

How to

Achieve Your Optimal Wellbeing: A Patient Guide

Finding Your Personal Power to Live Better with Chronic Disease

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Use this Guide Book to discover how to:

- Coordinate your care team of conventional and functional* medicine providers.
- Incorporate digital health tools to self-manage and track your progress.
- Develop your self-care toolkit to maximize your own well-being.
- Experiment with and implement personalized lifestyle modifications.

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“*Achieve Your Optimal Wellbeing: A Patient Guide* is a godsend for those suffering with Autoimmune illness. This guide will help you understand how to get started with all the lifestyle changes and treatment options that are recommended for those with autoimmunity. Everyone needs a coach, and this guide is yours! I strongly recommend it!”

— Susan S. Blum, MD, MPH. Author, *The Immune System Recovery Plan and Healing Arthritis*

“Chronic disease is becoming an epidemic and Dr. Bonnie has created an amazing resource to help patients navigate and regain control of their health.”

— Dr. Jill Callahan, MD, ABFM, ABIHM, IFMCP. Functional Medicine Expert & Autoimmune Patient

The information in this patient guide is not intended to be a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have or suspect that you have a medical problem, contact your healthcare provider(s) directly. All content is for general information purposes only. You are encouraged to confirm any information obtained from this guide with other sources, and review all relevant information with your physician. Your Autoimmunity Connection/DrBonnie360 does not make any representation about the efficacy or appropriateness of any specific tests, products, services, or procedures that may be available through this patient guide.



INTRODUCTION

The Invisible Epidemic

As a chronic disease patient, navigating the healthcare system can feel like maneuvering through a maze, with complex barriers posing unnecessary confusion and frustration.

You are not alone. Some **117 million** people, or about **half of all US adults**, are living with one or more chronic health conditions, and many of them are navigating the complex system.¹ Maybe a map would help!

If you fall amongst these millions, this guide is written for you. Flip through the pages to learn how to coordinate your care providers, find tools to take charge of your own health, and shift towards a lifestyle of disease prevention, in the face of the rising yet invisible epidemic of chronic and autoimmune disease.

“According to the CDC, 7 of 10 deaths per year are due to chronic diseases.¹”

In fact, the most **preventable** causes of disability and death in the United States are chronic and autoimmune diseases, including arthritis, psoriasis, Hashimoto's, and many more. According to the CDC, **7 of 10 deaths** per year are due to chronic diseases.¹

Management and prevention are key. **Many aspects of your health are largely within your control.** You can learn to better manage and sometimes even prevent chronic disease; some symptoms could be reversed.² From tips for coordinating your care team to tools for implementing personal lifestyle modifications, this guide seeks to enable you to do just that.

Moreover, by taking preventative steps for your own health, in concert with others, you may help reduce the rising incidence of chronic disease and move towards creating a legacy of health for future generations!

By **2023** there will be 230 million Americans with chronic diseases.

85% of US Health Dollars are spent on people with chronic diseases.

27% of Children under 19 y.o. have at least one Chronic Condition.

100+ Autoimmune diseases are currently recognized.

16% of the US population has an autoimmune disease. More than both cancer and heart disease.

Autoimmune disease are a **Top 10** cause of death in Women under 64 years.

What Can You Do Today?

Become CEO of your own health

Your goal is to create a team that will provide you with the best of conventional, functional, and digital medicine.

GOALS

Get organized, get educated, get assertive

- Follow a comprehensive checklist to coordinate your care team.
- Learn to incorporate digital tools to track your symptoms & progress.

Get experimental

- Build up your self-care toolkit to maximize your well-being.
- Make lifestyle modifications guided by interactive exercises.

Big Picture Goal

- Build resilience to cope with symptoms, minimize the occurrence of flares, and prevent recurrences.
- Cultivate positivity: hope, gratitude and joy in all areas of life.
- Maximize your personal well-being, while helping the next generation avoid disease altogether.

As the patient, you deserve empathy, concern, and compassion from your care team!

Let the following checklist serve as your guide for finding the right providers, willing and ready to be your team players.



STEPS

01

Organize Your Family History and Medical Records

- Gather and organize your family medical history to the best of your abilities.
- If you have genetic data on yourself or family members, include it as part of your family history.
- Be prepared to present this information succinctly and clearly to your conventional provider.

02

Understand Your Symptoms & Communicate With Your Conventional Provider(s)

- Gather all of your personal medical records in one place.
- Consider an electronic [personal health record](#), with a hard copy backup.
- Research your past medical history and your current symptoms.
- Research any aspects of your case you don't understand.
- Draft questions for your providers.
- Define your immediate goals vs. long-term objectives:
 - Why are you going to the doctor?
 - Reduce joint pain upon awakening vs. lose 15 pounds to look better.

03

Find Your First Functional Medicine Provider

- Online resources:
 - Institute for Functional Medicine: [Find a Practitioner](#)
 - American College of Lifestyle Medicine: [Find a Practitioner](#)
 - Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine: [Provider Directory](#)
- Screen & interview your care team. Initial questions should include:
 - Have you treated people like me? What is your experience with them?
 - Can you describe 3 previous case studies? E.g., one who got better, one who did not get better, one who got worse
- Try to get a financial estimate
 - For each case study, how long were the patients in treatment and how much did they spend?
- Ask further questions, such as:
 - What is your experience coordinating with conventional doctors?
 - How do you facilitate a team approach to treatment and healing?

STEPS

04

Don't Forget Your Musculoskeletal Team

- Start by finding an open-minded, experienced physical therapist (or [occupational therapist](#), [osteopath](#), [physiatrist](#), etc.) with a specific passion for chronic disease cases.
 - Try to get a personal referral from someone with a similar condition.
 - You may also search academic resources for programs based on your specific condition(s), for example: [USC Lifestyle Redesign for Multiple Sclerosis](#), which offers a blend of physical and occupational therapies.
 - Screen ahead of time: find out how many complex cases, with and without chronic pain, they have treated with positive results.
- Expand your team to include Pilates, Gyrotonic, Feldenkrais, yoga therapy instructors, etc. based on your individual needs.
 - Again, if possible, beginning with referrals to expedite the process.
 - Be sure you like your chosen instructor(s).
 - Movement therapy is more long-term than the traditional “rehabilitation” outlook of physical therapy.
 - Once you find your right instructor, you will likely be a long-term returning customer - consider asking for a discount!
 - Aside from 1:1 sessions, you may explore small classes of people with similar conditions in order to reduce cost.

05

Coordinate Your Providers

- Effective care requires coordinating your team: each provider should be an open and willing member of your care team.
- Aim to schedule quarterly team meetings to review your progress.
 - Keep each provider informed about any relevant work you are doing with the others.

In addition to coordinating your care providers, incorporating digital tools may help you effectively self-manage and track your goals. It feels good to be back in control!

What is Digital Health?

Self-managing your own health trajectory and symptoms is now more convenient than ever with the availability of health-related applications for download.

But self-management does not mean you are alone in this process - many of these apps still allow for overseeing by your own providers, or connection with patient communities! Explore some of the existing options to see which you find most helpful...

The convergence of:

- Genomics, microbiomics, and other -omics
- Digital technology (mobile phones/apps, wireless devices, Internet, cloud computing, etc.)
- Health, healthcare, and lifestyle

Digital health tools can help you:

- Collect your data
- Track your progress
- Modify your behavior
- Personalize and improve your care

Benefits of Digital Health

According to Goldman Sachs' 2015 equity research³

- 8 in 10 dollars spent on healthcare goes towards chronic disease.
- But \$300 billion in healthcare savings may come from the widespread use of digital therapies.



Find Digital Tools for Your Self-Care Journey

Personalized Coaching

Find your symptom triggers & stay motivated between appointments.

- **MyMee**: choose a practitioner, track your symptoms & food intake, and receive personalized data-driven coaching.
- **Vida**: pair with a health coach handpicked based on your health goals (e.g., healthier eating, reduced stress levels).

Medication Adherence & Pricing Transparency

Stay on schedule with medications, for the best price.

- **Mango Health**: customized reminders to take your medication & supplements, drug interaction info, health history, refill alerts.
- **GoodRx**: compare prices for every FDA-approved prescription drug at more than 70,000 US pharmacies.
- Stay on the lookout for more!

Community Building

Increase positive emotions to influence your physical health⁴.

- **Smart Patients**: online community where patient may learn from each other.
- **MyHealthTeams**: social networks for patients living with chronic conditions.
- **Inspire**: share and learn about medical conditions, treatment, and support.

Nutrition & Fitness Trackers

Fine-tune your optimal plan for daily exercise and food.

- **MyFitnessPal**: track your daily food/beverage intake & receive calculations for your optimal nutrients, calories, and vitamins.
- **Map My Fitness**: track and share your exercise routes, workouts, and food intake.
- **MealLogger**: create a photo food journal & connect with dietitians, trainers, or health coaches.
- **HealthyOut**: choose healthier foods while eating out; search by calories, diet, cuisine, etc.

Meditation, Balance & Breathing

Find balance & lower stress to improve overall health⁵.

- **Headspace**: a personal meditation guide with hundreds of themed sessions, ranging from sleep to relaxation, focus, and more.
- **Insight Timer**: offers free guided meditations, music tracks, talks, and courses.
- **10% Happier**: a 7-day introduction to meditation with video lessons, guided audios, and online coaches.
- **HeartMath's Inner Balance**: a biofeedback heart rhythm sensor helps you align your heart, breath, and mind for a sense of calm & balance.
- **Serenita**: a "stress test" breathing exercise helps you record & manage stress level and treatment data.

Women's Health Apps

Explore specific women's health issues and product transparency.

- **Glow**: online community space with over 40 million discussions on women's health.
- **Skin Deep**: database of personal care products that allows you to check for toxicity, ingredients, etc.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Sleep

Overcome your sleep problems for the rest you deserve.

- **Sleepio**: remove sleep interruptions and establish a healthy sleep pattern with this cognitive-behavioral therapy program built on your personal goals.

Identify Your Risk Factors

Consider using new technologies to identify personal genetic risk factors. Stay tuned as the predictive accuracy improves. Watch for innovations in genomic testing to help you personalize your healthcare journey:

23 & Me

Offers genetic reports in five categories (Genetic Health Risk, Carrier Status, Ancestry, Wellness, and Traits). Each report describes whether a person has variants associated with a higher risk of developing a disease, but does not describe that person's overall risk of developing the disease.

Vitagene

Offers a detailed report with personalized recommendations for diet, fitness, and supplements. To view DrBonnie360's patient review of her Vitagene experience [click here](#).

Both of these genomic tests generate data based on saliva tests to give you a fuller picture of your genetic history in the form of a useful report.

By detailing your ancestral history and genetic predispositions, these innovations may enable you to better manage and prevent chronic disease.

Knowing your personal risk factors may help you to improve your well-being by finding the right foods and supplements for yourself, as well as optimal approaches to alignment, exercise, self-care, and more!



Develop Your Self-Care Toolkit

For chronic disease patients, waking up every morning brings the question,

“What can I do today to make it my best day possible?”

Lifestyle has been identified as a key component of disease prevention⁸. Adopting habits of self-care may help you prevent and conquer chronic disease!

Keep in mind...

- The big three of self-care: **diet**, **exercise**, and **sleep** are key vital signs.
- The importance of movement therapy for pain, mood, and sleep.

The sooner you build up your toolkit, the better! With so many potential self-care habits and lifestyle modifications, it may take some experimentation to find the best fit. Here are some ideas to get started:

MOVE

- Go outside
- Stroll through a park
- Have a dance party
- Practice Yoga
- Do some stretches
- Go for a jog

BREATHE

- Stay positive
- Stay organized, don't overbook
- Get enough sleep
- Take a time out
- Remember how far you've come
- Meditate



NOURISH

- Have a healthy snack
- Take a nap
- Journal your thoughts
- Take a bath
- Read a good book
- Make a cup of tea

CONNECT

- Spend time with family
- Call a friend
- Work as a team
- Laugh
- Find your online support -community

Experiment as a Fearless Leader

As you find the right lifestyle modifications for yourself, keep an open mindset to experimentation. Consider **movement therapy** from a patient perspective...

You get to customize your own treatment! Minimizing painful symptoms and maximizing well-being likely requires a combination of therapies. You know your own body, so be sure to pay attention to how you feel in response to each therapy. It's time to get started... here are some suggestions for you to try out:

- Yoga/Pilates/Gyrotonic/Strength training
- Tai Chi/Qi Gong/Meditation/Mindfulness/Breathing
- Feldenkrais/Physical therapy/Massage/Corrective exercise

Mind + body is key... Studies show that the therapeutic effects of yoga may influence gene expression⁶, and mindfulness meditation may also impact your immune system⁷. Explore more of the potential benefits:

A good place to start is becoming aware of your own symptoms and researching which potential therapies may be most effective for these symptoms. But, research can only get you so far - once you have gathered enough background information, it is time to experiment for yourself!

The **interactive exercises** on the following pages may guide you in both forming clear goals for your personal wellbeing and experimenting with the necessary lifestyle modifications to achieve these goals...

Gyrotonic **Pilates**

BOTH

- **Circular Form** - Involves the **whole body** in large, gentle movements with rhythm, repetition, & flow
- **Improve range of motion**, stimulate **nervous system**, open energy pathways.
- **Weight-pulley equipment** mimics *natural movement patterns*, gives body both **assistance & resistance**
- **Build core strength**
- May incorporate specialized equipment
- **Adaptable** for different skill levels & needs
- Harmonize muscles, **fascia**, skeletal & nervous systems
- **Teacher-dependent**: be sure to find one knowledgeable in musculoskeletal integrity (maybe even find one teacher who does both practices, *personalization is key!*)
- **Linear form** based on repetition of smaller, controlled movements
- Improve **core strength & spinal stability**
- Focus is on **muscle balance & alignment**
- **Spring resistance equipment** challenges body with resistance (but may also be done on mat with body weight)

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BENEFITS of FELDENKRAIS

- Elevated Mood & Deeper Sleep**
With reduced pain and increased relaxation, more comfortable sleep and positive thoughts may follow.
- Fuller Breathing & Relaxation**
Relieve physical and psychological constraints by engaging both mind and body in this practice.
- More Flexibility & Better Coordination**
Break movements down into smaller components to gain control, ease, and agility through repetition of motion.
- Improved Posture & Balance**
Increase self-awareness of how your body is intended to work.
- Reduced Pain & Discomfort**
Replace movement patterns associated with pain with new ones that feel good.
- Increased Prevention From Injury**
Work smarter rather than harder. Avoid unnecessary muscular effort or overuse stress on any single body part.

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- Elevate Mood & Overall Well-being**
Integrate mind and body to improve the flow of Qi or the energy force coursing through our bodies.
- Improve Sleep**
Tai Chi reduces stress, which is known to cause sleep problems.
- Combat Stress & Anxiety**
Replace anxiety-inducing thoughts with focused attention and introspection.
- Deepen Relaxation**
Controlled breathing and movement promotes a tranquil mental state.
- Boost Flexibility & Agility**
Boost upper & lower-body flexibility & strength, improve balance & coordination with a heightened sense of proprioception.
- Lower Blood Pressure**
This low-impact, relaxing exercise is beneficial for heart health.
- Enhance Immune Function**
Scientific studies show that Tai Chi boosts our lymphatic system, which may increase protection against colds, flus, or autoimmune diseases.
- Lessen Joint Pain**
The slow, graceful exercises have been shown to offer joint and arthritis pain relief.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS of TAI CHI

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Step 1: Grow Your Goals

Create an open mindset – refine your goals and the steps to achieve them.

Roots - Your “pillars of health”, or foundation for maximizing your personal well-being (physical, mental, emotional, and social).

E.g., Healthy eating, active living, stress reduction, connection with others.

Crown - Your overall vision of your best self. How do you want to feel?

E.g., Energized during the day, free of limitation, positive outlook on the future.

Trunk - Your concrete goal, grounded in your pillars of health. You may have more than one tree with different goals.

E.g., Reduce chronic pain and stiffness.

Branches - Steps to take towards your “trunk” goal. Break down each goal into smaller activities and tasks that you can tackle.

E.g., Get to bed by 9pm, meditate before bed, exercise every other day.

Fruit - Payoffs/rewards. What positive impact will each step have on your wellbeing?

E.g., More energy, more free time, lower stress.



Once you have a clear vision for your goal and steps to achieve it, you can get experimental! Listen to your body and mind, keep records, modify your actions, evaluate results, and repeat.

Use the blank template provided on the next page to help you define your goals.

Print this out and fill in your own goals!



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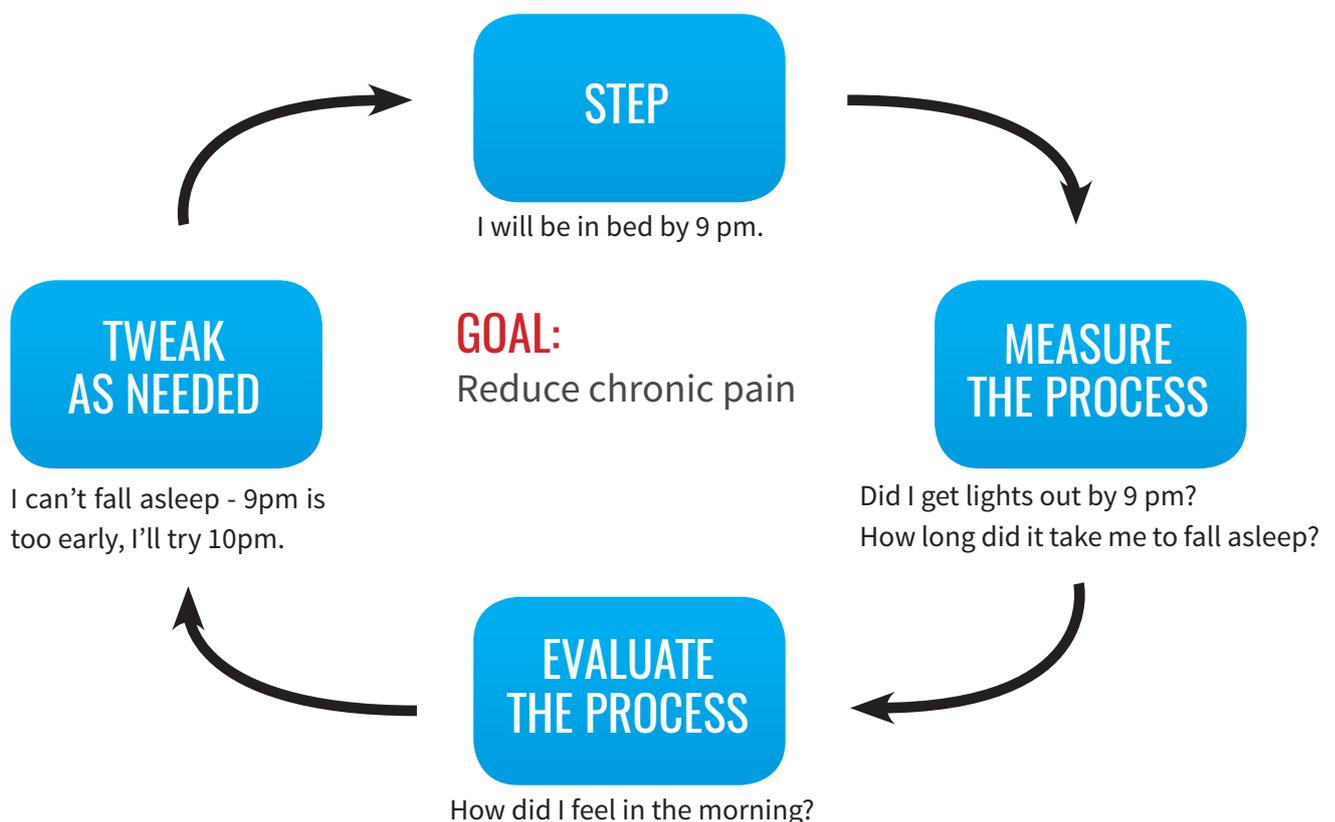
Fruit - Payoffs/rewards. What positive impact will each step have on your wellbeing?

Step 2: Set Your Goals in Motion

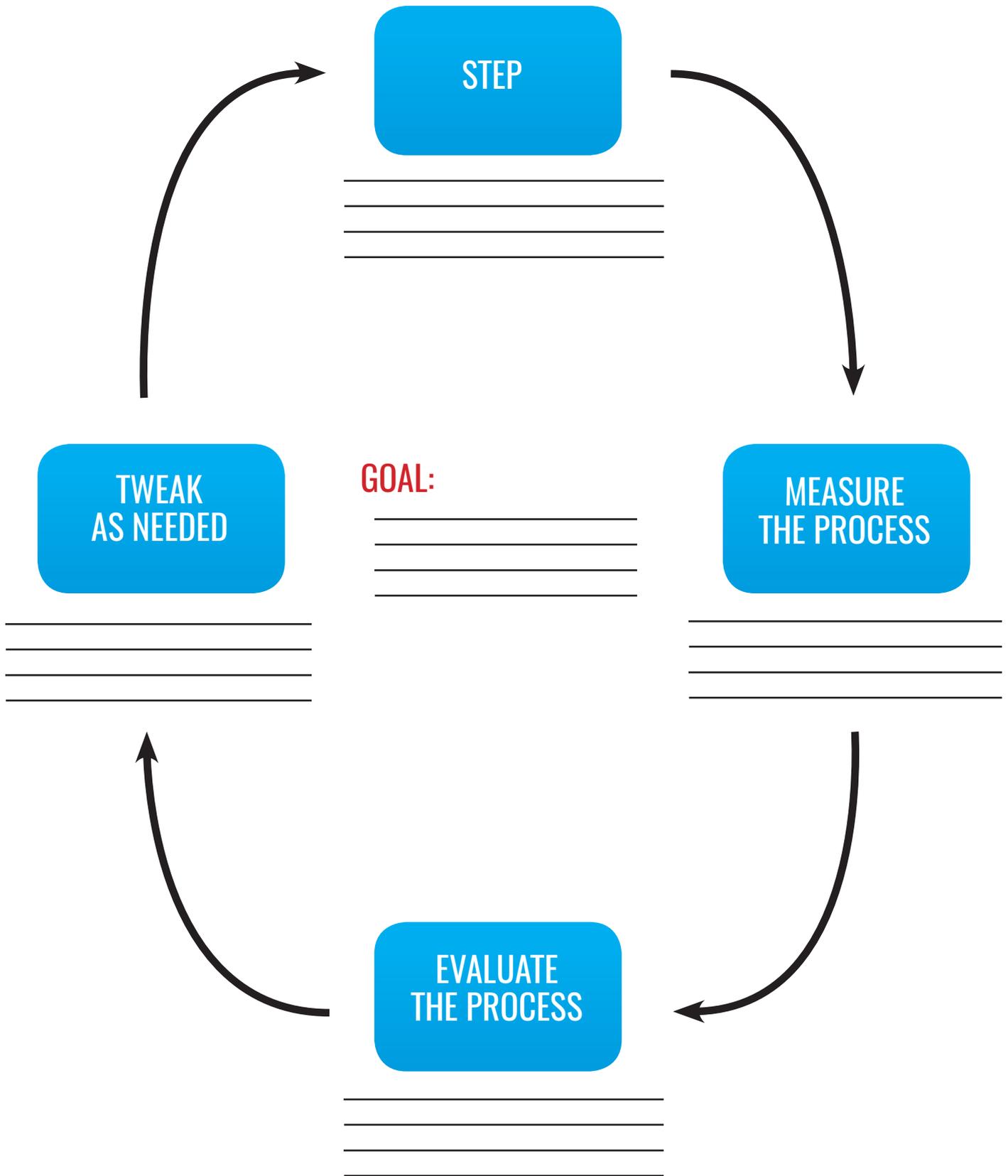
A feedback loop, centered around the goal you intend to grow.

- 01** Focus on an individual step, or “branch”.
E.g., I will be in bed by 9 pm.
- 02** As you carry out this step, measure the progress.
E.g., Did I get lights out by 9 pm? How long did it take me to fall asleep?
- 03** Evaluate the immediate results of the process.
E.g., How did I feel in the morning?
- 04** Tweak your step as needed: How can the process be improved?
E.g., I can't fall asleep - 9pm is too early, I'll try 10pm.
- 05** Repeat the feedback loop process until you are happy with the results!

Use the blank template provided on the next page to help you achieve your goal.



Print this out and fill in your own goals!



LEARN MORE

from Dr. Bonnie Feldman

Be inspired by my [TEDx talk](#) to create a culture of self-care for chronic disease prevention.

Explore my curated scientific [bibliography](#) with hundreds of autoimmunity resources.

Gain insights from my personal story of creating my care team [here](#).

PAY IT FORWARD

If you found this guide helpful for improving your well-being, managing or preventing chronic illness, pass the resources along to your friends, family, or community!

We want the good news that you have control of much of your own health to reach as many patients as possible. Let's work towards creating a legacy of health for chronic disease patients today and future generations.

JOIN US

At Your Autoimmunity Connection, our vision is of a digitally connected world of personalized care for autoimmune patients.

We consult with startup companies and entrepreneurs who are bringing new products and services that will improve all aspects of autoimmune care. Concurrently, we educate and empower patients with the necessary resources and community to achieve their healthiest self.

Visit DrBonnie360.com to learn more about our work to reshape research, diagnosis, and treatment, and raise awareness of autoimmunity.

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