

The 6S's

A Framework For Sustainable Wellness



LifeMD⁺

How to reboot your health and achieve balance in the era of **prescription GLP-1 medications**





“The 6 S’s are a framework to drive a larger transformation, just as weight loss medications can be the impetus or jumpstart to a broader and longer-lasting health optimization.”

Anthony Puopolo, MD



A NEW ERA

The term “miracle cure” is thrown around a lot these days – often with little justification. But when it comes to the new class of weight loss drugs, it appears the hype is justified.

Glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists – more widely known as “GLP-1s” – are a class of medications that includes semaglutide (brand names Ozempic and Wegovy), tirzepatide (brand names Mounjaro and Zepbound), and other cutting-edge drugs. Originally created for type 2 diabetes patients, GLP-1s are now also prescribed to patients with chronic weight issues and are considered a once-in-a-generation breakthrough for weight loss. Experts who’ve studied them call them “[game-changers](#)” for patients with obesity.

“We believe GLP-1s are the best non-surgical treatment for weight loss ever created,” says Dr. Anthony Puopolo, chief medical officer at LifeMD.

Not only do these drugs lead to remarkable weight loss, they also appear to reduce a person’s risk for common medical conditions associated with obesity. They support lowered blood sugar levels, as well as [healthier GI, liver, and kidney function](#). GLP-1s are also associated with a reduced risk of [cardiovascular disease](#) and death. Heart doctors [are hailing them](#) as “a new treatment paradigm,” while other medical experts have [compared them to antibiotics](#) for their potential to save lives and reduce suffering.

But amidst all the plaudits and fawning press, an important aspect of GLP-1 medications is widely overlooked: [The research behind these drugs](#) categorizes them strictly as an “adjunct” therapy, rather than a standalone treatment. That means they’re intended to be used as an addition to – not instead of – regular exercise, a balanced diet, and other tried-and-true components of healthy living.

That’s not to say GLP-1s are ineffective when taken alone. But if you want to maximize their benefits – and sustain those benefits long-term – it’s important to eat right, move, manage your stress, and take other steps to support your overall health. At LifeMD, we acknowledge both the power and the limitations of these medicines. While they can help people lose weight and lower their risks for obesity-related diseases – benefits that are worth celebrating – these are just two aspects of a healthy life.

True health is about more than numbers and test results, and it's definitely about more than weight. It’s about living a life that supports you in body, mind, and spirit. Knowing this, it may be best to view GLP-1s as a starting point, not as a finish line. In computer terms, you could call them a “hard reset.” They offer you an opportunity to slim down and establish a stronger baseline as you pursue long-term, holistic health.



“Obesity is often a visible sign of underlying imbalances, affecting not only physical health but also mental and social well-being.”

“Obesity is often a visible sign of underlying imbalances, affecting not only physical health but also mental and social well-being,” Dr. Puopolo says. “Achieving a balanced and healthy lifestyle involves addressing the root causes of those underlying imbalances, reshaping habits, and establishing sustainable routines.”

LifeMD has developed the **6S Framework** – a new methodology for supporting your physical, mental, and social well-being. Consider this your guide to holistic health in the era of prescription GLP-1 medications.

The 6S Framework: An Overview

The 6S Framework includes the six elements of a healthy and balanced life. These pillars encompass proper nutrition and exercise, as well as sleep, stress management, and other behaviors that support a strong body and mind.

Here's a quick rundown of those elements – or what we call the 6 S's – and how each fits into the context of your overall health.



Sleep

Like an electric vehicle, you need time to recharge your batteries. Far from “down time,” sleep is an active stage of repair, recovery, and rejuvenation – a time when some of your body's most important health-sustaining processes take place.



Sustenance

Sticking with the vehicle analogy, think of the foods, drinks, and supplements you consume (the things that sustain you) as your fuel. They should provide your body with the nourishment it needs to not only survive, but to thrive. It's also important to avoid (or, in some cases, limit) harmful substances like alcohol and nicotine.



Sweat

Your body is made to move, and depends on a variety of exercises to function at its peak. Think of sweat as the necessary lubricant for your vehicle's important parts – parts that include your joints, muscles, and even your brain. Without that lubricant, those parts become weak and rusty. Sweat also helps you burn off excess energy, and keeps you feeling sharp, focused, and productive.



Stillness and Self-Talk

Self-talk is your GPS; it gives you guidance and direction. It's all your questions, reflections, ambitions, and doubts – about the past and the future – acting like dashboard gauges on your lifelong voyage. But too much self-talk can be distracting and harmful. It must be balanced with stillness – a state of being that focuses on the here and now.



Stress Management

Stress is a form of energy. It can either power you forward or hold you back. A little stress can ensure that your needs and wants are adequately satisfied. It can motivate you. But too much stress can cause you to stall out and struggle. It's like revving your engine in the wrong gear. That's why it's so important to manage your stress in healthy ways.



Social Interactions

Think of the people in your social network (and your interactions with them) as the other cars traveling on the road beside you. These may be your valued companions – lighting the way forward – or, conversely, congestion that slows you down. Finding balance in your social life allows you to draw strength and comfort from friends and loved ones while also limiting the interactions that hold you back.

A DETAILED GUIDE TO THE 6S FRAMEWORK

At LifeMD, everything we do is rooted in science. But our real-world experience has taught us that each person is unique, and what works for one individual may not work for the next.

As a result, we don't believe in strict formulas or rigid approaches to health and wellness. We believe in flexible advice – guidelines, not rules – that people can adopt and apply in the context of their own lives. You'll see that ethos reflected in our approach to each of the 6 S's.

“I think the 6S Framework gives people guidance to improve their health, but it's not a solution in and of itself,” Dr. Puopolo says. “The 6 S's are a framework to drive a larger transformation, just as weight loss medications can be the impetus or jumpstart to a broader and longer-lasting health optimization.”



Sleep

You will spend roughly one-third of your life asleep. Have you ever wondered why so much of your existence is taken up by a state of unconscious inactivity?

There's a reason your body and brain allocate so much time to slumber (and it's the same reason we place sleep first among the 6 S's). While it's common to think of sleep as downtime, or even wasted time, many essential internal housekeeping processes can only take place while you're asleep.

Sleep and the Brain

Not long ago, sleep experts still weren't clear of the [purpose of sleep](#). They understood that sleep aids rest and recovery, and they also knew that sleep helps the brain store away the new knowledge and information it collects during the day. Still, these conclusions were the result of educated guesswork – not hard science. A recent breakthrough helped to change that.

Roughly a decade ago, sleep researchers discovered [a secret “fluid transport system”](#) inside the brain. Known as the glymphatic system, it's essentially a network of vessels that carry fluid throughout the brain and other

parts of the nervous system, like a bunch of tiny rivers and streams. It's now believed that the glymphatic system performs a necessary flushing and cleaning function – almost like a garbage collection service for the brain.

More specifically, it helps [remove waste products](#) that build up in the brain throughout the day. These waste products include beta amyloids, the peptides found in the brains of people with Alzheimer's disease, as well as the kind of detritus that [may contribute](#) to migraines.

“The longer we’re awake, the more cellular byproducts build up in the brain.”

This glymphatic system may also protect the brain from damage. “The longer we’re awake, the more cellular byproducts build up in the brain,” said Jeanne Duffy, a neuroscientist and sleep researcher wrote [in a recent media report](#). “The glymphatic system washes these cellular byproducts out so they’re not causing damage to brain cells.”

And here’s the kicker: This waste-clearing system appears to operate almost exclusively while you sleep.

Apart from this brain-boosting function, sleep supports emotional health, as well as your ability to learn and remember things. Without adequate sleep, your [memory, mood, and ability to think suffer](#) greatly.



Sleep and the Body

Your muscles and organs require sleep for rest and recovery. But sleep does more – much more – to support the health of your body.



Metaphorically speaking, every cell and organ inside of you is equipped with a clock. Together, these clocks form your body’s circadian system, [which helps regulate](#) your hormones, body temperature, blood pressure, gene expression, immune system activity, and other functions that keep you alive and healthy.

All of these clocks are closely tied to sleep. In fact, sleep is what “sets” these clocks and keeps them properly aligned. When you don’t get enough sleep, or when your sleep is irregular or erratic, it disrupts your body’s circadian timing. This can make any existing health conditions worse, and elevate your risk for [cardiovascular disease, cancer, cognitive impairment, and even accelerated aging](#).

Improving Your Sleep

You've heard that it's important to sleep eight hours a night. While this is a helpful rule of thumb, the truth is that sleep needs can vary from person to person, and perhaps even from season to season. Still, researchers agree that between seven to nine hours of sleep is [optimal](#) for the majority of people.

Researchers have also found that everyone goes through periods of poor sleep. If you have a bad night (or even a bad week) of sleep now and then, but you normally sleep well, it's unlikely to cause serious damage to your health.



Still, researchers agree that between seven to nine hours of sleep is optimal for the majority of people.

Sleep isn't just about the total time you spend in bed. [Research](#) suggests the quality of your sleep matters too. Eating too close to bedtime or drinking too much alcohol could harm the quality of your sleep, even if you're sleeping eight hours. An inadequate [sleeping environment](#) – one that is too hot, loud, or bright – can also impact your quality of sleep.

Determining your personal sleep needs – and how to achieve them – can take some trial and error. It isn't as straightforward as one might hope.

But getting consistent, quality sleep can be incredibly challenging for people who are overweight. Excess weight is known to cause [sleep disruptions](#) and is linked to issues like obstructive sleep apnea and gastroesophageal reflux disease.

Conversely, how well or poorly you sleep can have a huge impact on your weight. For example, leptin and ghrelin, which are hormones that regulate appetite, are altered by sleep patterns – and insufficient sleep can impair your metabolism.

That being said, prescription GLP-1 medications (and their accompanying weight loss) may help some patients – specifically, those who have trouble sleeping – improve their overall sleep habits.

Bottom line? Make sleep a priority and it will pay off in dividends.



Still, one piece of advice holds true for everyone: consistency is key. Greater sleep variability [is consistently tied](#) to poor health outcomes. It's difficult to sleep well and healthfully if your sleep-wake schedule is all over the place.



Sustenance

Sustenance is survival. If you don't eat or drink, you die. That much, at least, is simple. But precisely how you approach eating and drinking – what you consume and how you consume it – is endlessly complicated.

If you've dieted before, you already know this. It can feel like new online information or published research is forever contradicting the advice you heard in the past.

Eat fat. Don't eat fat.

Eat fewer carbs. Eat more whole grains.

Saturated fats are dangerous. Saturated fats are safe.

And on and on.

But despite all the noise within the nutrition and dieting space, some ground truths have emerged. And with the assistance of a prescription GLP-1 medication, putting those foundational principles into practice may come easier than it has in the past. Additionally, even if you transition off of the medication, you may find yourself in a better position and mindset to make better choices moving forward.

“When you've been heavier and have struggled to lose weight, and now you're in a better place, that's a great opportunity to make the changes you need to sustain and build on the improvements that go beyond numbers on the scale,” Dr. Puopolo says.

Dietary Patterns Matter More Than Individual Choices

Nutrients play a major role in regulating the health and functioning of your body and brain. As the authors of a [2024 research review](#) put it: **“The quantity, quality, and composition of the food consumed, as well as the timing of meals, directly impact human health by influencing the availability of nutrients.”**

Mounting research links certain dietary patterns to higher rates of cardiovascular disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancer. In fact, some of the [latest evidence](#) suggests that how a person eats can even affect the metabolism of cancerous tumors – potentially helping or hindering the



The overall makeup of your diet, as well as the timing of your meals, is more important than any individual component.



effectiveness of treatment. Meanwhile, some other dietary patterns can reduce risk for these serious diseases.

Despite the importance of diet and the attention around it, [most people](#) have a poor understanding of how to eat healthfully. While many of us focus on the effects of individual foods or nutrients – trying to avoid *this* or get more of *that* – the overall makeup of your diet, as well as the timing of your meals, is more important than any individual component.

For this reason, nutrition experts today often talk about dietary “patterns.” While their focus was once very granular – studying the effects of specific foods or nutrients – the inconsistency of their findings led them to zoom out and assess people’s eating habits from a broader vantage point. Whether you have a salad for

lunch or a Coke with dinner seems to matter less than whether your overall diet is heavy on leafy greens or sugar-laden beverages. It's the pattern and overall balance of different foods that matters most.

Likewise, a growing amount of research links when and how often you eat to major health effects. While more research is needed to make any definitive findings, there's mounting evidence that eating earlier in the day is generally healthier than eating late in the day and close to bedtime. Additionally,

some scientists believe that restricting your consumption to two or three larger meals may be healthier than eating continually throughout the day.

To make matters even more complex, it's clear that an "optimal" approach to eating will vary depending on a person's age, health status, current weight, genetic makeup, physical activity levels, and other factors. For example, supplements can be a helpful – and in some cases, necessary – addition to your regular diet. But [not all supplements are beneficial](#).



DOs

- **Eat earlier in the day**
- **Eat two to three large meals**



DON'Ts

- **Eat close to bedtime**
- **Eat continually throughout the day**

So, when it comes to sustenance, it's important to see the bigger picture and develop long-term "patterns" rather than changing diets regularly or taking supplements without clinical guidance. Further, embrace that the "right" approach to sustenance varies from person to person. The healthiest approach for you may look a lot different than the healthiest approach for someone else.

This is especially true if you've embarked on a weight loss journey and are concerned about muscle loss. It's also true if you've lost weight with the help of medications and need to focus on maintaining your results. GLP-1 medication may be integral in allowing you to reduce the "food noise" so that you can effectively explore and identify an optimal approach to diet.



They can also help you reinforce "patterns" that align with your long-term goals.



Sweat

Human beings are made to move. Unfortunately, much of modern life asks us to sit still, causing severe damage to our health.

According to the authors of [a 2020 research study](#): “Sedentary lifestyles are spreading worldwide because of a lack of available spaces for exercise, increased occupational sedentary behaviors such as office work, and the increased penetration of television and video devices.” Additionally, [a survey](#) revealed that the average American spends almost 10 hours a day sitting or engaged in other sedentary behaviors – and that’s not including time spent sleeping.

The last decade has witnessed a barrage of studies linking a sedentary lifestyle to problems of both body and mind. These [problems](#) include weight gain, insomnia, depression, cognitive issues, and an increased risk for cardiovascular and metabolic diseases. A sedentary lifestyle can also lead to problems with balance, flexibility, and stability.

“Many of us are taking in a lot of energy, but we’re not using that energy,” Dr. Puopolo says. “And so we end up collecting all this energy, which leads to imbalance.”

Our need to move – to sweat – has never been more urgent.

How Inactivity Imperils Your Health

Some of the effects of a sedentary lifestyle include:



Elevated levels of fats
in bloodstream



Problems breaking
down carbohydrates
and fats



Lower cardiac output
and reduced systemic
blood flow



Increased levels of
unhealthy sympathetic
nervous system activity



Reduced insulin
sensitivity



Poorer vascular
function



Altered circulation
of hormones



Higher levels of
chronic inflammation

Research has also linked inactivity to higher levels of stress, poorer sleep, fatigue, and problems with mood and thinking.

The Importance of Exercise

Decades of research show that [regular physical activity](#) lengthens a person's life and reduces their risks for at least 40 separate chronic conditions and diseases.

Exercise [has also been shown](#) to improve health at a cellular level. It strengthens your tissues and organs, as well as all of your major muscles – including your brain. It keeps you flexible, agile, energized, and able to meet life's diverse challenges.

[National health guidelines](#) recommend at

least 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity, or at least 75 minutes per week of vigorous physical activity. These recommendations have consistent evidence supporting their health benefits.

But what exactly does moderate or vigorous activity look like? The answer depends on the individual. For some, a brisk walk might raise their heart rate enough to be considered vigorous. For others, more intense aerobic training – swimming or running, for example – may be necessary. Furthermore, some people

may benefit more from strength (weight) or flexibility training than others.

While each individual's exercise needs vary, just about any exercise is good exercise. You don't have to train for hours to capture the benefits of physical activity; even a little exercise appears to go a long way.

For example, experts have been studying the effects of short bouts of vigorous physical activity – the kind of training that makes you sweat or elevates your heart rate. [They've found](#) that even brief workouts – even just running for one minute or walking up a flight of stairs – are good for your health.

Even if you're not doing designated workouts, simply moving your body has incredible benefits. **A [study](#) showed that people who reduced their daily amount of sedentary time by one hour – even if they weren't exercising – saw**



improvements in their mood, sleep, and stress levels. Spending more time gardening, doing household chores, stretching, cooking, or engaging in other movement-oriented activities can make a huge difference in how you think and feel.

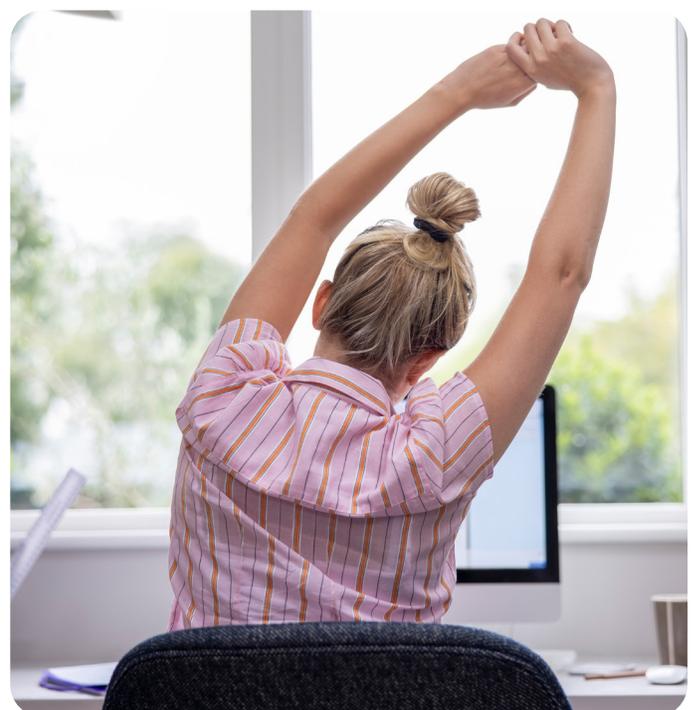
Finding the Right Approach

You can find more balance in your approach to physical activity, rather than always thinking about exercise as a route to weight loss.

A lot of us think of exercise in narrow terms: something that involves running a few miles, for example, or spending an hour at the gym. This view may be especially common among those who have struggled with their weight and think of exercise as a route to weight loss.

But it's clear that many types of movement support your mental and physical health. As people lose weight with prescription GLP-1 medications, their approach to exercise may start to evolve.

“You can find more balance in your approach to physical activity, rather than always thinking about exercise as a route to weight loss,” Dr. Puopolo says.





Stillness and Self-Talk

In some ways, much of life is a conversation with yourself. We each have an inner voice that guides our actions and informs our decisions.

That voice talks to us about our hopes and ambitions, as well as our concerns, our fears, and our self-doubts. Without that inner voice, our motivation to improve, achieve – and even survive – would be muted.

Of course, there are times when self-talk can become imbalanced and destabilizing. Not everything you tell yourself is true. Sometimes, that voice in your head isn't telling you what you need to hear. Sometimes, it's lying to you.

For example, people who are overweight or obese may have an inner voice telling them that sustained weight loss is impossible. But that simply isn't true. They might carry shame about their weight, losing sight of the fact that obesity is a chronic health condition and not a moral failing.

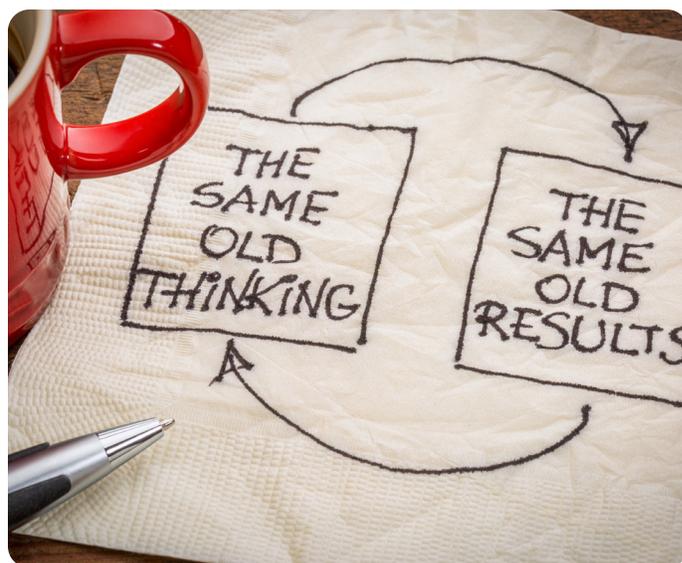
Stillness – a state of inner calmness, tranquility, and quietude – is the necessary counterweight to self-talk. Practicing stillness requires you to focus on the here and now rather than the past or future. “Stillness is your spiritual brain helping you tune in to the universal energy that's feeding you and supporting you right now – in this moment,” Dr. Puopolo says.

When Self-Talk Becomes Imbalanced

There is nothing inherently negative about self-talk. Even if that voice in your head is expressing concern, or questioning or criticizing your choices or actions, that kind of inner dialogue has its place. It can help you make changes or keep your resolve when the circumstances of your life challenge you.

But, as stated earlier, self-talk can become imbalanced. Unhelpful thoughts, worries, or criticisms can become automatic and repetitive. Over time, they can distort your view of your life and yourself. It's as though the story you're telling yourself is always frightening or upsetting.

Research has identified repetitive negative thinking (also known as rumination) as a hallmark of depression, anxiety, and other mood



disorders. Often, these [repetitive negative thoughts](#) arise first – before emotional problems set in – and fuel psychological dysfunction.

Achieving Stillness



Stillness is about staying present, in the here and now, rather than focusing on what is passed or what will come. It's turning your attention outward so that you can appreciate where you are and what's around you, rather than turning your attention inward – where all your doubts, fears, and regrets lurk.

As you've surely heard, practicing mindfulness and other forms of meditation (practices that help you achieve stillness) can be hugely helpful for your mental health. These ancient practices teach you to quiet your thoughts and to set aside any judgments or worries.

[Mindfulness practices](#) can also help you recognize problematic patterns in your own self-talk. They can train you to identify those times

Self-talk grows silent when you're immersed in the moment and occupied with the experience of being alive.

when your inner narrative may be unhelpfully negative, automatic, or inappropriate.

But mindfulness isn't the only path to stillness.

There are other techniques, such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), that can help you identify and quiet unhelpful inner chatter. In some cases, confronting the sources of your negative self-talk can help you find stillness. Adopting new behaviors can also allow you break up patterns or habits of negative self-talk.



New experiences or new passions can also help you find stillness. When you visit a new place or spend time on something you find engaging and rewarding, stillness often comes naturally. Self-talk grows silent when you're immersed in the moment and occupied with the experience of being alive.



Nature is another counterweight to self-talk. Spending time in nature can be an extremely grounding experience. Something as simple as walking through a park or hearing waves crash on a beach can provide a break from the “noise” of life – both inside and outside your head.

Self-talk is important. But, for optimal health, it must be balanced with stillness and serenity.



Stress Management

There's a lot of talk these days about the frantic pace of life. The chores and challenges of the modern world seem to barrel toward us faster than ever before, and we're forced to hurry from one to the next – trying to keep up, but always feeling like we're falling behind.

“When we're in a state of imbalance, it can feel like the demands of the outside world are too much,” Dr. Puopolo says.

Of course, everyone experiences some level of stress – and it's not inherently harmful or negative. Stress can be energizing and motivating. It can propel you forward toward your goals.

But there are times when stress – that sense of go go go – can be overwhelming. Too much stress can lead to breakdowns or burnouts. If your pedal is always to the floor, eventually your engine is going to overheat and stall. That's why managing your stress is so important.

The Different Forms of Stress

Stress can be psychological. It can also be physical or biological.

Psychological stress is the feeling that you're being taxed – pushed toward (or to) your limit by the demands of life. Work deadlines, social obligations, family frictions, and personal goals can all contribute to psychological stress.

Physical stress stems from the demands you place on your body. Exercise is often a form of healthy physical stress – the kind that makes your body stronger and more resilient. But there are other types of physical stress – muscle tension, difficult labor, hunching over a phone or computer, or even exercising to extremes – that can harm your body.

[Biological stress](#) occurs internally. Your internal systems interpret stress as a kind of threat, and they respond to that threat in ways that are intended to help you rise and meet it. Hormone levels shift. Your sympathetic nervous system (a.k.a. your “fight-or-flight” system) ramps up, while your parasympathetic nervous system (a.k.a. your “rest-and-recover” system) powers down. Your immune system goes on high alert, while your digestive system may slow or suspend its activity. Additionally, the infamous “stress hormone” cortisol temporarily increases blood glucose levels to give you the energy needed to deal with the immediate stressor. Even your thinking changes; your focus tends to grow sharper, while your decision-making functions may take a hit.



When Stress Becomes Chronic

While some types of stress are natural and benign, or even healthy, other types of stress are dangerous.

If you are chronically stressed – never allowing your mind and body a break from the pressures of life – your internal responses to stress can become imbalanced. Stress-related

hormones like cortisol remain elevated, causing inflammation.

Basically, you can wear down, just like an overworked muscle grows fatigued from too much use. [Chronic stress](#) can lead to issues like insomnia, poor digestion, heart trouble, and mental illness.

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Chronic stress can also impact your weight. According to a study on [obesity and stress](#), chronic stress can interfere with your ability to regulate your eating habits and increase your body’s levels of “hunger hormones” like leptin and ghrelin. Together, these issues can cause people to overindulge in foods that are high in fat, sugar, and calories. Additionally, chronic stress can disrupt your sleep and deplete your energy levels, causing you to engage in a more sedentary lifestyle. All of these effects can cause weight gain and other related health issues.

Managing Stress in Healthy Ways

There are countless ways to relieve the pressure of a stressful life. Not all of them are helpful, especially if you lean on them too heavily.

Some people drink to relieve stress. Others try to escape from stress by filling their free time with TV or social media. Some rely on exercise to help them shed the tension and energy stress has built up inside them.

All of these methods may have their place. But balance is essential. For example, if you always respond to stress by pouring yourself a drink or reaching for your smartphone, you're building up a habit that may do more harm than good. Interestingly, research suggests that prescription



Stress Management



Breathing exercises



Meditation



Relaxation therapy



Physical activity

GLP-1 medications may be helpful in [treating addictive behaviors](#) – lessening our reliance on drinking and other vices. While more studies are needed, this may be helpful for people who want to develop healthier strategies for managing stress.

You need to have more than one weapon against stress in your arsenal. Breathing exercises, meditation, and other forms of relaxation therapy can be helpful. So can physical activity. Stress relief can also come from music, movies, or a good laugh with friends.

“Learning to manage stress is about identifying helpful sources of relief, as well as a balanced and effective plan for accessing those sources,” Dr. Puopolo says. “It’s also about learning not to fear stress – not trying to stamp it out whenever it arises.”

Some stress is healthy. It’s too much stress that causes us trouble.



Social Interactions

When something significant happens in your life, whether good or bad, what's the first thing you feel the urge to do? For many of us, the answer is sharing it with another person.

The point is, human beings are social creatures. We depend on one another, in big ways and small, for our wellbeing. Our friends and loved ones – and the relationships we have with them – tend to define our lives.

Sadly, the constructs of society can push us away from each other and toward more solitary pursuits. Many of us sit at computers to work, and engage with screens during our down time.

Experts today often talk about the “epidemic of loneliness,” and there is ample evidence that a lack of meaningful social relationships can lead to emotional and even physical pain.

When studying the connection between [obesity and social networks](#), researchers found that a variety of factors – from who you live with to what sort of support system you have – can affect your weight and waistline.

Clearly, social connections are important, but they can burden us too. At times, they can feel like another demand on our time and energy. Additionally, some relationships can become toxic; they can take more from us than they give, and influence our choices in unhealthy ways.

How the Right Social Ties Protect and Sustain Us

Positive social relationships enrich our lives and health in ways that can be difficult for medical science to measure. Still, researchers have now firmly linked social isolation and loneliness to a range of mental and physical risks.

[Studies](#) have found that people who feel socially isolated live shorter lives and have a higher risk for depression, sleep problems, metabolic diseases (such as obesity and diabetes), and heart trouble. That's true even if a lonely person lives an otherwise healthy life.

Some experts [have made the case](#) that feeling socially isolated acts like a form of stress on our brains and bodies. For reasons linked to



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our species' early history – a time when social connections were needed for survival – feeling cut off and alone can activate our immune systems and other internal defenses in ways that harm us.

But it's important to note that loneliness is something we define on our own terms. It's not a matter of how many friends you have, or how much time you spend with them. You can be surrounded by other people and still feel isolated. Or you can spend very little time with other people and feel socially connected and satisfied. The depth of your connections – how much you feel understood and cared for – seems to matter most. In other words, the old “quality not quantity” maxim applies to our social relationships.

Making Time for Those Who Matter Most

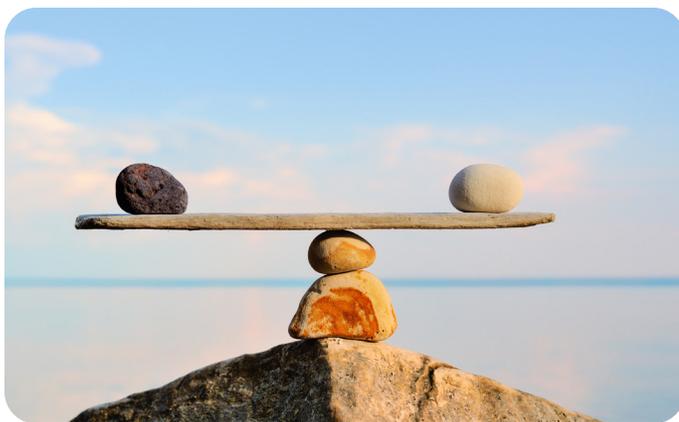
While friendships really matter, researchers [have also found](#) that spending too much time with other people – or what is sometimes called “social crowding” – can cause stress. Solitude and loneliness aren’t the same thing, and some of us need more time alone than others.

Once again, balance is paramount. And a balanced social life for you may look quite different than it looks for someone else. Finding and sustaining the kinds of social relationships that support your happiness and health is the project of a lifetime – one that requires ongoing effort and care.

Your social needs are unique to you, and those needs may shift throughout your life as you deal with hardships or hurdles.



Balance and Longevity



Achieving healthy balance doesn’t just impact your quality of life – it can affect the length of your life too. Recently, researchers in the field of lifestyle medicine found that healthy practices (things like regular exercise and restorative sleep) correlate with longevity.

Interestingly, [veterans](#) who adopted these practices – many of which exist within the 6S Framework – lived between two and three years longer than those who did not. Furthermore, veterans who adopted all of the lifestyle behaviors recommended in the study lived up to 24 years longer than veterans who adopted none at all.

[Prior research](#) related to U.S. death rates had a similar takeaway: The choices you make – not just your genes – play an integral role in your health, wellness, and longevity.

Looking Ahead

Your life is your own. No one can drive your vehicle for you, and your route forward is unique to you.

The good news is, healthy change is always possible. And thanks to the advent of prescription GLP-1 medications, patients are facing fewer obstacles – and seeing more positive outcomes – in their pursuit of better health. But while these drugs can offer you a big push forward, they can't carry you all the way to your destination.

At LifeMD, we believe that orienting your journey around the 6S Framework can help you achieve the kind of balance that supports lifelong health.

“So many people have been imbalanced for so long,” Dr. Puopolo says. “Now, with these medications, we have the chance to help people find balance before obesity leads to even more serious physical and health-related issues.”

Wherever you are on your wellness journey, the 6S Framework can help you make smart choices and course correct, as needed. Think of the 6 S's as useful guardrails on the road of life.

Interested in LifeMD's
Weight Management
Program?

[Learn More](#)



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