



# Research Summary: Habits #1

As featured in Dr. Kenny Mittelstadt's video:  
"12 Ancient Habits That Support a Longer, Healthier Life"  
Date of Publication: 04/16/2026

## Research Context:

This topic explores how long-term health and aging are shaped less by isolated habits and more by the patterns your body is exposed to every day. While most health advice focuses on diet, exercise, or supplements, there is a deeper layer that often goes overlooked: stress chemistry and nervous system load.

Many ancient habits were never designed as health strategies. They emerged naturally through daily life. But when viewed through a functional medicine lens, these patterns consistently reduce internal stress signals and create conditions where the body can repair and recover more effectively.

What makes this especially relevant is that stress isn't always obvious. It often builds quietly through rushed routines, overstimulation, and lack of rhythm.

## Key Findings from the Research:

### Study 1 (PMID 20668659):

This large meta-analysis examined how social relationships influence long-term health outcomes. Researchers found that people with stronger social connections had about a 50% higher likelihood of survival compared to those with weaker or more isolated relationships. That's a meaningful difference, similar in scale to many traditional health risk factors. These findings suggest that relationships are not just emotional, but deeply biological. Supportive, stable connections help regulate stress hormones like cortisol, reduce inflammation, and support immune function. In contrast, loneliness or unstable relationships can act as a steady stress signal. Over time, this added load can shift the nervous system toward constant activation, making recovery more difficult and gradually impacting long-term health.

### Study 2 (PMID 29486547):

This review explored how chronic stress affects multiple systems in the body. One of the key findings is that ongoing stress keeps cortisol (your main stress hormone) elevated longer than intended. When this pattern persists, it begins to disrupt blood sugar balance, weaken immune defenses, and drain energy production. Instead of moving between stress and recovery, the body stays in a more constant "on" state. Over time, this can show up as fatigue, slower recovery, and reduced resilience to everyday demands. What makes this pattern challenging is that it often builds gradually and feels normal. This research highlights that stress is not just psychological. It creates real, measurable changes in the body that compound over time.

### Study 3 (PMID 33054337):

This study looked at how circadian rhythms, your body's internal clock, influence health. These rhythms help regulate when you feel alert, when you feel tired, and how hormones are released throughout the day. The research shows that consistent patterns like regular sleep timing, natural light exposure, and predictable routines help keep these systems aligned. When your rhythm is stable, your body can anticipate what's coming next, supporting more consistent energy, better sleep, and improved metabolic function. When rhythms are disrupted, the body loses that predictability. This can lead to poor sleep, fluctuating energy, and increased stress on the system. Over time, these disruptions can accumulate and affect long-term health and recovery capacity.



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## Functional Medicine Connections:

Here's how these pieces fit together: your body is constantly responding to patterns, not isolated events. Stress, light exposure, relationships, and daily rhythm all feed into your nervous system and shape your internal chemistry.

When stress signals stay elevated, your body shifts toward output mode instead of repair. This affects digestion, hormone balance, immune function, and energy regulation over time. It's not one system breaking down. It's multiple systems adapting to the same ongoing signal.

Rhythm acts as a stabilizer. Consistent sleep, meals, and daily timing help your body anticipate what's coming next. That predictability lowers internal stress and supports more efficient hormone signaling and recovery processes.

Your environment also plays a role. Constant stimulation from noise, light, and multitasking keeps your system slightly activated, even when you're not aware of it. Supportive relationships add another layer. They provide "safety signals" that help calm the nervous system and reduce overall load.

## Practical Reflections & Takeaways:

Take a moment to look at your daily patterns, not just your habits, but the environment and rhythm around them.

Where in your day does everything feel rushed or compressed? When do you notice the most overstimulation or mental noise? Do your energy dips or fatigue line up with stress, poor sleep, or inconsistent timing?

These patterns are not random. They are often signals that your system is carrying more load than it can comfortably process.

You might also reflect on your relationships and environment. Do they feel supportive and steady, or unpredictable and draining? That difference can shape your stress chemistry more than you might expect.

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