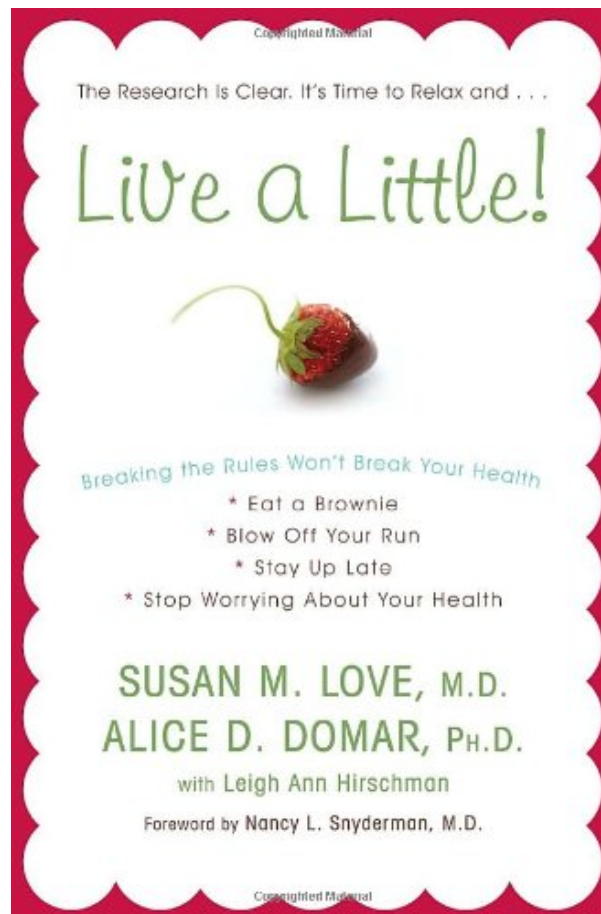


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The Research Is Clear. It's Time to Relax and . . .

Live a Little!



Breaking the Rules Won't Break Your Health

- * Eat a Brownie
- * Blow Off Your Run
- * Stay Up Late
- * Stop Worrying About Your Health

SUSAN M. LOVE, M.D.
ALICE D. DOMAR, PH.D.
with Leigh Ann Hirschman

Foreword by Nancy L. Snyderman, M.D.

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From Booklist

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And don't forget the Kegels.

This list is so impossible that it leaves most women either consumed with panic or doubled over with laughter. Yet if you have picked up this book, chances are you feel at least some obligation to follow what we'll call, with more than a dab of irony, the "health rules." The individual rules themselves may change with unsettling frequency—by the time you read this book, at least one of the rules we listed will probably be out of date—but one thing remains constant: Every time you turn on the television or read a magazine, you are bombarded with a highly specific set of dos and don'ts for staying healthy. Of course, you want to be healthy. And if you do get sick, you definitely don't want people to say, in an accusing tone, "She brought it on herself, you know, because she -didn't eat enough broccoli." So you try.

But despite earnest efforts to follow these rules, you probably find it tough-going. Maybe you've experienced the "what the hell" effect. I've been "bad" and eaten a cookie. What the hell, I'll eat the whole bag. Or: There's no way I can exercise for sixty minutes every day. What the hell! I won't exercise at all. Or perhaps you've done your level best to follow every piece of health advice and then been riddled with a sense of failure when you fell short. These experiences are common—all too common, we believe. The health rules, which are supposed to help us live longer and live better, have become a source of pressure, guilt, and stress. This is not a healthy situation.

We've written this book as a corrective to the narrowly laid--out health rules; in their place, we'll offer a more relaxed definition of both health and health habits. You might argue that we're exactly the kind of people who ought to be vigorously defending the conventional rules, not questioning them. And, yes, we've both devoted our lives to bettering the health of women. Susan is a breast cancer surgeon; the author of books about menopause and breast health; and president of the Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation, an organization dedicated to ending breast cancer. Ali is a psychologist and author specializing in women's health; the head of the Domar Center for Mind/Body Health; the director of Mind/Body Services for Boston IVF; and an assistant professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive biology at Harvard Medical School. We're both part of BeWell, a team of health care professionals at the forefront of helping women live healthier lives.

In our jobs, we rarely encounter women who blithely ignore the health rules. Instead, we see women who are overwhelmed by them. So we decided to review the evidence for the health rules, sifting through piles of data—and guess what? We've come to believe what you have probably suspected all along: These rules are a little ridiculous. They are unrealistic, and, worse, their scientific foundation is often shaky. We're frustrated that you are made to feel guilty or hopeless when you can't conform to impractical and sometimes unsupported health guidelines. And we suspect that there are negative health consequences of worrying

about your health all the time!

Great News: You Don't Have Total Control Over Your Health

We'd like to help you take on the health police—you know, those well-intentioned but literal-minded policy makers, television experts, magazine writers, personal trainers, and neighbors who make you feel like a lawbreaker every time you eat a gram of saturated fat. But to do this we have to address a difficult truth, which is that we don't have total control over our health. For too long, we've all been coached that if we follow certain health habits we will create a kind of protective bubble around our bodies, one that instantly deflects chronic diseases such as arthritis and hypertension. Pain-free and feeling great, we'll sally forth into old age with our bubbles intact, our bodies fortified by perfect diets and exercise regimens. The big nasties—cancer and heart disease—won't stand a chance against our flexible arteries and robust, well-regulated cells. Finally, at the age of 110, we'll say a moving good-bye to our loved ones and die peacefully in our sleep.

Sorry, but health -doesn't work like this. Although there are habits clearly associated with premature disease, there are some determinants of illness and death that are beyond our control. (As the stress humorist and BeWell member Loretta LaRoche likes to say, those health nuts are going to be really surprised when they die of nothing.) All the yoga and stress reduction in the world might not be enough to counteract a genetic tendency toward, say, back pain. Or from being hit by that favorite morbid cliché of mothers everywhere, the city bus. On the other hand, we've all read the stories about one-hundred-year-old ladies who attribute their long lives to a diet of unfiltered cigarettes and butter. A true understanding of health takes into account the very real presence of luck, both bad and good.

But, you might ask, isn't there evidence showing that we can control our health by engaging in good habits? Well, if you poke at some of this evidence, you'll find it doesn't take long for that "total control" illusion to pop. For example, studies show that people who eat lots of fiber are less likely to develop heart disease than people who don't. What those studies don't tell us is whether the fiber-eating people live any longer. Do they have more years in which to enjoy life? Or do they simply die at the same age of an alternative disease, perhaps one that is not as mercifully quick and relatively painless as a heart attack? If they do live longer, are their lives any better, or are the added years spent in disability, senility, and depression? We simply don't know.

What we do know is that the health rules can mislead you into halfway believing that if you eat only the right things, or exercise in the proper way, you can escape not just run-of-the-mill illnesses but death itself. This way of thinking leads to a distorted set of priorities: Instead of trying to be healthy so that you can enjoy life, you squander your happiness in the pursuit of more health. But as Nortin Hadler, a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina, points out in his book *Worried Sick*, "The death rate is one per person." We can't stop death, not even with oat bran.

Bleak news, yes. When you realize, though, that health is not under your total control, a lot of guilt and stress slide off your shoulders. It no longer feels as if your very life depends on how frantically you monitor your nutritional intake, exercise habits, and stress level. Better still, you can trade in your illusion of becoming

perfectly healthy for something much more fun: being pretty healthy. Pretty Healthy means, first of all, that your health habits contribute to, not distract from, your enjoyment of life.

When you're Pretty Healthy, you live in such a way that you don't bring untimely disability or death upon yourself. You have sufficient supplies of energy, and you're free from obsession about the state of your body or your mind. Although you may suffer from illness now and then, or even develop a chronic health problem like osteoarthritis, you can still be Pretty Healthy if you take pleasure in life most of the time and possess the general sense that you can cope with the challenges that come your way.

There is good reason to think that pretty good health encompasses a much wider set of behaviors than we've been led to believe. We don't have to achieve maximum vegetable consumption or get eight straight hours of sleep every night to "get it right."

Where's the Evidence?

In the chapters that follow, we'll look at six areas—sleep, stress management, health screenings, exercise, nutrition, and personal relationships—that are the subject of many a health rule. Some of these rules are based on excellent evidence. But many are not. Plenty are based on scanty evidence or even bald corporate interest.

This is a sorry situation, but not a new one. Take a quick glimpse back at the past decade of health journalism, and it's easy to think of examples of health fads that rose on a wave of conjecture then receded when someone finally pointed out a lack of evidence. Just a few years ago, you -couldn't open a newspaper or magazine without reading about the importance of drinking eight glasses of water a day. Told they were in constant danger of dehydration, the women of America (and many of the men, too) toted around giant bottles of fancy, expensive water. Then the Institute of Medicine reviewed the clinical literature and discovered ther...

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Later to bed, munching some fries, makes a girl pretty healthy and wise. . . .

Yes, it's true—more or less. Why? Women do need to eat healthier, exercise, get adequate sleep, and take preventive health care seriously, yet it's equally important for them to relax. Relax, take a breather, and give up trying to follow the narrowly prescribed health “rules” that are constant sources of unhealthy stress and guilt.

In *Live a Little!*, women finally get a long-overdue dose of realism about what's truly healthy and what's mostly hype. Susan Love and Alice Domar take on the health police, whose edicts make us feel terrible when we don't get eight hours of sleep or eat the maximum daily serving of veggies. Most important, they remind us of a forgotten truth: Perfect health is not achievable.

Breaking down the prevailing health “musts” in six areas—sleep, stress, preventive care, exercise, nutrition, and personal relationships—these doctors, with a little help from the other experts of *BeWell*, cut to the heart of these topics and give us realistic guidelines for living a healthy enough life, one that also includes laughter, relaxation, and a commonsense attitude about being pretty healthy.

To learn more health truths and whittle down your overblown expectations of yourself, open this book. Using science combined with these experts' surprisingly refreshing opinions, *Live a Little!* shows you how to be healthy without driving yourself crazy!

- Sales Rank: #1812055 in Books
- Dimensions: 9.60" h x 1.00" w x 6.50" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 256 pages

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Live a little - love it!

By Faith

Love this book!

16 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Such a breath of fresh air~!

By E. Burke

Finally, we are advised to use our common sense (as the authors say, no one else lives in your body), live with moderation, and live a lot! (Despite the interests of the pharmaceutical industry and much of the medical profession.)

Honest and sometimes very funny. What? Maybe we don't need annual physicals? What? A frank discussion of mammograms and CT scans? What? We may not need 8 hrs. of sleep? What? We should look to who has funded the study before swallowing it hook, line and sinker?

Sleeping, eating ('beyond blueberries), exercise, relationships and more. If, as the authors say, Pretty Healthy is a worthy goal (and more than that may not increase our longevity), chances are, many more of us can achieve it.

Happy 2010~!

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Live A Little

By Miriam Sagan

I wanted to like LIVE A LITTLE by Susan M. Love M.D. and Alice D.Domar Ph.D in part because it sports a chocolate covered strawberry on the cover. And the subtitle is "Breaking the Rules Won't Break Your Health." I've found Love to be helpful on menopause and an authority on breast cancer, but frankly these authors didn't enlighten me on happiness. The premise of the book-that you don't have to have perfect habits to be healthy enough-might relieve some readers of guilt. But I found it to be too much of a rehashing on the general, oft repeated, health advice for women, just with the addition of a moderate tone.

Particularly unappetizing is the approach towards sex. Each chapter has little quizzes (something I'm generally a fan of) but the most positive statement begins "My sex drive has changed over the years" which is hardly what I'd call live a little. So too the guidelines for medical testing seem overly pro-test-with yearly mammagrams suggested just at the time when these guidelines have been revised down.

Sometimes I wish I'd majored in the history of science in college. I love the way rational belief wars with culture and personal experience. I love that we're motivated by things we just assume are real-really real-and not just temporary cultural assumptions. Health is one of those things, particularly for women, and for women as consumers of health. Is our health really our responsibility, as we're told in article after article, or are our woes part of a public health demographic? At least LIVE A LITTLE doesn't believe we can live forever by jogging and drinking bottled water. The book does debunk the myth that we need to drink eight glasses of water a day. (As well as the belief that we need eight hours of sleep) In fact, it does take a reasonable approach to health information. It just doesn't go far enough beyond the strawberry.

My reviews can also be found on the literary blog Miriasm's Well ([...])

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From Booklist

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drink two glasses of said wine to avoid breast cancer; get a full night's sleep to promote immune function; expose the skin to sunlight for ten minutes to absorb vitamin D, then immediately apply sunscreen to avoid skin cancer; relieve stress to strengthen the immune system; build a social support network to ward off Alzheimer's; book appointments with our mates for healthy sexual pleasure; and, of course, maintain a body mass index that falls exactly within the "healthy" range listed in every women's magazine.

And don't forget the Kegels.

This list is so impossible that it leaves most women either consumed with panic or doubled over with laughter. Yet if you have picked up this book, chances are you feel at least some obligation to follow what we'll call, with more than a dab of irony, the "health rules." The individual rules themselves may change with unsettling frequency—by the time you read this book, at least one of the rules we listed will probably be out of date—but one thing remains constant: Every time you turn on the television or read a magazine, you are bombarded with a highly specific set of dos and don'ts for staying healthy. Of course, you want to be healthy. And if you do get sick, you definitely don't want people to say, in an accusing tone, "She brought it on herself, you know, because she -didn't eat enough broccoli." So you try.

But despite earnest efforts to follow these rules, you probably find it tough-going. Maybe you've experienced the "what the hell" effect. I've been "bad" and eaten a cookie. What the hell, I'll eat the whole bag. Or: There's no way I can exercise for sixty minutes every day. What the hell! I won't exercise at all. Or perhaps you've done your level best to follow every piece of health advice and then been riddled with a sense of failure when you fell short. These experiences are common—all too common, we believe. The health rules, which are supposed to help us live longer and live better, have become a source of pressure, guilt, and stress. This is not a healthy situation.

We've written this book as a corrective to the narrowly laid-out health rules; in their place, we'll offer a more relaxed definition of both health and health habits. You might argue that we're exactly the kind of people who ought to be vigorously defending the conventional rules, not questioning them. And, yes, we've both devoted our lives to bettering the health of women. Susan is a breast cancer surgeon; the author of books about menopause and breast health; and president of the Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation, an organization dedicated to ending breast cancer. Ali is a psychologist and author specializing in women's health; the head of the Domar Center for Mind/Body Health; the director of Mind/Body Services for Boston IVF; and an assistant professor of obstetrics, gynecology, and reproductive biology at Harvard Medical School. We're both part of BeWell, a team of health care professionals at the forefront of helping women live healthier lives.

In our jobs, we rarely encounter women who blithely ignore the health rules. Instead, we see women who are overwhelmed by them. So we decided to review the evidence for the health rules, sifting through piles of data—and guess what? We've come to believe what you have probably suspected all along: These rules are a little ridiculous. They are unrealistic, and, worse, their scientific foundation is often shaky. We're frustrated that you are made to feel guilty or hopeless when you can't conform to impractical and sometimes unsupported health guidelines. And we suspect that there are negative health consequences of worrying about your health all the time!

Great News: You Don't Have Total Control Over Your Health

We'd like to help you take on the health police—you know, those well-intentioned but literal-minded policy makers, television experts, magazine writers, personal trainers, and neighbors who make you feel like a lawbreaker every time you eat a gram of saturated fat. But to do this we have to address a difficult truth, which is that we don't have total control over our health. For too long, we've all been coached that if we follow certain health habits we will create a kind of protective bubble around our bodies, one that instantly deflects chronic diseases such as arthritis and hypertension. Pain-free and feeling great, we'll sally forth into old age with our bubbles intact, our bodies fortified by perfect diets and exercise regimens. The big nasties—cancer and heart disease—won't stand a chance against our flexible arteries and robust, well-regulated cells. Finally, at the age of 110, we'll say a moving good-bye to our loved ones and die peacefully in our sleep.

Sorry, but health -doesn't work like this. Although there are habits clearly associated with premature disease, there are some determinants of illness and death that are beyond our control. (As the stress humorist and BeWell member Loretta LaRoche likes to say, those health nuts are going to be really surprised when they die of nothing.) All the yoga and stress reduction in the world might not be enough to counteract a genetic tendency toward, say, back pain. Or from being hit by that favorite morbid cliché of mothers everywhere, the city bus. On the other hand, we've all read the stories about one-hundred-year-old ladies who attribute their long lives to a diet of unfiltered cigarettes and butter. A true understanding of health takes into account the very real presence of luck, both bad and good.

But, you might ask, isn't there evidence showing that we can control our health by engaging in good habits? Well, if you poke at some of this evidence, you'll find it doesn't take long for that "total control" illusion to pop. For example, studies show that people who eat lots of fiber are less likely to develop heart disease than people who don't. What those studies don't tell us is whether the fiber-eating people live any longer. Do they have more years in which to enjoy life? Or do they simply die at the same age of an alternative disease, perhaps one that is not as mercifully quick and relatively painless as a heart attack? If they do live longer, are their lives any better, or are the added years spent in disability, senility, and depression? We simply don't know.

What we do know is that the health rules can mislead you into halfway believing that if you eat only the right things, or exercise in the proper way, you can escape not just run-of-the-mill illnesses but death itself. This way of thinking leads to a distorted set of priorities: Instead of trying to be healthy so that you can enjoy life, you squander your happiness in the pursuit of more health. But as Nortin Hadler, a professor of medicine at the University of North Carolina, points out in his book *Worried Sick*, "The death rate is one per person." We can't stop death, not even with oat bran.

Bleak news, yes. When you realize, though, that health is not under your total control, a lot of guilt and stress slide off your shoulders. It no longer feels as if your very life depends on how frantically you monitor your nutritional intake, exercise habits, and stress level. Better still, you can trade in your illusion of becoming perfectly healthy for something much more fun: being pretty healthy. Pretty Healthy means, first of all, that your health habits contribute to, not distract from, your enjoyment of life.

When you're Pretty Healthy, you live in such a way that you don't bring untimely disability or death upon yourself. You have sufficient supplies of energy, and you're free from obsession about the state of your body or your mind. Although you may suffer from illness now and then, or even develop a chronic health problem like osteoarthritis, you can still be Pretty Healthy if you take pleasure in life most of the time and possess the general sense that you can cope with the challenges that come your way.

There is good reason to think that pretty good health encompasses a much wider set of behaviors than we've been led to believe. We don't have to achieve maximum vegetable consumption or get eight straight hours of sleep every night to "get it right."

Where's the Evidence?

In the chapters that follow, we'll look at six areas—sleep, stress management, health screenings, exercise, nutrition, and personal relationships—that are the subject of many a health rule. Some of these rules are based on excellent evidence. But many are not. Plenty are based on scanty evidence or even bald corporate interest.

This is a sorry situation, but not a new one. Take a quick glimpse back at the past decade of health journalism, and it's easy to think of examples of health fads that rose on a wave of conjecture then receded when someone finally pointed out a lack of evidence. Just a few years ago, you -couldn't open a newspaper or magazine without reading about the importance of drinking eight glasses of water a day. Told they were in constant danger of dehydration, the women of America (and many of the men, too) toted around giant bottles of fancy, expensive water. Then the Institute of Medicine reviewed the clinical literature and discovered ther...

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