

SuperLife Summary

By Darin Olien

Do you want to feel your best every day?

Superlife is a groundbreaking health and lifestyle guide, in which superfood hunter and nutritionist Darin Olien, helps us to understand and utilize five factors that determine whether we will be healthy, fit, and feel our best.

However, Olien isn't just *any* nutritionist. He's made a name for himself as the exotic "superfood hunter" as he visits indigenous populations in search of the healthiest foods on the planet. He's also the co-host, together with Zac Efron, of the Netflix docuseries *Down to Earth*.

Olien has put all his knowledge on nutrition and health into this "bite-sized" book. Although Olien is an advocate for healthy, and predominantly plant-based eating, he doesn't stop there. A good diet is just one of five factors that can make or break our health. In addition to his expertise in nutrition, Olien has a master's degree in exercise physiology and psychology, so he's knowledgeable in many areas related to diet and wellness. In *Superlife*, Olien condenses healthy living principles to just five key "life forces": nutrition, alkalization, hydration, oxygenation, and detoxification. He gives us up-to-date science on each factor, and at the end of every chapter, he summarizes the key takeaway points. These points make up a simple to-do list that will help any health enthusiast to adopt better eating and lifestyle habits.

Briefly, we'll explore each critical life force and some actionable points to

bring these to life. So if you're looking to optimize your health, and want more than just an "eat your fruit and vegetables" plotline, then this book might be your meal ticket.

Lifeforce 1: Nutrition

If we want to feel fresh, clean, and wholesome, then we need to eat fresh, clean, and wholesome food.

When we eat a whole-food and mainly a plant-based diet, we nourish our bodies on a cellular level. Each of us is a miraculous collection of around 70 trillion cells. And cells need macronutrients such as protein, carbs, and fat. These are essential requirements for life, and they fuel all the processes inside our cells. However, that's just the tip of the iceberg. There are a host of other things that our body needs that are *just* as vital. These are things such as vitamins, minerals, salts, enzymes, coenzymes, antioxidants, electrolytes, micronutrients, phytonutrients, flavonoids, microbes – the list goes on. It's a lot to keep track of, and it's complicated because science is constantly discovering new things to add to the list. There's no way we can remember them all. So what can we eat to give ourselves all the cellular nourishment we need? The best way to get everything we need is just to eat a clean, whole-food, predominantly plant-based diet.

Let's unpack this a little. We've all heard that 'we are what we eat.' However, have we ever considered what our food eats? As food grows up and develops, it too, absorbs, metabolizes, and excretes nutrients. If we eat a diet that's predominantly plant-based, we absorb what they eat, and what they eat according to Olien, 'Is pretty cool.' Plants consume and install the energy of a star that's 93 million miles away, and they consume the mysterious substance, soil, which we trivialize by calling "dirt."

According to Olien, soil is the most underrated substance on the planet. It's filled with minerals, vitamins, metals, and microscopic living organisms, that consume, and excrete, and lots of other essential stuff. So a clean, whole fruit or vegetable is the go-between – a way for us to absorb substances that exist in the stars above us, and the soil beneath us.

What does "whole" mean? It simply means that we need to aim to eat the *entire* fruit or vegetable in its natural state. And by clean, Olien doesn't mean food that's "not dirty." As we now know, dirt is probably the cleanest thing that food comes into contact with. Clean means free from harmful chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, and is organic or harvested wild. We should also aim to try to eat at least one meal a day of raw vegetables or fruit (think salad and smoothies). Cooking often kills off a lot of beneficial enzymes and microbes. And variety is the spice of life, so we need to eat a diverse range of plant-based foods to get all the macro and micronutrients we need.

Olien also emphasizes that whole foods, not pills, should be the primary source of our most essential nutrients. If someone invented a tablet with all the health benefits of broccoli, they'd make millions. However, no pill can compensate for eating whole foods. Most supplements don't even get absorbed in our bodies. They're not in a form that our body recognizes or can efficiently metabolize. So break up with the pharmacy aisle, and befriend broccoli.

And remember, every bite counts. Every bite we take is a decision to be healthy or unhealthy. As we learned from Tom Rath in *Eat, Move, Sleep*, we buy willpower at the grocery store.

Lifeforce 2: Hydration

Water makes up two-thirds of our bodies and is a significant component of every kind of tissue we have, from blood to bone, as well as everything in between. Water is involved in every system and every event in our bodies – nothing happens without it. It's our body's transport system, the vehicle for every nutrient, hormone, chemical, messenger, enzyme, electrolyte, and brain pulse. And as with any vehicle, what happens when a car battery loses its water? Dead. No more power. We're no different. Our brain and nervous systems are nearly all water, 85% and 98% respectively.

Water also operates our immune system. It ferries the white blood cells created in the bone marrow to our tissues to fight off disease. In addition, water helps transport lymphatic fluid, a clear-white fluid that carries toxic substances and carcinogens, to the lymph nodes where they can be destroyed. Without proper hydration, we can't detoxify our bodies. According to Olien, 'The list of jobs that water does puts other organs to shame, and just like any other organ, water supply can be healthy, and functioning well, or can be insufficient to do its job right.'

However, despite water's wondrous ways, most of us aren't drinking nearly enough of it. According to a Federal Center for disease control survey, 7% of adults report no daily consumption of water. 36% of respondents said they drink a measly two to three glasses per day, 35% drink four cups a day, and only 22% have eight cups or more. This means four out of five of us don't get sufficient water.

We should be drinking between 3 to 4 liters of water *every day*. For those

who rely on thirst as an indicator that it's time to drink, think again. When the 'dry mouth' sensations visit us, chances are we're behind in the hydration game, and our bodies have been dehydrated for a while. And this isn't good. Even mild dehydration reduces our ability to focus, perform at our best, and can also put us in a low mood.

If there's one thing Olien doesn't compromise on, it's drinking *only* filtered, distilled water, with added unrefined salt that our bodies require. In 2009, the Environmental Working Group analyzed drinking water throughout the United States and discovered hundreds of pollutants in tap water. Tap water contains chemicals, pesticides, medications, radiation, human and animal waste, and a host of other toxic materials. Water picks up a little bit of everything it touches. That's why scientists call it "the universal solvent." As Olien puts it, 'Drinking just any kind of water day in and day out won't enable the hydration and detoxification potential we're hoping to achieve for optimal health. Water's quality plays a huge role in how we feel.' It's for this reason that Olien advises we don't drink tap water. Instead, we need to make the extra effort and drink only filtered distilled water.

There's only one downside – distilled water is stripped of its impurities along with its minerals. Olien suggests adding half a teaspoon of salt, preferably Himalayan Crystal salt, to about a gallon of water to supplement the lost minerals. However, reaching for commercially bottled water with vitamins or other added substances isn't ideal either, because they often contain sugars or additives that aren't beneficial.

Lifeforce 3: Oxygenation

Here's a question you might not have been asked before. Are you a vertical or horizontal breather?

Most of us are vertical breathers, meaning when we breathe in, our shoulders lift (vertically) and tensely. Vertical breathers are shallow breathers; we don't fill our lungs completely. But if we breathe horizontally, we inhale deeply, so that our shoulders relax, our rib cage extends out to the sides (horizontally), and our diaphragm moves down, deeply filling our lungs with air.

Shallow breathing, a poor diet, and even mild dehydration can put us at risk of being oxygen-deprived. This results in circulation problems, poor digestion, muscle aches, pain, dizziness, depression, memory loss, irritability, an acidic stomach, and so the list goes on. Olien says, 'Oxygen is the spark of life. But it's a "life force" we take most for granted.'

How long can you hold your breath? This tells us a story because we can live for two months without food, two weeks without water, and at best four minutes without oxygen. We all know we need oxygen, but how many of us know *precisely* why?

Food is our primary source of energy. But without oxygen, we can't get the nutrients we need from the food we eat. Every meal we eat contains sugars. These sugars get into our cells, where oxygen breaks them down. This releases energy, which fuels all cellular processes. Without oxygen, nothing gets done. Low oxygen levels can be a considerable health risk. Olien quotes Dr. Arthur C Guyton, author of the respected textbook of medicine *Medical Physiology*. He puts it like this, 'All chronic pain, suffering, and disease are caused by a lack of oxygen at the cellular level.'

However, we don't just inhale oxygen; we also get it from food and water. Nutrition, in the form of fruits, vegetables, raw leafy greens, and proper hydration, is how we boost our oxygen levels. Uncooked, fresh vegetables and fruit, along with seeds and nuts, contain the highest oxygen levels. (Remember, cooking speeds up the oxidation of anything we eat). Foods that don't contribute to our oxygen levels include animal products, processed foods, and sugar. Studies show that these foods deplete our oxygen levels further.

It's also essential to move as much as possible. Physical activity requires that we inhale and exhale deeply in a controlled way. It's also best to exercise outdoors because nature is rich in oxygen. And if we can't get outside as much as we'd like, we can bring the outdoors indoors. Scattering plants throughout our home helps, as they help to clean and oxygenate the air. Studies show that hospital patients with plants in their rooms recover quicker than those with no plants.

Lifeforce 4: Alkalinization

Acid is a corrosive substance that breaks things down. However, alkalization is a concept that's harder to picture. We don't really get a "mental image" on this one, which makes alkalization the least understood of all the life forces.

We need to consider the pH balance of foods. The scale that measures pH goes from 0 to 14. A neutral substance is 7.0. However, the scale is logarithmic, not arithmetic, and this is a significant difference. This means that each whole point equals not merely one more or one less than the point next to it, but *ten* times more or less. And a little scientific arithmetic goes a long way to help us make better health choices.

For example, distilled water pH is 7.0, whereas Coca-Cola is around 2.5. This means that a sugary carbonated Coke is 50000 times more acidifying than pure water. Too much acid and our cells become irritated and inflamed. Alkalinity, by contrast, is a soothing influence on our bodies. When we're slightly alkaline, we hold more oxygen, which supports all the cellular functions, including our ability to rid ourselves of toxins, harmful microbes, and metabolic debris. So, except for our stomach, our body needs to be slightly alkaline. For example, our blood must have a pH between 7.35 and 7.45 (which is somewhat alkaline), but our stomach, on the other hand, is way down at 2.0 to 3.0 (because it requires a lot of acid to digest and liquefy our food).

Have you ever experienced acid reflux? That's our body signaling that we've ingested too much acid for it to cope with. When we get heartburn or acid reflux, we tend to reach for an antacid. Antacids typically contain calcium, an alkalizing mineral. The only problem is this alkalizing mineral goes straight to our stomachs, which is where we need high acid levels to digest our food correctly. Without realizing it, some of our habits make it difficult for our bodies to do what they're supposed to do naturally.

Eat mineral-rich plant foods: fresh leafy greens, brightly-colored veggies, avocados, almonds, cold-pressed oils such as olive oil. Limes and lemons, even though they taste acidic, have an alkalizing effect on our bodies. The book provides a whole index of foods that are either

acidifying or alkalizing. Surprisingly, some healthy foods, such as most beans, lentils, and peanuts, are slightly acidifying. And all kinds of protein, even vegetable protein and whole grains, are also somewhat acidic. However, plant-based foods contain so-called weak acids, which our bodies neutralize more easily.

Oxygen is an alkalizing substance, so oxygenation and alkalization go hand in hand. Without enough oxygen, we immediately become too acidic. And, above what we eat, drink, and how we breathe, we also need to address our mental health matters. For example, too little sleep and too much worry can be acidifying, by promoting the release of cortisol and other stress responses. So Olien's advice, 'Surround yourself with people who inspire you and make you laugh and speak honestly and truthfully about what's going on in your life.'

Lifeforce 5: Detoxification

No one ever says 'It's bin day' with wild excitement. Taking out the trash isn't a fun chore. But for our poor bodies, every day is bin day.

An awful lot of our bodily functions are devoted to detoxification and protecting us from serious harm. Our sweat glands, lungs, liver, kidneys, lymphatic system, intestinal microbes, and bladder work to "clear out the trash." The liver and kidneys are the real detoxification heroes. They serve as our body's first line of defense and work to filter blood and remove toxins and foreign invaders. White blood cells work tirelessly to transport toxins and other types of trash to the lymphatic system, where all the junk gets destroyed. The only problem is, in today's world, they have to work overtime.

Modern life hits us with so many unknown chemicals and harmful toxins. Studies show more than 3,000 chemicals are added to food, and more than 10,000 chemical solvents, emulsifiers, and preservatives are used to process foods. And industrial additives and irritants aren't just found in our food and drink, but in our clothing, personal care products, and surroundings. According to Olien, 'We have created an entirely new habitat *not* designed to support human health, and we now live in it. We are constantly barraged by toxic substances and forces of one kind or another.'

So what can we do? For starters, we can take the stress off our livers and kidneys by cutting down on alcohol, drugs, and processed foods. We can also turn to the former life forces for help. We need to get plenty of iron, copper, zinc, folic acid, Coenzyme q 10, and vitamins A, B's, C, and E, so our immune system can fight pathogens and function properly. But rather than run to the pharmacy, let "food be thy medicine."

According to Olien, 'A strong, healthy, well-fed body is an unfriendly environment for disease.' On the other hand, if we're run-down and vulnerable, or if we're acidic, dehydrated, oxygen-poor, and not getting the proper nutrients, we offer harmful bacteria, viruses, and even carcinogens a welcoming home. So taking care of all our life-forces sets us up for success. As Olien says, 'We don't "catch a cold"; we create the conditions through our tendencies, food habits, and stress levels to either welcome or repel the illness.'

In Conclusion

Unlike preachy nutrition books, Olien's relaxed, California surfer vibe comes through in how he writes. *Superlife* is a simple, casual approach to

understanding the science behind leading a health-driven life. For the skeptics, he gives us the hard science to back up his claims. For the pragmatics, he offers realistic, actionable steps to enhance each 'lifeforce' to improve our health.

It's not all about being reactionary and trying to take care of ourselves only when we get sick. It's about doing things that produce vitality in our lives and keep disease at bay. It's about maximizing our body's healthy and natural healing potential, by focusing on the five simple forces: quality nutrition, hydration, detoxification, oxygenation, and alkalization. The best thing is that it doesn't have to be a complex process. All we need to do is indulge in nutritional food, keep hydrated, and breathe right.

According to Olien, 'We have the power to nourish, regenerate, energize and heal ourselves. All thanks to air, water, and whole fresh foods.' The beauty of the life forces is that we support the other four if we work to get just one right. However, the opposite is also true: if we fail to maintain one of the life forces, it drags down the others and can set off a cascade of consequences that can seriously damage our health over time. The choices we make today set us up for long-term health and wellbeing. As Olien says, 'Once we know what healthy choices to make, we repeat them over and over again. That's how health becomes a lifestyle.'