

————— Your Path to Total Recovery —————

# A Health Timeline

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From the *Total Recovery* Toolkit



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• Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine •

===== SOLVING THE MYSTERY OF =====  
CHRONIC PAIN AND DEPRESSION

## Total RECOVERY

HOW WE  
GET SICK

WHY WE  
STAY SICK

HOW WE CAN  
RECOVER

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with Donna Beech



## About This Timeline

Making a timeline of your history can help you and your doctor identify the assaults and traumas your body has already endured that may be affecting your health today.

If you already have a pretty healthy lifestyle, you have been stacking the deck in your favor. At the same time, of course, none of us comes through life unscathed. We have all survived a series of major and minor traumas. Sometimes they have made us stronger, but that is not always the case.

As a physician, I believe it is my job to help identify the clues to my patients' conditions. No matter what their initial symptoms are, I start by asking, "When was the last time you felt completely healthy, vital, and strong?"

The first thing most people do is lie to me.

"I was in excellent health until that car accident 5 years ago."

"I felt strong and healthy until my sophomore year, when that head-ache came over me in the middle of class."

"I was always healthy until after the birth of my second child."

They tell me about a traumatic or infectious event, not realizing that their current condition is far more complex. Their symptoms may have started with an event, but most are the result of a process. A cumulative series of events gradually undermined their health until their body couldn't recover from the "event" that they think caused the problem. So, unwittingly, they lie.

We start where they want to start, but as their stories unfold, it inevitably turns out that they have had a long history of aches and pains. But they assumed that was



normal. As seemingly minor problems became chronic, they figured they'd "just have to live with them." After all, a lot of their friends complained of the same sort of thing.

"Your back pain started after you moved that furniture around, but how is your sleep?" I ask a patient. "Oh, I really haven't slept well since I was a child," she shrugs.

"Fatigue is your main concern," I say, acknowledging another patient's complaint. "But do you ever get headaches?" "I've had migraines two to three times a month since I was a teenager, but I take medication and they go away," he tells me.

What I see as a problem is very different from what my patients see. As you will read in *Total Recovery*, I bring a very different perspective. I know only too well that the physical and emotional traumas we endure are cumulative. Everything's related. And we have to know what's happened and evaluate whether it's relevant, so we can follow the trail.

Having a doctor evaluate those connections is ideal, but you can start with a timeline and begin to make notes about the kind of connections you've learned about from reading this book. A doctor who knows what to make of your story can glean invaluable insight from your timeline.

## **Your Timeline**

The goal is to develop a timeline of life events and health issues to see if a cumulative pattern emerges or to find evidence of how an illness evolved over the years. Inevitably, it is an ongoing process, as the patient remembers things, and we explore the connections together.

Our results are so persuasive that my patients' perspectives begin to change simply by seeing their health histories before their eyes. Before long, they learn to notice connections themselves. You can do the same by developing your own timeline to track the chronology. The important thing is to write down as much as you can remember and start to notice what changed for you after each major event.

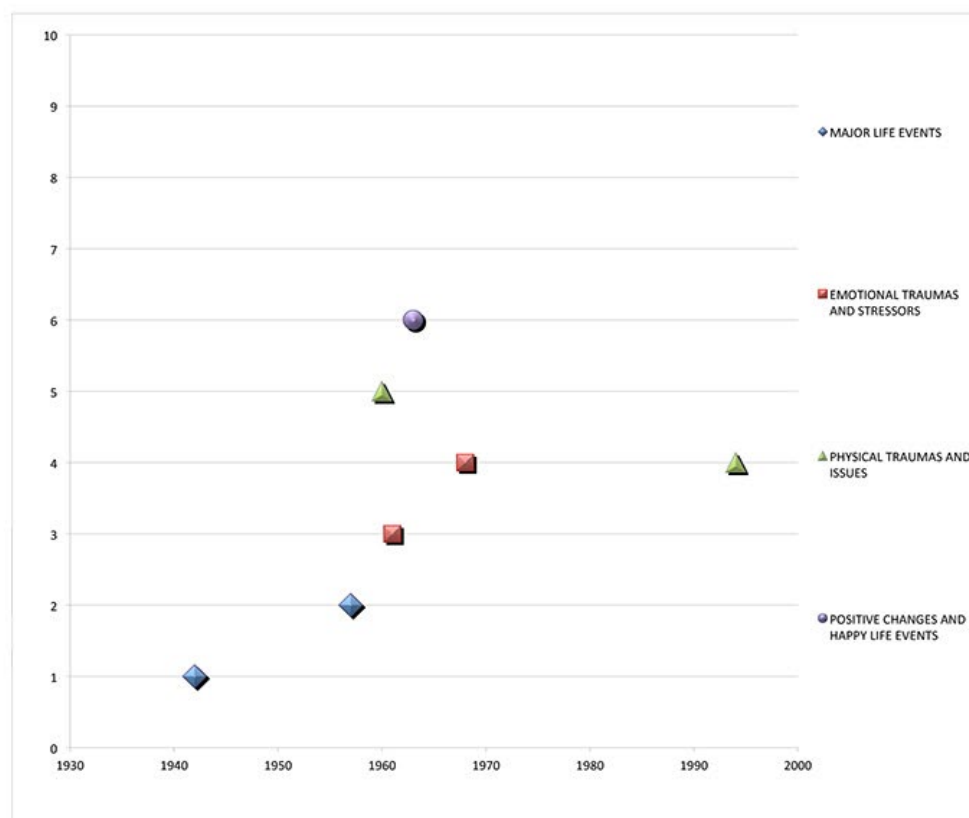
On the next page, you'll find a template to begin work on your own timeline.



## YOUR HEALTH TIMELINE

### HOW TO USE THIS TIMELINE

BIRTH DATA	YEAR	MONTH	DATE	AGE
	1940	JAN	4	74



The goal in using this timeline is to list the significant events in your life, starting with the day you were born, year by year, in chronological order. You will track **major life events**, **emotional traumas and stressors**, **physical traumas and issues**, and **positive changes and happy life events**. As you type information for each event, results will populate the scatter graph on the left, providing you with a visual representation of your Health Timeline from birth to present day.

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

Enter the Year, Month and Date of your birth in the boxes on Row 6 of this sheet (replacing the sample information with the correct data for you).

On the bottom left of this screen, click the Major Life Events tab (it's next to the "Graph" tab which is currently open). Fill out the fields for Year and Event Description and assign a Stress Level Score\* to indicate the significance of the event (replacing the sample information you see with the correct data for you).

*\*A happy event can be stressful to some degree, for example, giving birth or landing your dream job.*

Repeat the data entry process for Emotional Traumas, Physical Traumas, and Positive Life Events to create your complete Health Timeline.

**Remember to click "Save" regularly!**

Download this template at:

<http://www.kaplanclinic.com/total-recovery/HealthTimeline.xlsx>

In 1967, the Holmes-Rahe Stress Inventory was created by two psychiatrists, Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe. They correlated the medical records of 5,000 patients, then asked the patients to say how stressful they found each one of 43 stressful life events—such as the death of a spouse, a major personal injury or illness, retirement, major change in the health of a family member, pregnancy, sexual difficulties, taking on a mortgage, a child leaving home, an outstanding personal achievement, changes in residence, changes in eating habits, etc. It may be helpful to start with this inventory, as you recall events from your own life. You can find it at [www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory](http://www.stress.org/holmes-rahe-stress-inventory).



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When you evaluate your timeline, raise questions. Make notes to yourself about things that should be addressed. Why live in pain and poor health—now or 20 years from now—because of cumulative assaults that could have been fully resolved?

Your actions have the ability to build deep strength and resilience into your body for the long term. They generate a cumulative sense of health and well-being that is not always dramatic, but moves you steadily in the right direction.

Whether you are suffering from pain and depression, or whether you feel good but want to stay as healthy as possible, you can start stacking the deck in your favor today.

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*- Dr. Gary*

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With our best wishes

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# The Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine

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