed as fish oil-based supplements but without the toxins found higher on the aquatic food chain or the environmental harms.

A word of warning about EPA and DHA supplements, however. In 2023, researchers at George Washington University published a study in the *Journal of Dietary Supplements*. The researchers analyzed 72 omega-3 supplements and found that 32 percent of the flavored supplements and 13 percent of the unflavored ones were rancid. The rates were probably higher with the flavored ones because flavoring can mask the rancidity. Now, this is a problem because rancid omega-3s can actually be

worse than useless, causing a host of new health problems.

So if you are going to take DHA or EPA supplements, keep them in the fridge, and don't stock up on large quantities. You might want to aim to get them on a subscription, auto-shipped to your door, or from a store that keeps them refrigerated.

### Conclusion

It can be challenging to get enough omega-3 fatty acids in a modern diet. Fish are the most common food source, but they come with significant ethical and environmental concerns—as well as a sizable dose of heavy metals and increased risk of mela-

noma. If you don't eat fish, look for ways to add nuts and seeds—especially flax, chia, and hemp—to your diet on a daily basis. Consider adding sea vegetables, and cut back on or eliminate high omega-6 vegetable oils. You can get your blood levels for EPA and DHA checked, and you might well want to take a fresh and unflavored omega-3 supplement, especially if you are pregnant or over 65. Vegan supplement options appear to be just as effective as fish oil-based supplements.

However you do it, make sure your diet includes omega-3s for a healthy heart, a well-functioning brain, and limber, pain-free joints. 🌱

### MORNING ZEN BUCKWHEAT MUESLI

Muesli is a versatile breakfast cereal or snack that typically consists of rolled oats, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, and spices. Using buckwheat in place of oats and combining a rich medley of nuts and seeds adds extra plant-powered protein and anti-inflammatory omega-3s. These all-star ingredients are also packed with calcium, magnesium, and iron, making it a recipe you'll want to keep in your breakfast cereal archives.

#### YIELD: 2

- 1/2 cup dry buckwheat, rinsed, soaked, and drained*
- 2 Tbsp slivered almonds*
- 2 Tbsp raw pumpkin seeds 1 tablespoon flaxseed meal*
- 1 Tbsp chia seeds*
- 1 Tbsp hemp seeds*
- 2 Tbsp unsweetened or naturally sweetened dried cranberries*
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon*
- 1 cup plain, unsweetened plant-based milk, plus more as desired*



Image created with AI in Photoshop

In a medium pan over medium heat, toast the buckwheat for five minutes, tossing or stirring often until fragrant and lightly golden brown. Set aside.

To a 16-ounce mason jar or storage container, add the buckwheat, almonds, pumpkin seeds, flaxseed meal, chia seeds, hemp seeds, dried cranberries, and cinnamon. Place a lid on top and shake to combine.

Add the plant-based milk. Stir and store in the refrigerator overnight.

Enjoy it cold or heat it on the stovetop the next morning. Add more plant-based milk, depending on the consistency you'd like. Add toppings of your choice.



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# Personalized Nutrition

## Fine-Tuning the Dinner Plate

by Carrie Jackson



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Targeted nutrition is emerging as one of the year's biggest areas of growth in the field of health care. Data researchers at Statista estimate that the global personalized nutrition market will exceed \$16 billion in 2025. From elite athletes to busy professionals, consumers are looking for individualized recommendations that take their lifestyles and unique physiological needs into consideration. Smart devices, artificial intelligence (AI) and comprehensive testing are helping people identify their nutritional requirements and make informed dietary choices. Greater attention is also being placed on the gut microbiome and customized supplementation. The one-size-fits-all approach to eating is dwindling.

Kerry Health and Nutrition Institute, a global food research organization, recently listed targeted nutrition in their top five trends for 2025, suggesting a greater emphasis on individual "need states" that might focus on the health status of the heart, joints, bones or gut, or on personal goals associated with sports nutrition, while nutritionists are using finely tuned supplements that cater to individual requirements. Joint and bone health benefit from anti-inflammatory compounds and improved calcium absorption, for example, while cognitive health is supported by nootropics,

medicinal substances that improve thinking, learning, memory and gut-brain axis modulation. Consumers are also opting for innovative ingredients like collagen peptides, omega-3 amino acids, postbiotics and adaptogens to enhance their health status and optimize their fitness.

### Health-Tracking Aids

Technology is making it easier to measure how our bodies are responding and performing at any given time. "Smart watches, smart rings and armband devices can track heart rate and oxygen levels, and monitor blood pressure levels. Some healthcare providers may recommend continuous glucose monitors to track blood sugar trends and fitness devices to track physical activity," says Sue-Ellen Anderson-Haynes, a registered dietitian nutritionist and owner of 360Girls&Women, which offers personalized nutrition plans for health improvement or maintenance.

Using AI-powered products and services, consumers have the ability to receive nutritionist-backed recommendations, monitor their progress and make adjustments based on food preferences, health goals and other variables such as age, gender and body mass index. It is a streamlined path to improving eating habits, tailoring meal plans and creating recipes that align with health objectives and personal preferences.

### Dietitians Can Help

For even more personalization, Anderson-Haynes notes, "A registered dietitian nutritionist can evaluate past medical history, nutrition, physical activity, age, biochemical and anthropometric measurements, laboratory data, and socioeconomic and education levels. In addition, they might perform functional medical testing that includes specialized hormone testing, a review of food intolerances and microbiome testing. About 70 to 80 percent of our immune cells are found within the gut. Studies show that the more diverse the healthy microbes are in the gut, the lower the risk of inflammation and diseases like diabetes, heart disease, dementia and certain cancers. In addition, when our gut is functioning well, it allows for proper metabolism processes to occur, like digestion and the absorption of nutrients from the foods we eat."

While research on the gut-brain axis is still ongoing, it is becoming clearer that the nerves that send signals between the gut and the brain may be influenced by the foods we eat. Anderson-Haynes suggests, "Healthful nutrients for the microbiome may include prebiotic fiber, probiotics, omega-3s, anthocyanins [plants that are blue, violet or red] and resveratrol [a defensive substance found in the skin of plants, fruits and seeds]. Studies show that the health components in these foods positively affect mood, anxiety, depression, the immune system and the nervous system."

Other supplementation may be necessary or advised. "While there are a variety of supplements on the market, a personalized assessment and evaluation reveal what each person may



Anastasia Nurullina from baseimage/CanvaPro

need. For example, if there is a deficiency that food alone may not be able to increase, then a vitamin or mineral supplement will be needed," explains Anderson-Haynes. "Symptoms of low levels of vitamin D may include fatigue, depression, muscle weakness and hair loss, and if vitamin D levels are deficient, then a supplement will be needed. If there are reports and symptoms of anxiety and excessive stress, supplements generally recommended to support the nervous system may be ashwagandha, magnesium, vitamin C and others. There are also evidence-based herbal remedies utilized by functional medicine practitioners to support hormone imbalances."

Anderson-Haynes encourages clients to listen to their own bodies and to prioritize nourishment at every meal. "Food is amazing. It comes in all shapes, sizes, textures and tastes. It serves as the backdrop for social engagements and helps express culture. When done right, it's absolutely delicious. It also serves as an element of strengthening and healing to the body. No matter your eating style, if you're trying to eat more plant-based, with less to no animal foods, you're in the right place," she says.

### The Gut and a Healthy Immune System

According to Monique Ryan, an Illinois-based sports dietitian and author of *Sports Nutrition for Endurance Athletes*, because 70 percent of the immune system is in the gastrointestinal tract, personalized nutrition begins by getting the microbiome

functioning properly. "The gut is the first line of barrier to food. If it's been damaged or hurt, people may experience increased intestinal permeability, also known as leaky gut," she explains.

Ryan recommends food sensitivity testing to evaluate the body's reaction to more than 175 foods. "Once we get our test results, we can create a protocol for an oligoantigenic diet, which takes out all the antigens that cause inflammation in the body. It's a very personalized anti-inflammatory diet and targets what people are specifically sensitive to," she says. "Anyone can go on the internet and find a generic anti-inflammatory diet, but what causes inflammation varies from person to person."

For Ryan, all aspects of a patient's background and lifestyle can offer pivotal clues. "I'll sit down with each patient and take a detailed health history, including their nutrition background. Genetics also factor into overall nutrition, so we'll look at family history and any hereditary diseases. I'll analyze their most recent bloodwork and look at what they typically eat and what their activity levels are," she attests. "The more I learn about a patient, the better I can personalize a plan based on their specific needs and not just their test results."

Ideally, nutrients are supplied through food, but some supplements may be necessary based on the patient's blood levels. "Vitamin D, which plays a key role in immune system health, is not readily supplied by food, so most people should be taking it in supplement form," Ryan says. "I also generally recommend a probiotic and prebiotic to support gut health. Other supplements are highly personal and vary based on the patient's individual needs."

Ryan urges clients to choose whole, fiber-rich foods with no added chemicals. "Simple, minimally processed foods are generally the most nutritious and efficient for the body to process. So, an almond milk that has almonds, water and maybe salt is going to be better for the body than one with multiple additives and chemical ingredients," she explains.

### Eating for Peak Performance

Ryan also works with high-level athletes. For them, personalized nutrition helps to ensure they are performing at peak levels. "Many athletes have Garmin or Polar monitors that measure their caloric output. Combined with body composition tests, these give us an overview of their metabolic and energy needs," she says. "From there, we still have to tailor their nutrition plan for that day's specific training. They might burn 500 additional calories one day and 1,000 in another. It depends on the athlete's metabolism, their particular sport and what their specific training protocol is for that day. It's not one-size-fits-all or eating the same thing every day." 🍌

Carrie Jackson is a Chicago-based freelance writer and frequent contributor to Natural Awakenings. Connect at [CarrieJacksonWrites.com](http://CarrieJacksonWrites.com).

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# Sober Curious

## A Growing Trend for Health and Personal Growth

by Maya Whitman



SPH/CanvaPro

From champagne wedding toasts to college spring break, celebrating life's milestones with alcohol is deeply ingrained in our culture. The idea of pouring a drink and having a good time or unwinding with a cocktail after a hard day at work is considered the norm for many people. A 2024 study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* reported that alcohol consumption rose during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to rise through 2022, especially in those aged 40 to 49.

Even daily moderate drinking as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—up to two standard drinks for men and one for women—comes with a hefty price tag of increased risks for cancer, heart disease and cognitive decline. Women are more likely to develop malignancies, chronic liver disease and cardiovascular issues. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one person is killed every 39 minutes due to drunk driving.

A sober curious counterculture led by Gen Z individuals born between the 1990s and 2010s is forging a fresh path and spurring a new industry of alcohol-free venues, including "dry" bars, clubs, music festivals and events. According to a 2020 study by the University of Michigan, the percentage of college students ditching alcohol increased from 20 to 28 percent from 2002 to 2018, while up to 30 percent of those not in school are opting for life without the inevitable hangovers. Alcohol abuse on campuses has dropped by half compared to 20 years ago, and taking an extended break from alcoholic drinks is on the upswing, as monthly challenges like "Dry January" and "Sober October" become more popular.

### Easing Into Sobriety

"You do not need to be an alcoholic to benefit from exploring the role alcohol plays in your life or pursuing sobriety," says Katie Campbell, a board-certified health and wellness coach in Ipswich, Massachusetts, who is passionate about alcohol-free living. "The term

'sober curious' refers to anyone who wants to explore more deeply or consciously how their personal relationship to alcohol is affecting them in mind, body and spirit, no matter how much they drink."

Calling it a curiosity rather than full-blown sobriety gives people the freedom to experiment with their lifestyle choices. By not setting strict rules or unrealistic goals, they are not setting themselves up for failure. "In my own life, I was sober curious for years, especially throughout my thirties. Every time I took a break from alcohol, I felt so much more alive and deeply connected to myself," says Didi Jordan, an alcohol-free life coach and founder of Sober Chapters, in Los Angeles, California.

After periods of sober curious experimentation throughout her 30s, Jordan finally embraced a fully sober life by age 40. "The transformation was undeniable," she attests. "Opportunities unfolded in ways I could never have imagined, and every area of my life leveled up."

### Benefits Without Booze

According to research published in *BMJ Open* in 2018, setting booze down for just one month lowers the risks of cardiovascular events, insulin resistance, liver disease and cancer in moderate to heavy drinkers. Experts at Allina Health, a non-profit healthcare system in Minneapolis, assert that abstinence improves sleep quality, sexual intimacy, energy and concentration. It is a great way to save calories and money, too.

Campbell recalls that alcohol fueled a false sense of confidence and bravado that she mistook for real courage. "Drinking socially actually robbed my confidence and worsened anxiety in the days to follow," she asserts, adding that there are myriad benefits to abandoning alcohol, including deeper interpersonal connections and meaningful engagement without forgetting conversations or regretting remarks.

The abundance of a life free from escapism also spills into other areas. "I truly believe that deep down, you know when alcohol is no longer serving you," says Jordan. "It's about not just the physical or mental health benefits, but also the immense personal and spiritual growth. When alcohol is no longer part of the equation, we begin to uncover what our soul is calling us to do."

Campbell's definition of fun has dramatically shifted to newly discovered hobbies, chasing new dreams and being there for loved ones 100 percent. She affirms, "Most of all, my son, Arthur, will never see me drunk, and I don't have to ever regret missing a moment of watching him grow." Initially, nixing cocktails at gatherings might feel awkward, but Campbell advises, "Stick with it, and eventually what feels uncomfortable will evolve into a superpower. I love socializing sober!"

Trialing sobriety was the best gift Jordan ever gave to herself. "I didn't start with the pressure of committing to forever," she says. "Instead, I gave myself the freedom to explore." 🍷

Maya Whitman is a regular contributor to Natural Awakenings.



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# Surviving the COVID Years

## Has Atlanta’s Yoga Scene Bounced Back?

by Patricia Schmidt

March 2025 marks five years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the US. The professional and personal lives of countless individuals and communities were turned upside down during the weeks and months that followed; it was a time of upheaval, unemployment, loss and grief for so many. But the yoga world, perhaps more than other communities, relied heavily on interpersonal and in-person connection. *Breathing, moving, and being* together in small indoor spaces for dedicated periods of time was a fundamental part of practicing yoga and its related arts. At the same time, each of these aspects of the practice was suddenly considered potentially harmful when it came to the spread and contraction of the virus. Yoga teachers, studio owners and students alike asked, “What now?”

### March 2020: Change is in the Air

When the pandemic began, Marti and Marty Yura, the founders of Vista Yoga in Decatur, were operating a thriving center within a vibrant community of experienced yoga teachers and students. On a Monday in the third week of March, a teacher asked Marty to pause in-person classes for safety concerns. “By the end of that day, we knew we had to close,” he says.



Marti Yura

Anna Leo, who led an established class of 20 years and has over 40 years of experience teaching movement at Stillwater Yoga in Atlanta, was one of several people who were not comfortable continuing to meet in person. She talked with the studio owner, and a week later, they were closed. Stillwater Yoga never re-opened.

Meryl Arnett, former co-owner with Octavia Raheem of Sacred Chill West in Atlanta and host of Our Mindful Nature podcast, recalls her long-time meditation class at the studio. “Monday night meditation was originally an in-studio class, and it moved online in March 2020 in direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic.” Unfortunately, the owners have closed Sacred Chill West’s doors permanently.

Vanya Francis, founder of Cherished Life Wellness and an advanced holistic doula, recalls teaching prenatal yoga to flourishing classes at Solstice Yoga & Barre in Virginia Highlands just before the onset. “Classes were full; we were turning folks away. ... Obviously,” she says matter-of-factly, “things have changed since that time.” Solstice has since closed, but Virginia Highlands is now offering in-person classes and Cherished Life Wellness continues to thrive online.



Image created with AI in Photoshop

### First, the Technology!

Still, many found they could pivot to survive, but that brought its own challenges. Both studio owners and teachers often felt uncertain as they took their first steps with a new teaching paradigm that included everything from buying a camera to streaming subscriptions. Word-of-mouth and prodding from students helped get out the message that



Marty Yura

people could attend online from their homes. Technologically savvy students championed online meetings and offered tutorials.

Pressed by a student, Leo finally gathered a few email addresses together for a trial live online class. Her students were ecstatic, but she didn’t feel that way. “I was terrified every Saturday for the first six weeks. ‘What’s going to happen, and how is this gonna go?’ And you’re trying to stay in your body, but your brain keeps going out to what’s going to happen with the technology!” Marti Yura recalls the difficult yet practical questions. “How am I gonna set up the camera?!” Over time, they figured it out.

In fact, online teaching has sustained Vista Yoga over the years. At the start of the pandemic, Vista Yoga had up to forty people per class. But “we did not miss a day,” says Marty. The platform continues to provide flexibility around disruptions such as weather or staffing challenges, he says. The studio’s success online also reflects its students’ positive experiences with it. Long-time yoga practitioner and psychotherapist Sharman Colosetti notes that many started practicing online to support the studio. “It was making that paradigm shift and saying, ‘Ok, I can do this. And I can figure out how to adjust, and that’s what yoga is!’”

### Fostering Connection Even at a Distance

While some were learning to master the technology, others found it challenging to sustain connectedness and community online.

For Francis, as for many studio owners, creating a kind of sanctuary space, working with ambient sound and emphasizing inclusivity and safety within the classroom were vital to her flourishing prenatal and postpartum yoga offerings. Personal check-ins, injury awareness and prevention, student growth, and creating connection and community were all a part of creating successful in-person classes—and they were far more difficult to create and foster through a screen.

But the will was there. Arnett moved her Monday night class online largely to maintain connection in the face of the pandemic. Francis decided to continue to do check-ins with each student, a hallmark of her in-person classes and a key community-building

tool. Says Leo, “I did it because these people really wanted to take a class. ... They really were *with* me, and they weathered through whatever difficulties I initially had.”

Colosetti feels that consistency, continuity and connection with her teachers were important during such an unstable time. Alison Spitz, another long-time practitioner and public health professional, found her practice was enhanced by going online. “I really liked the shift to online!” she says. “I started doing more classes each week, and I really found it productive.” She found she didn’t have to race back and forth from work, and she noticed “the teacher is right in front of you, and you really can hear and see the cueing.” She also liked the quiet and space she had at home.

Leo and Arnett’s online classes continue to this day. All of Francis’ birth-centering classes are now still thriving exclusively online, and Colosetti reflects that her practice would not have continued without online offerings during the pandemic. “I hate to think about it; I would have probably just dropped yoga altogether.”

“It is some satisfaction that there is a group of people who would not be practicing without what we’re doing,” says Marty Yura. “It’s not a rationale; it’s not a business decision. It’s just extra.”

### Early Glitches and Setbacks

Challenges abounded for everyone in the



Anna Leo

early days of COVID. Students experienced technological barriers such as dropped meetings, slower internet speeds, botched audio and missed meetings. Teachers admitted feeling a general terror but also feeling torn between wanting to “drop in” and focus on their materials and having to attend to technological considerations of muting online participants, meeting entries and exits, collecting payments and attendance, and making sure audio/visual needs of students were met throughout.

Additionally, pedagogical and safety concerns arose for teachers, owners, and students alike. How challenging should overall classes and specific yoga postures be when teachers are working with minimal visual insight—sometimes only seeing blackened boxes? How can teachers ensure student safety? And how can students be assured they’re doing something both safely and skillfully without a teacher’s guidance?

Once people returned to in-person practice along with online study, students and teachers alike faced issues of divided attention. Students at home struggled with hearing the goings-on of a room they weren’t actually in, while those in the studio felt the teacher’s attention moving between the two environments and the different needs of each group.

### Yet Connection Flourishes

Anna Leo got in the habit of always having



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## calendar

### SATURDAY, MARCH 8

**Yoga at the Lake Claire Community Land Trust** – 11am-12pm. A liberating yoga experience in nature, blending movement, meditation, and wellness. Led by Vada. \$10. 270 Arizona Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/yoga-lake-claire-community-land-trust-Every-Saturday](http://bit.ly/yoga-lake-claire-community-land-trust-Every-Saturday).

**I Am More Than Me** – 2:30-5:30pm. A heart-centered workshop using journaling, music, and yoga to release stress and deepen self-awareness. Includes Jocelyn's book, journal, and light refreshments. \$45. Limited seats. Register: [bit.ly/vista-yoga-events](http://bit.ly/vista-yoga-events).

**Free Reiki Infused Yoga & Meditation** – 3:30-5:30pm. A Vinyasa yoga and meditation class incorporating Reiki to balance and align energy centers. Led by Tiffany Monroe. Free. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development, 27 Waddell St NE, Suite A, Atlanta. [bit.ly/free-reiki-infused-yoga-and-meditation-Every1st-and-2nd-Sat](http://bit.ly/free-reiki-infused-yoga-and-meditation-Every1st-and-2nd-Sat).

**Yoga After Dark** – 7-8:15pm. A beginner-friendly evening yoga experience with sensual movement, R&B vibes, and wine. Ages 21+. \$25-\$40. CORE, 133 Sycamore St, Decatur. [bit.ly/yoga-after-dark-Every-Saturday](http://bit.ly/yoga-after-dark-Every-Saturday).

### SUNDAY, MARCH 9

**Yin & Chow: Yoga and Brunch Series** – 10:30am-1:30pm. Enjoy a meditative Yin yoga session followed by a pop-up chef brunch. Includes tea and community connection. \$25. 2440 Piedmont Rd NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/yin-chow-yoga-brunch-Every-Sunday](http://bit.ly/yin-chow-yoga-brunch-Every-Sunday).

**T.R.A.P. Yoga ATL** – 11am-12:15pm. An all-levels yoga class set to a high-energy playlist featuring hip-hop and R&B. No experience necessary. \$15 at the door. The Loft Athletic Club, 275 Decatur St SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/trap-yoga-atl-Every-Sunday](http://bit.ly/trap-yoga-atl-Every-Sunday).

**Bare Skin Yoga** – 11am-12:30pm. A nude yoga class promoting self-love, body positivity, and mindfulness through movement

and meditation. Clothing optional. \$25. Chosewood Studio, 992 Ralph David Abernathy Blvd, Atlanta. [bit.ly/3PpQjtZ](http://bit.ly/3PpQjtZ).

**Hops & Flow Metal Beer Yoga** – 11am-12:30pm. A metal-infused yoga class paired with craft beer at Little Cottage Brewery. Includes a 60-minute flow and first beverage. \$18. 120 Olive St, Suite 500, Avondale Estates. [bit.ly/427Fg08](http://bit.ly/427Fg08).

**Art Therapy Yoga Class** – 6-8pm. A beginner-friendly yoga session promoting relaxation, restoration, and wellness through art therapy. Hosted by K. Jones at Buckhead Art & Company. \$25. 286 Buckhead Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/art-therapy-yoga-030925](http://bit.ly/art-therapy-yoga-030925).

Monday, March 10

**Yoga Presented by Kaiser Permanente** – 6:30-7:30pm. Free outdoor yoga at The Battery Atlanta's Plaza Green. Pre-registration required via Eventbrite. Bring a mat and water. Free parking available. Weather permitting. Register: [bit.ly/yoga-by-kaiser-permanente-031025](http://bit.ly/yoga-by-kaiser-permanente-031025).

### FRIDAY, MARCH 14

**Women's Yoga Session** – 8:50-10am. A weekly yoga class designed for women to unwind, relax, and connect with a supportive community. Ages 18+. \$1. Brookhaven, Atlanta. [bit.ly/womens-yoga-session-Every-14th](http://bit.ly/womens-yoga-session-Every-14th).

### SATURDAY, MARCH 22

**COMPASS** – 6:30-8:30pm. A grounding practice blending somatic release, Latin dance, and yoga. Includes walking meditation, storytelling, and tea with treats. Led by Fabiana Pimenta and Lucrecia Vizcaino. \$20/person, \$35/two. Register: [bit.ly/vista-yoga-events](http://bit.ly/vista-yoga-events).

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**Adolescent Yoga** – 12-1pm. Monthly yoga for kids and teens to manage anxiety, improve focus, build self-discipline, and boost self-esteem through body awareness. Led by Sheterra Walker, MAMFT, CYT-200. Free. Center for Intuitive Healing, 1842 Independence Square, Suite D, Dunwoody. [bit.ly/AdolescentYoga-Every-4th-Sat](http://bit.ly/AdolescentYoga-Every-4th-Sat).

### TUESDAY, APRIL 1

**Family Yoga Night!** – 6-7pm. Enjoy a free, all-ages family yoga session with Sati Yoga & Wellness at Kirkwood Branch Library. Held every first Tuesday. Free admission and venue parking. Sponsored by FOLK. Register: [bit.ly/family-yoga-night-040125](http://bit.ly/family-yoga-night-040125).

### SATURDAY, APRIL 5

**Tone of Life** – Sacred Sound Ceremony – 7-9pm. Immerse in the healing vibrations of gongs, flutes, handpan, and voice with Tom Soltron and Abby Delsol. Bring yoga mat, pillows, and blankets. \$100/person. Register: [bit.ly/vista-yoga-events](http://bit.ly/vista-yoga-events).

flowers to create community online. She would hold up a vase to the camera and, in her best Fred Rogers voice, say, "Today, we have chrysanthemums..." She'd show her own environment and then connect with her students in theirs: their pets, loved ones, living room decor and more. By doing so, she created trust and connection: "It was just supportive. People checked in with each other; it turned into this really great group." Marti Yura makes a point of talking directly to online students, just as she would those in class, and positioning the camera—not to record her best angles or most flattering pose but to create the greatest sense of practice community.

For some, deep connections continue to flourish despite the years now spent out of physical presence. "Most surprisingly perhaps, you can still absolutely sense the energy of the 'room,' even in an online setting," says Arnett. "I've been so grateful not to lose that sense of energetic connection with a room full of meditation practitioners. As students have moved to other states and even other countries, they are able to stay with this meditation community we've built together."

Arnett is not alone. "I like that I still can connect with these people," says Leo. "I love that they're still coming. I was terrified

*Continued on page 30*



# Bali Bliss

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initially, but I really accept the challenge of doing this online.” As Marti Yura says, “We’re wired for community.”

**With Resilience Comes Growth**  
It is not hyperbole to say that the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything for yoga teachers, studios and students alike. We’re all aware that another public health emergency, geo-political challenge or climate crisis could upend the in-person paradigm. Studios such as Vista Yoga have maintained online and hybrid provisions, acknowledging that it increases accessibility for all students and allows the yoga business itself to remain nimble and adaptable in a way it wasn’t before.

Students in particular are experiencing a new interconnectedness and depth in their practice world—on the one hand, the quiet and accessible online format and, on the other, a more extroverted, open experience of in-person practice. Both Spitz and Colosetti now attend a mix of live online and in-person classes, and unexpected connections continue to surprise them. In her newest in-person class, Spitz ran into people she knew previously online. “I am enjoying being in person in particular classes. I have enjoyed actually seeing, *in person*, some of the people that I’ve met in other online classes. I don’t recognize all of the people, but some of the people I do, and I find I’m saying hello to more people than I did in the past. So that’s nice.”

“It’s personal, and that’s what I really like about it,” says Colosetti. “One day, I went into class in person, and the instructor called me by name, and this young woman came up to me and said, ‘Oh, you’re Sharmen. I hear you online all the time. It’s nice to see your face.’” 🌱



Patricia Schmidt, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, YACEP, is a certified yoga therapist specializing in pelvic health, accessible yoga and yoga for cancer support. She is a Franklin Method trainer, Roll Model method teacher and somatic movement specialist. To learn more, visit [PLSYoga.com](http://PLSYoga.com).

# Fueling Exercise Recovery

## Nutritional Strategies To Boost Muscle Repair

by Zak Logan



A post-exercise recovery plan for seasoned athletes and fitness enthusiasts alike can greatly influence soreness, muscle repair and the ability to tackle the next workout. Proper hydration and nutrition work together to optimize energy levels, repair tissues and reduce inflammation. Above all, it is important to tune in to the body’s needs and adapt post-workout strategies as needed. Recovery is a personal journey to achieving the best performance every day.

### Replenishing Fluids

Water is fundamental for muscle and cardiovascular function, circulation, joint lubrication and body temperature regulation. During exercise, sweat and increased lung function expel water and electrolytes, which can lead to dehydration if not replenished.

Even a 1 to 2 percent fluid loss can impact bodily functions, reducing strength, power and endurance; impairing mental focus; increasing fatigue; delaying muscle recovery; and intensifying muscle soreness.

Maintaining proper hydration before, during and after exercise is an important part of every workout. The American Council on Exercise (ACE) recommends drinking 17 to 20 ounces of water two hours prior to exercising and seven to 10 ounces every 10 to 20 minutes during exercise. Post-workout, people are advised to drink 16 to 24 ounces of fluids for every pound of body weight lost during exercise, which would require weighing in before and after each workout. A simple way to evaluate hydration levels is to check urine color—clear or light yellow is a sign of good hydration;

a darker color indicates the need to drink more water.

According to ACE, if a workout is less than an hour long, only water is needed to rehydrate. For longer and high-intensity workouts, electrolyte replacement is advised. Electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, magnesium and calcium maintain muscle and nerve function. While many sports drinks provide a way to rehydrate and replace lost electrolytes, they may also contain sweeteners, artificial colors, flavors and preservatives.

Natural and homemade alternatives are equally effective. Coconut water has been called nature’s sports drink due to its electrolyte profile. Natural juices without added sugars or artificial ingredients have also been shown to be beneficial. Beetroot juice contains high concentrations of nitrate, which improves oxygenation and exercise performance by increasing nitric oxide production. Cherry juice is high in antioxidants and anthocyanins, which may improve muscle recovery. Grape juice is rich in flavonoid antioxidants, which may reduce oxidative stress and cell damage during exercise. For a quick and easy post-workout electrolyte drink, combine 16 ounces of water or iced rooibos tea with a pinch of salt, one teaspoon of honey and the juice of half a lemon.

### Nourishing Recovery

Protein plays a central role in repairing microscopic tears and fiber growth that occur in muscles during exercise. The aim is to consume approximately 20 grams of protein during or after a workout. Carbohydrates restore depleted glycogen—the stored energy that is burned during exercise.

Pairing high-quality protein and nutrient-rich carbs can maximize recovery. The British Heart Foundation recommends a carbohydrate-to-protein ratio of three-to-one or four-to-one. Simple combinations such as Greek yogurt with berries or chicken with sweet potatoes, quinoa or brown rice are effective and quick to prepare. Another easy combination is a smoothie that combines

animal-based (whey or casein) or plant-based (pea or hemp) protein with fruit-based carbohydrates like bananas or berries.

### Abating Soreness

Exercise creates temporary inflammation as the body’s way of initiating the healing process. But chronic inflammation can slow recovery and increase soreness. Adding these natural, anti-inflammatory foods to a recovery diet will help mitigate soreness and improve recovery time.

- **Turmeric and ginger** have potent, anti-inflammatory properties. Add turmeric to curries, or steep ginger in tea after workouts.
- **Fatty fish** such as salmon and mackerel provide omega-3 fatty acids, known for reducing inflammation and joint pain.
- **Berries and cherries** are packed with antioxidants that repair cellular damage.

- **Leafy greens** such as spinach or kale can be added to smoothie bases or steamed as a side dish.

Get creative by combining protein, carbohydrates and anti-inflammatory foods. Consider a quinoa bowl with turmeric-spiced salmon and steamed kale or a recovery smoothie with almond milk, mixed berries, flaxseed and fresh ginger.

### Supplementation Caveat

Supplements should complement, not replace, a balanced diet. Whenever possible, prioritize whole, nutrient-dense foods over processed alternatives or supplements. Consulting with a dietitian nutritionist or other practitioner that specializes in sports medicine may help identify areas where supplementation is most beneficial. 🌱

Zak Logan is a freelance health writer dedicated to getting back to basics.

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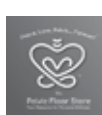


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## Thursday, March 6

**Mocktail Tasting & Free Education! Natural Solutions for Blood Sugar** – 6:30-8:30pm. Learn about natural solutions for adrenal fatigue and blood sugar management while enjoying low-sugar mocktails. Free admission includes two drinks. Nuts’n Berries, 4274 Peachtree Rd NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/mocktail-tasting-free-education-030625](http://bit.ly/mocktail-tasting-free-education-030625).

## Friday, March 7

**Cycles** – 6-10pm. A powerful play exploring resilience, societal stigma, and redemption through music, dance, and storytelling. \$25 general; \$50 VIP. The Legendary Ford Hall, 621 King Arnold St, Hapeville. [bit.ly/cycles-030725](http://bit.ly/cycles-030725).

## Saturday, March 8

**"Future Ready": Tech Skills for Emerging Leaders** – 8am-1pm. Teens 12+ explore social media, AI, and digital well-being through expert-led discussions and hands-on sessions. Free. Breakfast and lunch provided. UPS World HQ, 55 Glenlake Pkwy NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/tech-skills-for-emerging-leaders-030825](http://bit.ly/tech-skills-for-emerging-leaders-030825).

**Arabia Mountain Trail Walk** – 9-11am. Enjoy a scenic community walk along Arabia Mountain Trail, starting at Garden Life Juice Bar + Market. Free. 8020 Mall Pkwy, Stonecrest. [bit.ly/arabia-mt-trail-walk-030825](http://bit.ly/arabia-mt-trail-walk-030825).

**Master Your Mood** – 1-3pm. Explore emotional regulation, acceptance, and the art of releasing control through guided exercises and discussions. \$16. Free parking. 2849 Paces Ferry Rd SE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/master-your-mood-030825](http://bit.ly/master-your-mood-030825).

**Sounds of Home** – 7:30-9pm. A moving concert exploring the meaning of home through song, featuring the CTS Community Choir, Atlanta Young Singers, and ASO Talent Development Program. Free. First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta, 1328 Peachtree St NE. [bit.ly/sounds-of-home-030825](http://bit.ly/sounds-of-home-030825).

## Sunday, March 9

**Unity Atlanta Church 12 Powers Workshop** – 12:30-2:00 pm. The Lenten season is a time for letting go of thoughts which keep us from living our best life. Learn how to exercise your power of “Elimination/Release” in this month’s 12 Powers Workshop, facilitated by Licensed Unity Teacher, Freda Steward. Feel free to bring a bag lunch. Held in the Fellowship Hall. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org).

## Wednesday, March 12

**Women + Tech Meetup** – 12-1:30pm. Celebrate International Women’s Day with networking, a Period Project Packing Party, and professional headshots. \$10 non-members; free for ATV members. Atlanta Tech Village, 3423 Piedmont Rd NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/women-tech-meetup-031225](http://bit.ly/women-tech-meetup-031225).

**Unleash Your Inner Warrior** – 6:30-8:30pm. A transformative workshop on inner strength and boundary-setting with Dr. Shayna Gross and Coach Melinda Lee. Leave empowered and confident. \$25. 1189 Euclid Ave NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/unleash-your-inner-warrior-031225](http://bit.ly/unleash-your-inner-warrior-031225).

## Thursday, March 13

**Community Healing Reiki Circle** – 6-7pm. Join a guided Reiki circle to connect, heal, and support well-being in a welcoming space. Open to all levels. Free venue parking. Center for Intuitive Healing, 1842 Independence Square, Ste D, Dunwoody. [bit.ly/community-healing-reiki-circle-031325](http://bit.ly/community-healing-reiki-circle-031325).

## Friday, March 14

**The Search Within: A Mental Resilience Symposium** – 9am-4pm. Learn from FDNY members about resilience, first responder marriage, and coping after critical incidents. Open to all, spouses welcome. Free. Cobb County Fire Dept Training Center, 2109 Valor Dr SW, Marietta. [bit.ly/the-search-within-031425](http://bit.ly/the-search-within-031425).

## Saturday, March 15

**STEM Gems Summit 2025** – 9:30am-12:30pm. Inspiring pre-teen and teen girls to explore STEM careers through mentorship and hands-on learning. \$10 adults; \$5 kids. Spelman College Science Center, 350 Spelman Ln SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/STEM-Gems-Summit-031525](http://bit.ly/STEM-Gems-Summit-031525).

**2025 IZS Annual Youth Symposium** – 10am-2pm. Engaging event for youth ages 11-14 with games, music, and discussions on mindfulness, self-esteem, social media, and more. Free. A.W. “Tony” Matthews Boys & Girls Club, 785 Fontaine Rd SW, Mableton. [bit.ly/annual-youth-symposium-031525](http://bit.ly/annual-youth-symposium-031525).

**Empowered & Strong – Mental Health Workshop** – 10:30am-12:30pm. Engage in an interactive workshop with experts on sustaining mental well-being personally and professionally. \$35 early bird; \$40 general. The Tasting Den, 6690 Roswell Rd, Ste 415, Sandy Springs. [bit.ly/empowered-and-strong-mental-health-series-031525](http://bit.ly/empowered-and-strong-mental-health-series-031525).

**Annual Teen Health Summit** – 12-3pm. Empowering high school students and parents with insights on college preparedness, health, and safety. Expert advice, engaging sessions, and resources for a successful transition. Free. IBEW Local 613, 501 Pulliam St SW, Ste 250, Atlanta. [bit.ly/annual-teen-health-summit-031525](http://bit.ly/annual-teen-health-summit-031525).

## Sunday, March 16

**Healing Strong Support Group** – 4:30-6:30pm. A community for those facing health challenges, offering hope and education on non-toxic healing strategies. In-person and Zoom options available. Free. The Well of Roswell, 900 Old Roswell Lakes Pkwy, Ste 300, Roswell. [HealingStrongAtlanta@gmail.com](mailto:HealingStrongAtlanta@gmail.com). <https://bit.ly/healing-strong-support-031625>.

## Tuesday, March 18

**2025 Midtown Alliance Annual Meeting** – 11am-1:30pm. Join business and civic leaders to discuss bold ideas shaping Midtown Atlanta. Includes networking, luncheon, and city updates. \$100 general; \$75 members; \$10 students. The Fox Theatre, 660 Peachtree St NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/midtown-alliance-annual-meeting-031825](http://bit.ly/midtown-alliance-annual-meeting-031825).

## Wednesday, March 19

**Q1 Digital Readiness Workshop for Older Adults** – 12-1:30pm. Learn tech tips, explore its impact on health, and access free health screenings. Bring a device for hands-on learning. Free. Hapeville Branch Library, 525 King Arnold St, Hapeville. [bit.ly/digital-readiness-workshop-for-older-folks-031925](http://bit.ly/digital-readiness-workshop-for-older-folks-031925).

## Thursday, March 20

**Wellness by Design Summit** – 11am-1pm. Prioritize well-being with insights on designing healthier spaces. Enjoy a lunch talk on healthcare trends, plus mini massages, a juice bar, and more. Free. CFC Group, 1285 Chattahoochee Ave NW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/wellness-by-design-032025](http://bit.ly/wellness-by-design-032025).

**Healing Sound Bath with Raye Andrews** - 7-8pm. Theme: Plant Your Seeds of Desire for Spring. Join Raye Andrews in preparation for the Spring Equinox with a beautiful symphony of magical sound. Suggested love offering \$20-\$40. Held in the Chapel. Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org).

## Saturday, March 22

**Women's Business Day & Expo** – 10am-4pm. Connect, collaborate, and grow with women entrepreneurs through networking, workshops, and shopping. \$15 general; \$35 brunch pass. 1380 Atlantic Dr NW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/womens-business-expo-032225](http://bit.ly/womens-business-expo-032225).

## Sunday, March 23

**Livable Buckhead x Big Peach Social Ride** – 2-4pm. Enjoy a six-mile community bike ride on PATH400, followed by food and drink specials at Eclipse di Luna. Free. 764 Miami Cir NE, Atlanta. [bit.ly/buckhead-bigpeach-socialride-032325](http://bit.ly/buckhead-bigpeach-socialride-032325).

**Soundbath Meditation** – 4-5pm. Relax and rejuvenate with the soothing sounds of crystal singing bowls. Reduce stress, tension, and anxiety in a tranquil setting. \$20. Phoenix and Dragon, 5531 Roswell Rd NE, Sandy Springs. [bit.ly/soundbath-meditation-032325](http://bit.ly/soundbath-meditation-032325).

## Saturday, March 29

**GET GORGEOUS, GET FIT! “Walk It Out” Edition** – 10am-12pm. Enjoy a 2-mile walk, beautiful scenery, and great conversation on the Beltline. Meet at Kroger’s outdoor patio at Ponce City Market. Free; registration required. 725 Ponce De Leon Ave NE, Atlanta. 470-670-5052. [bit.ly/get-gorgeous-get-fit-032925](http://bit.ly/get-gorgeous-get-fit-032925).

**Art Walk Fundraiser 2025** – 6-10:30pm. Enjoy a vibrant evening of local art, live music, and community support. Free admission. 333 Peters St SW, Atlanta. [bit.ly/art-walk-fundraiser-032925](http://bit.ly/art-walk-fundraiser-032925).

## Saturday, April 5

**Angel & Ancestor Spirit Jam** – 6-8pm. Receive intuitive messages from the Angel and Ancestor realms in a group setting. \$10 at the door. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development, 27 Waddell St, Ste A, Atlanta. [bit.ly/angel-ancestor-spirit-jam-Every1st-Saturday-Monthly](http://bit.ly/angel-ancestor-spirit-jam-Every1st-Saturday-Monthly).

## Sundays

**Practicing the Presence-A Course in Miracles** – 8:45-10:30 am. This weekly Zoom study group aims at removing the blocks to the awareness of love’s presence. Facilitator: Michael Wilkinson. An open and ongoing class. All are welcome. For more info and to receive the zoom link, email: [MWilkinson@leadstrat.com](mailto:MWilkinson@leadstrat.com). Unity Atlanta Church, 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org).

**Online & In-Person Sunday Experience** – 9-10:30 am Adult Study; 3pm, Music and Message; 4pm, Food and Fellowship; 5pm, New Thought Education Workshop. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Ste A, Atlanta. More info: [slc-atlanta.org](http://slc-atlanta.org).

**Red Clay Sangha Sunday Morning Service** – 9am, Sitting/Walking Meditation; 10:30, Morning Service; 10:45am, Dharma Discussion; 11:30am, Closse and Brunch. Via Zoom or in person. 3420 W Hospital Ave, Ste 102, Chamblee. More info: [RedClaySangha.org](http://RedClaySangha.org).

**Grant Park Farmers Market** – 9am-1pm. The Beacon ATL, 1030 Grant St SE, Atlanta. [cfmatl.org/markets](http://cfmatl.org/markets).

**Online: NWUUC** – 10:30am. Via Zoom. Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation: 770-955-1408 or [nwuuc.org](http://nwuuc.org).

**SRF Atlanta Meditation Service** – 10-10:45am. An opportunity to meet with other truth-seekers to commune with God and share spiritual fellowship. 4000 King Springs Rd, Smyrna. 770-434-7200. [srfatlanta.org](http://srfatlanta.org).

**Meditation Open House** – 10-11:30am. Discussion at 11:30am and tea at 12pm. Meditation instruction available from 10-11am for those new to the practice. Atlanta Shamb-

hala Center, 1447 Church St, Decatur. More info: [Atlanta.Shambhala.org](http://Atlanta.Shambhala.org).

**Online: UUCA Service** – 11am. Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta: [uucanet.org/live](http://uucanet.org/live).

**Unity Atlanta Church Sunday Services** – 11-1:45pm. Message series for the Lenten Season: Why Not Be Rich? Rev. Jennifer L. Sacks invites you to open yourself to abundance everywhere as she shares the timeless wisdom of Unity Master Teacher, Rev. Martha Guidici. Attend in-person or watch via livestream. A weekly “Brown Bag” workshop follows in-person 12:30-1:45pm to help expand the application in daily life. Youth Sunday School is held in-person 11am-12pm for ages 5-18. Childcare is also available during the workshop. 3597 Parkway Lane, Peachtree Corners. 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org).

**Twin Hearts Meditation** – 11.00 am – 12.30 pm. This meditation is an act of service. We use divine energy to bless the planet, our loved ones and every part of our life. With Atlanta Pranic Healing Center via Zoom. To watch: [AtlPranicHealing.com](http://AtlPranicHealing.com).

**Tarot and Mocktails** – 1-2.30 pm. 1st Sunday. Designed for experienced and beginner tarot readers. Bring a deck of cards or buy onsite. Enjoy mid-day snack and drink. Learn about tarot and oracle cards. With Holistic Health & Wellness - 3372 Canton Rd Suite 116, Marietta, GA, 30066. 678-471-6587. [HolisticHealthse.square.site/events](http://HolisticHealthse.square.site/events)

## Tuesdays

### The Art of Preserving Balance and Vitality Through Movement

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[PathsToIntegration.com](http://PathsToIntegration.com).

**Online Meditation Open House** – 7-8pm meditation, 8-8:30pm discussion, followed by tea and cookies. To watch: Atlanta. [Shambhala.org](http://Shambhala.org).

**Twin Hearts Meditation** – 7-8:30pm. A short, guided meditation blessing the Earth with loving kindness, peace and good will. Donation. Spiritual Living Center of Atlanta, 3107 Clairmont Rd, Unit A, Atlanta. 404-417-0008. [Meetup.com/Twin-Hearts-Meditation](http://Meetup.com/Twin-Hearts-Meditation).

**Divine Connection Spanish Language Online Prayer & Study Group** – 8-9pm. Unity Atlanta Church invites the Spanish-speaking community to “Conexión Divina,” led by Rev. Xiomara Malagon. This weekly Zoom class features various topics for personal and spiritual development. Drop-in any time. New people are welcome to join. Register: [xioma735@gmail.com](mailto:xioma735@gmail.com). Unity Atlanta Church: 770-441-0585. [UnityAtl.org](http://UnityAtl.org).

## Wednesdays

**Meditation & Modern Buddhism** – 7:00-8:15pm. With Resident Teacher, Gen Kelsang Dechok. Talks, guided meditation, discussion and Q&A. All welcome. Kadampa Meditation Center Georgia, 741 Edgewood NE, Atlanta. 678-453-6753. [MeditationInGeorgia.org](http://MeditationInGeorgia.org).

**Weekly Wednesday Meditation Class** – 7-8:30pm. Open to all levels. Experience true inner peace. With the Venerable Nicholas Thannissaro of the Georgia Meditation Center via Zoom. To register: [MeditationCircle.org](http://MeditationCircle.org).

## Thursdays

**Beyond Limits Weekly Conscious Dance** – Between 8pm in Smyrna and 7pm in Roswell, GA at Awareness Studios. With Marisa Skolky. An intentional dance activated by vocal toning and singing during an hour and a half dance through our emotions, lifecycle, archetypes and levels of consciousness. Followed by a singing bowl meditation, a closing circle and community tea time. \$20. Beyond Limits Expressive Arts Therapy LLC, 4528 King Springs Rd SE, Smyrna. 770-235-3183. [MarisaSkolky.com](http://MarisaSkolky.com).

## Saturdays

**Morningside Farmers Market** – 8-11:30am. Year-round. Offers organic produce, bread, pastries, grains, meat, honey, along with chef pop-ups, prepared foods, coffee, in-season fruits, and locally produced crafts. Morningside Presbyterian, 1411 N Morningside Dr NE, Atlanta. [MorningsideMarket.com](http://MorningsideMarket.com).

**Oakhurst Farmers Market** – 9am-1pm. Year-round. Fresh produce, meat, baked treats, and more. Additional offerings include live music and chef demonstrations featuring seasonal recipes. Sceptre Brewing Arts, 630 E Lake Dr, Decatur. [cfmatl.org/oakhurst](http://cfmatl.org/oakhurst).

**Tea & Tarot** – 11am-2pm. 1st Sat. A tea party and tarot mixer for people of all ages and experience levels. Hosted by Amy Cathryn. \$25. Forever And A Day, 7830 Hwy 92, Woodstock. 770-516-6969. [ForeverAndADay.as.me/TeaandTarot](http://ForeverAndADay.as.me/TeaandTarot).

**Free Reiki-Infused Yoga & Meditation** – 3:30-5:30pm. 1st & 2nd Sat. Vinyasa flow classes enable you to move slowly, while focusing on strength, flexibility, concentration, breath work and meditation. Free. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development Inc, 27 Waddell St NE, Atlanta. Registration required: 313-671-5804 or [Tinyurl.com/4mnww3t4](http://Tinyurl.com/4mnww3t4).

**Reiki Share Group** – 3:30-5:30pm. Last Sat. A gathering of like-minded reiki practitioners who participate in group healing treatments on each other. \$21. Healing Hands Reiki & Spiritual Development, Inc, 27 Waddell St, Ste A, Atlanta. [Tinyurl.com/2rykarft](http://Tinyurl.com/2rykarft).

*I know once people get connected to real food, they never change back.*

—Alice Waters



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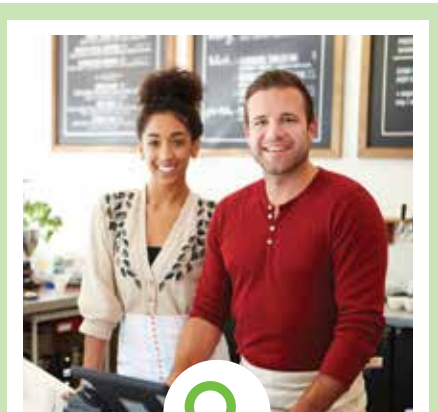
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# The Changing Face of Fun

by Tara Ochs



Earlier this year, I was invited to an out-of-town weekend social event. My bestie from college was turning 50, so there was no chance of turning down the invite. Which is a weird thing to say. Why would anyone want to miss out on that kind of fun? Are you the type of person who hears “beach weekend with the girls/guys” and thinks, “Heck yeah, sign me up!”? I used to be... I definitely used to be the person that lept off every cliff, explored every cave and stayed until the end of the party. I once woke up this college bestie at three in the morning to go jump in our famous campus fountain.

But as things do, and as things have, I guess I’ve changed.

I say that reluctantly because I love that girl who found fun around every corner. But for a while now, she has felt very distant. I won’t say I miss her. Because waking up at three in the morning to jump in a fountain does not sound fun to me anymore. Do not attempt to make me get up at 3 a.m. to do

anything. Fun for me now is making the perfect dough ball or sewing a costume for a friend. You know—inside stuff, stuff that’s quiet and maybe a bit isolated.

So when I got this invite, of course I said yes—but I also felt anxious, stressed and wary of how exhausted I’d be coming back to work the following Monday. Being around people I haven’t even seen in 30 years? And having to keep everyone entertained? And what are we even going to do all weekend? I had my reservations, but I went anyway.

I arrived at a beautiful beach house in Florida and was immediately thrown back into a mindset that the college girl version of me knew all too well—“I’m not cool enough.” For a solid two hours, I babbled, made jokes, bounced around the room—until the coffee wore off, and the late-40s energy reserves were tapped out. I took a deep breath and looked around. There they were: five very cool girls with five very different lives, yet all just like me—older, a little more

tired, and still unsure. And also wondering what “fun” looks like these days.

For the next two days, we traded reading glasses, wrinkle creams, sleeping aids. We stared at old photos and tried to remember who dated whom. We went out on the town at 5 p.m. and were back home by 9, pulling on pajama pants and wiping off makeup that wasn’t worn for anybody but us. I can’t tell you what we did all weekend, but I was never bored, and I was never stressed. After the first two hours, the social anxiety took a back seat and pretty much never uttered another word.

I’m not really surprised that I had a wonderful time, and I feel duty-bound to tell you that there was nothing pathetic about our version of fun just because it wasn’t the rager of 30 years ago. What caught me off guard was the *depth* of joy I felt that weekend. The kind of joy that even gave me energy the following Monday. Sometimes you don’t know that a feeling has been absent until you feel it again. Is it like watering a plant? I wouldn’t know—I am terrible with plants.

Where had that joy come from? I don’t think it was from walking on the beach, drinking mimosas all morning, staying up all night or lounging in a hot tub. I think what I needed—and what I received in huge quantities that weekend—was to see other women like me. To laugh and cry with them. To see them without makeup, without total self-confidence, without all the answers—and to see them doing OK. I got a kind of loving confirmation, a deep knowing. This is what happens to all of us: *We change. We get older. Life happens.* Yet, *we don’t really change.* Because the joy is still there. It’s just maybe gained a little weight and lost a little hair. But it’s still there. I just needed my girls to help me take her out for a weekend. 🌱



Tara Ochs is a writer, producer and performer in Atlanta’s entertainment community. She produces content with Dagger, a creative agency, and can be seen on stage at Dad’s Garage Theater in the Old Fourth Ward performing live comedy.

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