

# Being Mortal Summary – Atul Gawande

2 MINUTE READ

[Being Mortal](#) (2014)

Medicine and What Matters in the End

by [Atul Gawande](#)

Being Mortal is an uncomfortable yet enlightening exploration of how treating terminal disease (especially linked to ageing) as a purely extend-life-at-all-costs medical problem is destroying the final moments of our lives - by surgeon and best selling author, Atul Gawande. ([282 pages](#))

[Paperback](#) | [Ebook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

**Note:** This **Being Mortal summary** is part of an ongoing project to summarise the [Best Health Books](#) of all time.

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## Being Mortal Review

**Have you ever really thought about dying?**

I hadn't – until I read *Being Mortal*.

## **And then what I read scared the crap out of me.**

Partly by making me realise how unready I was for decisions I could easily face tomorrow.

## **But mostly in a good way.**

Because once you know what death looks like you can do something about it.

## **When you know there are options you can choose.**

**My verdict?** Read this book.

It'll shock you and worry you and enlighten you.

But whether it's yours or a loved one's you're dealing with, it'll help make things better in the end.

## **Being Mortal Summary**

**The bulk of Dr. Gawande's *Being Mortal* is taken up with well-written, engaging case studies while the breakdown of his arguments is quite simple:**

Medicine has become much better at treating disease.

As a result, whether from old-age or sickness, more and more of us are dying gradually instead of losing our lives in one swoop.

This slow decline comes with gradually decreasing independence (we rely on more people to help us with more things).

The problem, until recently, is that our choices for getting help have been limited.

The homes and hospitals that have stepped in are modelled on big medical institutions, prioritising treatment and safety and convenience over autonomy and meaning and wellness.

As a result, we too often trade end-of-life quality for end-of-life quantity. Despite the second being worthless without the first.

**Solution?** New ways of thinking – as governments, as institutions and individuals.

We need policies that encourage geriatric training and awareness and hospice.

We need homes, hospitals and carers that champion autonomy and meaning and options that don't involve spending our last days on moon-shot treatments or in ICUs (intensive care units).

**We need hard, end-of life conversations that help all involved understand:**

1. What is happening and with what potential outcomes?
2. What are our hopes and our fears?
3. What trade offs are we willing and not willing to make? and
4. What course of action best serves this understanding?

We need the courage to follow through on those decisions.

**The good news?** These things **ARE** happening.

And where that's the case the data in their favour is unequivocal.

But they're not happening widely enough.

Mostly because too many of us aren't hearing or thinking about them until it's too late.

Which leaves too many of us dying as we shouldn't, and too few of us dying as we could.

## Being Mortal Contents

There are 8 main chapters in Being Mortal:

1. The Independent Self
2. Things Fall Apart
3. Dependence
4. Assistance
5. A Better Life
6. Letting Go
7. Hard Conversations
8. Courage

[Click here to look inside the book.](#)

## Best Being Mortal Quotes

These Being Mortal quotes come from **The Art of Living**'s ever-growing central library of thoughts, anecdotes, notes, and [inspirational quotes](#).

*"In the end, people don't view their life as merely the average of all its moments—which, after all, is mostly nothing much plus some sleep. For human beings, life is meaningful because it is a story. A story has a sense of a whole, and its arc is determined by the significant moments, the ones where something happens. Measurements of people's minute-by-minute levels of pleasure and pain miss this fundamental aspect of human existence. A seemingly happy life maybe empty. A seemingly difficult life may be devoted to a great cause. We have purposes larger than ourselves."*

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"A few conclusions become clear when we understand this: that our most cruel failure in how we treat the sick and the aged is the failure to recognize that they have priorities beyond merely being safe and living longer; that the chance to shape one's story is essential to sustaining meaning in life; that we have the opportunity to refashion our institutions, our culture, and our conversations in ways that transform the possibilities for the last chapters of everyone's lives."**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"Our ultimate goal, after all, is not a good death but a good life to the very end."**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"Being mortal is about the struggle to cope with the constraints of our biology, with the limits set by genes and cells and flesh and bone. Medical science has given us remarkable power to push against these limits, and the potential value of this power was a central reason I became a doctor. But again and again, I have seen the damage we in medicine do when we fail to acknowledge that such power is finite and always will be. We've been wrong about what our job is in medicine. We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable well-being. And well-being is about the reasons one wishes to be alive. Those reasons matter not just at the end of life, or when debility comes, but all along the way. Whenever serious sickness or injury strikes and your body or mind breaks down, the vital questions are the same: What is your understanding of the situation and its potential outcomes? What are your fears and what are your hopes? What are the trade-offs you are willing to make and not willing to make? And what is the course of action that best serves this understanding?"**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"You may not control life's circumstances, but getting to be the author of your life means getting to control what you do with them."**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"How we seek to spend our time may depend on how much time we perceive ourselves to have."**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"Death is the enemy. But the enemy has superior forces. Eventually, it wins. And in a war that you cannot win, you don't want a general who fights to the point of total annihilation. You don't want Custer. You want Robert E. Lee, someone who knows how to fight for territory that can be won and how to surrender it when it can't, someone who understands that the damage is greatest if all you do is battle to the bitter end."**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"We've been wrong about what our job is in medicine. We think our job is to ensure health and survival. But really it is larger than that. It is to enable well-being."**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"It is not death that the very old tell me they fear. It is what happens short of death - losing their hearing, their memory, their best friends, their way of life. As Felix put it to me, "Old age is a continuous series of losses." Philip Roth put it more bitterly in his novel Everyman: "Old age is not a battle. Old age is a massacre.""**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

**"Life is choices, and they are relentless. No sooner have you made**

**[one choice than another is upon you."](#)**

- [Atul Gawande](#), Being Mortal

## Being Mortal PDF Summary

**Want to save this Being Mortal summary for later?**

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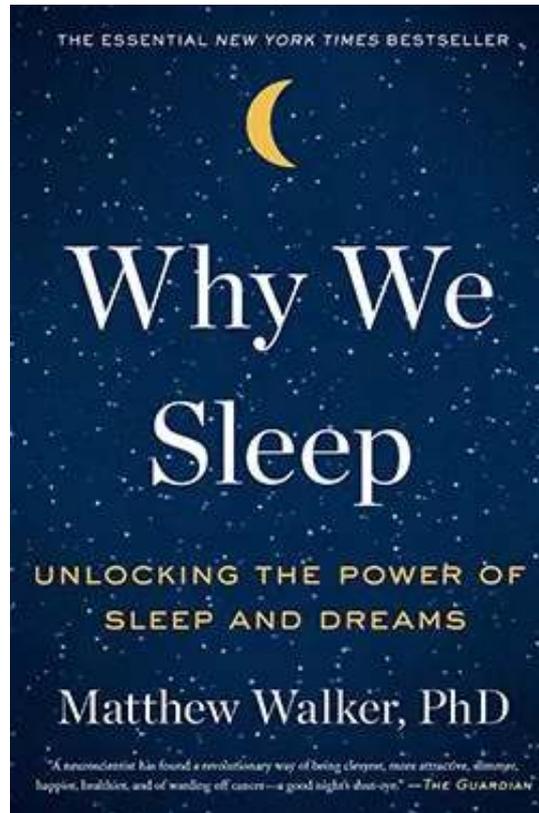
**Note:** Direct link to PDF. No email required.

## Read More: 5 Books Like Being Mortal

**Enjoyed this Being Mortal summary?** You might enjoy the rest of the books on these lists of the [Best Health Books](#) of all time.

And in the meantime...

**Here are 5 top books like Being Mortal...**

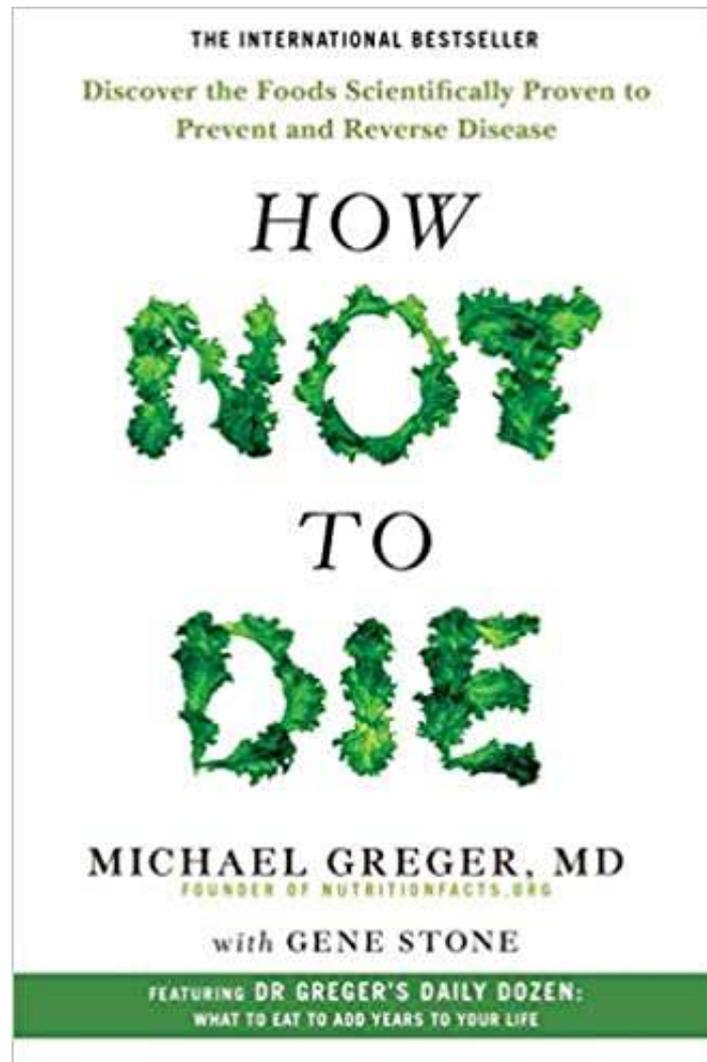


## 1. [Why We Sleep](#) - [Matthew Walker](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Unlocking the Power of Sleep and Dreams

Why We Sleep is a fascinating and accessible guide to what sleep is, why sleep matters and how to optimise your sleep habits to live longer, feel happier and set your life up for success - by sleep scientist and best-selling author, Matthew Walker.

Published 2017 // 368 pages // Rated 4.4 over 125,800 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

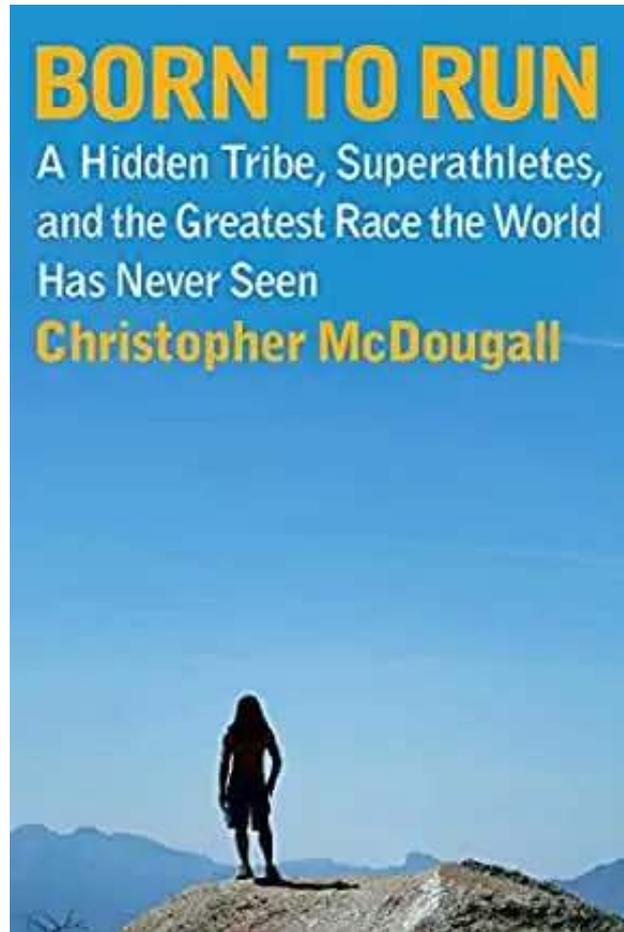


## 2. [How Not to Die](#) - [Michael Greger](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Discover the Foods Scientifically Proven to Prevent and Reverse Disease

How Not to Die is a deeply researched and compelling primer on the promise and importance of whole food plant-based nutrition in preventing and reversing disease - by medical doctor and nutrition expert, Michael Greger.

Published 2015 // 576 pages // Rated 4.4 over 31,000 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

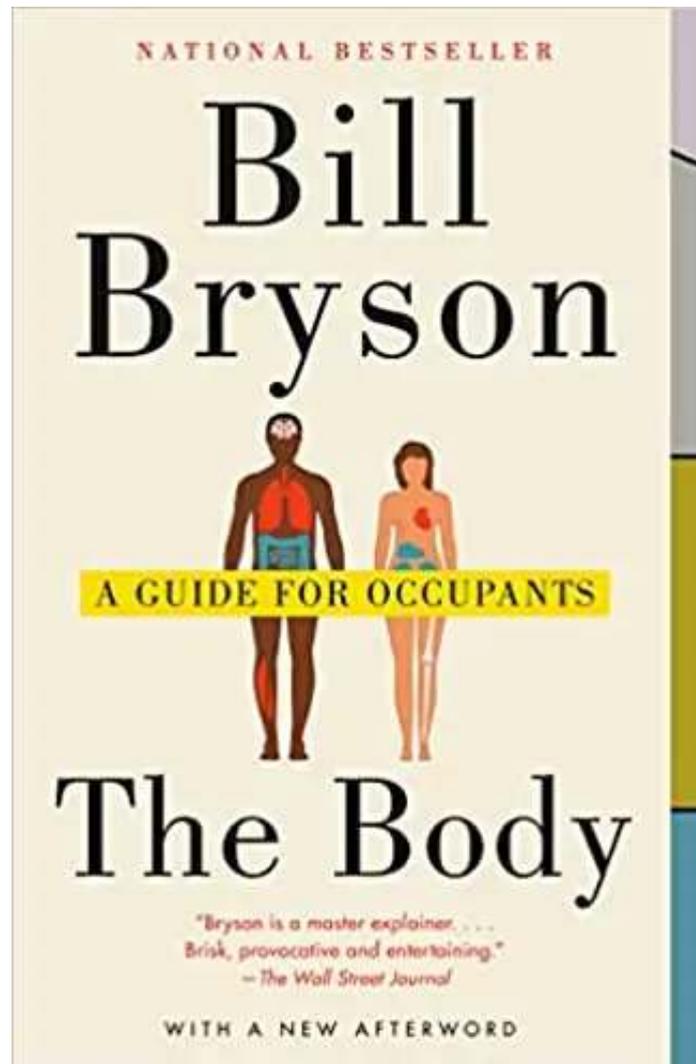


### 3. [Born to Run](#) - [Christopher McDougall](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen

Born to Run takes takes running back to its roots in this critically acclaimed analysis of evolution, injury and recovery that is filled with compelling insights, great story telling and practical tips - by best-selling author and journalist, Christopher McDougall.

Published 2009 // 287 pages // Rated 4.3 over 186,300 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

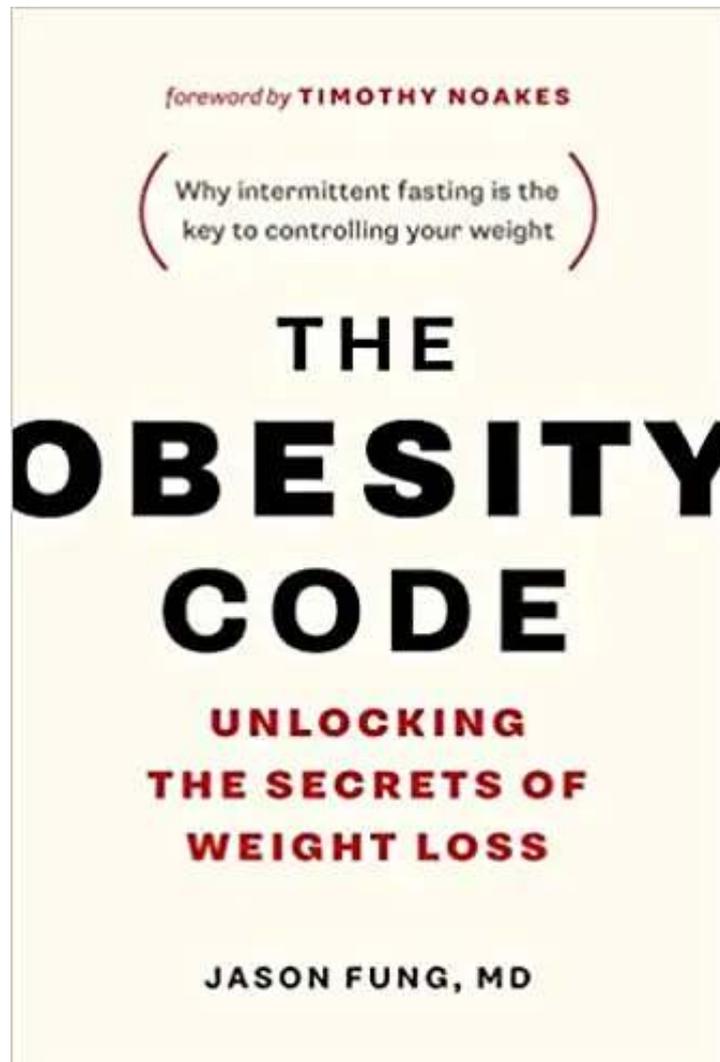


#### 4. [The Body](#) - [Bill Bryson](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

##### A Guide for Occupants

The Body is a fantastically-written and awe-inspiring 23-chapter tour through the 30 trillion cells that (literally) make you who you are - by best-selling author, Bill Bryson.

Published 2019 // 450 pages // Rated 4.3 over 58,200 reviews [on Goodreads](#)



## 5. [The Obesity Code](#) - [Jason Fung](#) ([FREE Summary](#))

Unlocking the Secrets of Weight Loss

The Obesity Code gives an amazing look at how the body uses food to create the perfect conditions for obesity and how to disrupt the cycle to create a healthier future - by kidney disease specialist, best-selling author and MD, Jason Fung.

Published 2016 // 328 pages // Rated 4.4 over 24,200 reviews [on Goodreads](#)

## **Wish There Was a Faster/Easier Way?**

Whenever you're ready, here are four ways I can help you be more

productive, find more balance and live life more on purpose...

1. **Curious? Discover how productive you really are...** Take this free, 2-minute assessment to unlock your PQ and discover the top 25 habits you need to get big things done. [Take the 2-minute quiz →](#)
2. **Overwhelmed? Get a free chapter of my book...** Let me show you how to beat procrastination, permanently, with this free sneak peek inside **TAoL**'s ultimate productivity primer. [Download your free chapter →](#)
3. **Stuck? Grab a 90-Day TRACKTION Planner...** Get the tool thousands trust to help them take control of their time, master their habits and hit goals in every part of their lives. [Order your 90-day planner →](#)
4. **Burned out? Join the TRACKTION Community...** Take the 6-week masterclass, get weekly group coaching, find accountability partners and connect with like-minded self-starters. [Get started FREE →](#)

### [Arthur Worsley](#)

I founded **TAoL** to discover and share the best wisdom on how to live long and prosper. Before that I studied Psychology, Philosophy & Physiology at Oxford and consulted at McKinsey. **Still curious?** [Learn more](#) or [take my FREE productivity quiz](#).