

no time to waste



10 Ideas to Improve Your Total Health Right Now

GEHA[®]



introduction

You probably already know it's important to exercise, eat right and get enough sleep. In fact, you likely think a lot about your health and want to do what you can to stay healthy. And you probably don't have a lot of extra time for a completely new routine. That's why we're suggesting 10 simple tips for your total wellness you can realistically work into your life today.

Don't worry – you don't need to incorporate all 10 at once. Consider picking one or two. Once those become second nature, try to add a new one. Before long, you could be enjoying each new day in better health (without worrying about where to store that treadmill that's collecting dust).

1

quench
your
thirst



1. quench your thirst

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) reports water can:

- Keep tissues (such as those around your mouth, eyes and nose) moist – This can be especially important in the wintertime when these tissues are more likely to dry out, which can lead to increased risk of illness.
- Regulate body temperature – You can't sweat to keep cool if your body doesn't have enough water.
- Cushion joints – If you're experiencing arthritis or occasional joint pain, this could be an important benefit.
- Allow the body to absorb nutrients – What good are all those healthy fruits and vegetables if your body can't access the vitamins and minerals?
- Flush waste products – Water allows your kidneys and digestive system to do their job properly, ridding the body of waste.

So how much water do you need to drink? HHS reports a good rule of thumb is six to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluid every day. Remember tea and juices – as well as water-rich fruits and vegetables, like watermelon and tomatoes – also count toward that total. Another good way to judge whether you're consuming enough is to check your urine. You're adequately hydrated

if you're producing about six cups of urine each day; just make sure it's colorless or slightly yellow. Dark urine could be a sign you need more water.

KEEP IT CHILLY

Fill a pitcher with water and keep it in the refrigerator.

You're more likely to reach for water if it's easily available and nice and cold. Think about adding slices of fresh fruit such as lemons, oranges or strawberries for a little flavor and color.



2 feed your brain





2. \ feed your brain

Just as nutritious whole foods are important for our bodies to fight off disease, the right foods can also help our brains stay sharp as we age.

Research from the National Institutes of Health has shown that cells known as glial cells help remove toxins in the brain associated with the development of Alzheimer's disease. The good news? *Everyday Health* reports that specific foods can help protect these glial cells, so they can continue to do their important work. Those foods include fatty fish (such as salmon, tuna, sardines, mackerel and trout), blueberries, blackberries, ginger and green tea.

One spice has shown to also be a particularly powerful warrior in the fight against dementia and Alzheimer's. Researchers at UCLA found that curcumin, a chemical found in the spice turmeric, is especially effective at improving the effectiveness of a certain type of immune cell that destroys damaging plaques associated with brain decline. Turmeric can be found in plain yellow mustard (it's responsible for mustard's yellow color) and Indian curry. You can also add a dash of the spice to soups, rice, roasted vegetables or your next breakfast scramble.

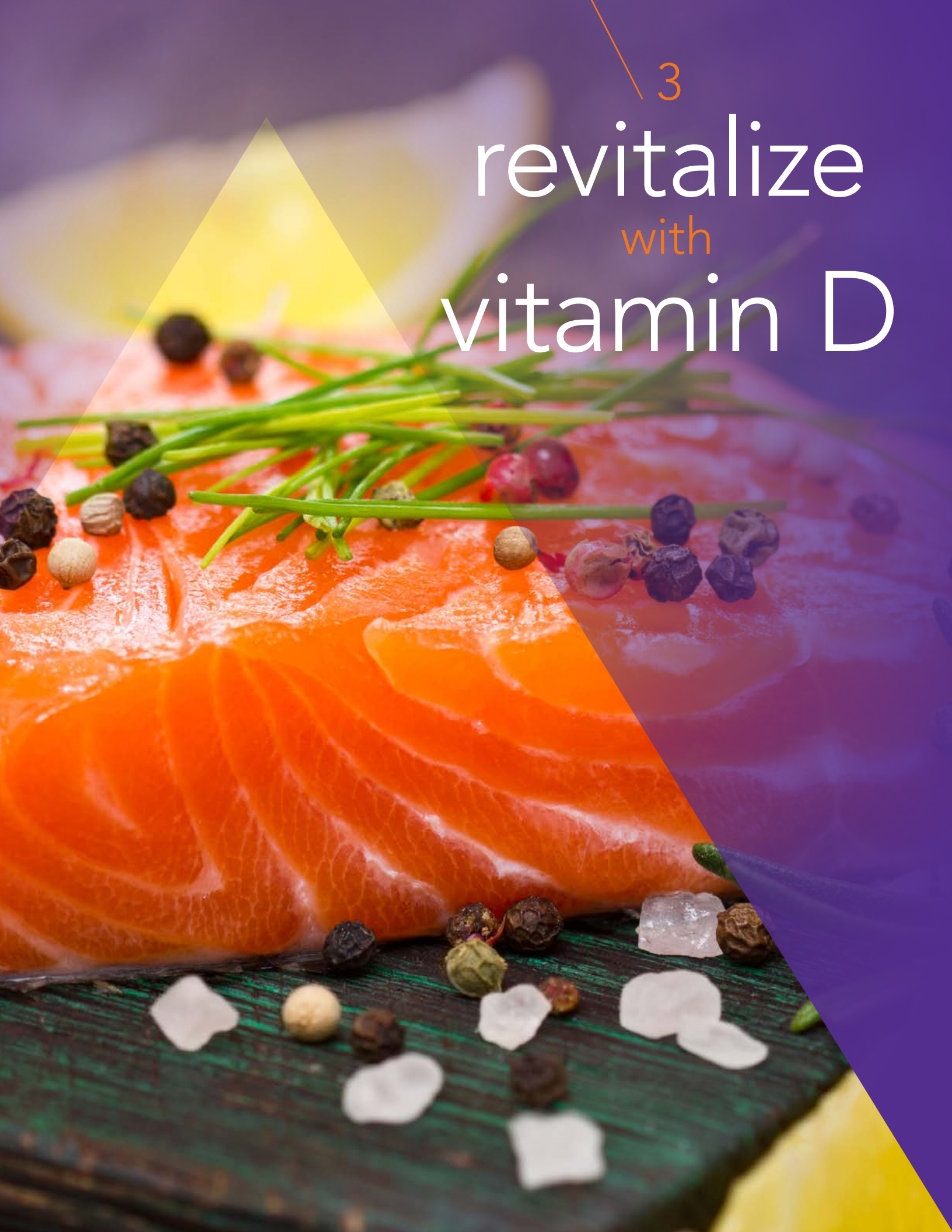
Your brain will thank you!

MORE THAN JUST WAKE-UP JUICE

Did you know your morning coffee is pulling double duty? That caffeine is not only giving you energy, but may also be boosting your brain health. Findings published in the *Journal of Alzheimer's Disease* suggest moderate amounts of caffeine may normalize memory function and help prevent Alzheimer's and dementia.

3

revitalize with vitamin D



3. \revitalize with vitamin D

Vitamin D has long been touted as crucial to building strong bones and preventing osteoporosis.

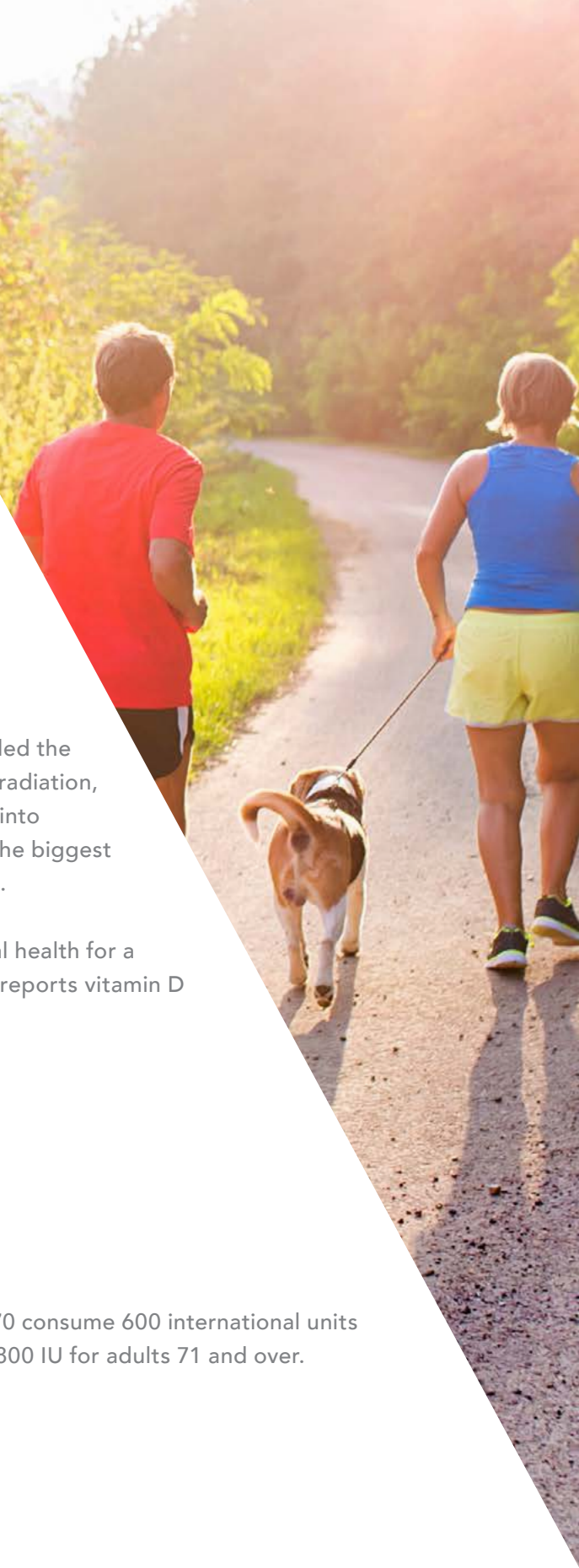
Vitamin D occurs naturally in very few foods, but some of the best sources include cod liver oil, swordfish, salmon and tuna. Other foods with smaller amounts include beef liver, cheese and egg yolks. In addition, many brands of breakfast cereals, orange juice and yogurt are fortified with vitamin D.

The most direct source of vitamin D – and the reason it’s called the “sunshine vitamin” – is sun exposure. Ultraviolet light (UV-B radiation, to be specific) penetrates the skin, and the body converts it into vitamin D. However, keep in mind that sun exposure is also the biggest risk factor for skin cancers, so it’s important not to overdo it.

Vitamin D also plays an important role in maintaining optimal health for a number of bodily systems. The National Institutes of Health reports vitamin D may help with the following issues:

- Controlling cell growth
- Increasing muscle movement and reducing inflammation
- Strengthening the immune system
- Preventing colon, prostate and breast cancer
- Keeping diabetes in check
- Lowering blood pressure

The Food and Nutrition Board recommends adults ages 19-70 consume 600 international units (IU) of vitamin D each day, and that level should increase to 800 IU for adults 71 and over.



4

pick up the phone



A group of young adults are playing tug-of-war on a grassy field. They are all pulling on a thick rope with effort. The background shows trees and a clear sky. The image is partially obscured by a white diagonal shape that contains the text.

4. pick up the phone

We all get busy, and it's easy to forget to reach out to our friends. But it turns out those friendships may be more valuable than you might think.

Not only can our friends bring us happiness, emotional support and often a lot of laughter, research has shown they also can help keep our minds sharp. A study published by the American Journal of Public Health shows, "Larger social networks have a protective influence on cognitive function among elderly women."

In fact, women with a larger personal network of friends reduced their risk of dementia by 26 percent, and those who contacted their friends and family every day cut their risk by nearly half!

Consider setting aside a particular day and time each week to call a friend. Some people find it beneficial to schedule time on their calendar, just as they would a meeting or appointment. A personal visit is even better than a phone call. Find time to meet for coffee or lunch once a month, or get the kids or grandkids together for a day of play on the weekend.

You'll be helping yourself *and* your friend at the same time!

5
get
some
fiber





5. \ get some fiber

Because the average American diet includes so many processed foods and so few raw fruits and vegetables, many of us get nowhere near the amount of fiber recommended by the FDA.

Unlike protein, vitamins or minerals, dietary fiber is the portion of plant foods your body can't digest. Also known as roughage, fiber passes through your digestive system pretty much intact. But that can be a good thing. As the Mayo Clinic reminds us, fiber not only softens our stool but also increases its weight and size, potentially deterring constipation. But fiber can also offer many more benefits, including:

- Maintaining bowel health (including preventing hemorrhoids).
- Lowering cholesterol levels.
- Assisting with blood sugar levels (which may help regulate and/or prevent diabetes).
- Helping achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Fiber may also help your heart: A study in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology Foundation* showed that women who consumed adequate fiber lowered their risk of heart disease and heart attacks.

The Institute of Medicine recommends 38 grams of fiber daily for men 50 and younger, and 30 grams for men 51 and older. For women, the group recommends 25 grams for those 50 and younger, and 21 grams for women 51 and older.

While supplements can be useful, the best source of fiber is through your diet. Consider incorporating more of these foods into your daily meals:

FAST FIBER

Here are just a few simple ideas to add more fiber to what you're already eating:

- Add kidney beans to a can of soup or green salad.
- Enjoy nachos? Top them with black beans or refried black beans.
- Mix in some uncooked oatmeal to your next batch of muffins or cookies.
- Whole-grain products
- Fresh fruits
- Fresh vegetables
- Beans, peas and other legumes
- Nuts and seeds

/6

check your coverage



6. check your coverage

Let's be honest: thinking about insurance can be overwhelming. Finding quality, affordable health and dental coverage for your family doesn't have to be cause for worry, and periodically checking your family's policies can really pay off.

Maybe you recently got married or divorced, or maybe you're thinking about children. Maybe you're starting to plan for retirement, or perhaps your health has changed and you're now taking more prescription medications. A periodic review of your insurance options can help ensure you have the right coverage.

When comparing plans, it can be helpful to ask yourself some questions:

- How many people in your family need coverage and what are their ages?
- How many times per year do you typically visit a doctor or dentist?
- Do you have any major medical or dental procedures planned in the coming year?
- What is your level of physical activity?
- How much do you spend each month for prescription drugs?
- Do you have established doctor or dentist relationships? Are they in a plan's network?
- What are the copayments and deductibles you must pay under various plans?
- What is the out-of-pocket maximum for each plan?

Reviewing your policies is not as hard as you may think, and knowing you have the right coverage for you and your family can give you invaluable piece of mind.

7

know your numbers



7. know your numbers

Quick, what's your blood pressure? Cholesterol? The truth is, many of us don't have a good idea about those important measures of health. You might know your weight, but do you know your BMI?

As you age, these biometric numbers are important to watch. They serve as your body's "check engine

lights," and can help you spot the early warning signs of serious conditions like heart disease and diabetes. Even if you're healthy, knowing your numbers can give you a baseline to compare against in the future. Your doctor can tell you where you stand on all of these numbers, but it's also good to track your progress between visits:

BODY MASS INDEX (BMI) Normal = 18.5 - 24.9	BLOOD GLUCOSE (FASTING) under 99 mg/dL
BLOOD PRESSURE Below 120/80	LDL (BAD) CHOLESTEROL Optimal – less than 100 mg/dL HDL (GOOD) CHOLESTEROL Less than 40 mg/dL is a major risk factor for heart disease.

Body weight/BMI – Your bathroom scale can help you with your weight, and you can then look up your body mass index (BMI) – basically a measure of body fat – by using this [easy calculator](#) from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Blood sugar – If you're diabetic or taking insulin, it's important to track your blood sugar (blood glucose) levels on a regular basis. The American Diabetes Association offers an online personal health record called [Diabetes 24/7](#) that allows you to securely store and share your blood sugar data. Healthline recently published its list of the [best diabetes apps](#) for 2016.

Blood pressure – This is probably one of the easiest numbers to track, and technology is making it even easier. Many of the new wearable

health monitors offer easy blood pressure tracking, including brands like Fitbit, Nike, Garmin and Jawbone. These, and [many more options](#), are available and can be connected to your smartphone. Of course, if you have an inflatable blood pressure cuff, you can always track it yourself at home.

Cholesterol – Cholesterol is checked with a blood test called a lipid profile. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services recommends testing only once every five years (unless otherwise recommended by your doctor).

8

just
breathe



8. \ just breathe

Stress is one of the most destructive forces in the human body. Alcohol or relaxing in front of the TV might seem like easy ways to de-stress, but both of those activities in excess can lead to more harm than good.

Instead, try a simple breathing exercise you can do anywhere. Dr. Andrew Weil, holistic health expert and founder of the Arizona Center for Integrated Medicine at the University of Arizona College of Medicine, highly recommends an exercise he calls the 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise:

- Place the tip of your tongue against the tissue behind your upper front teeth.
- Exhale completely through your mouth.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose while counting to four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth for a count of eight.
- Repeat the cycle three more times.

Weil reports this breathing exercise is a “natural tranquilizer” for your nerves, and he recommends performing it at least twice a day.



9

stand up





9. \ stand up

Did you know sitting is the new smoking? That's how dangerous our increasingly sedentary lifestyles have become, according to health experts. In fact, a recent study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* suggested people who sit for long periods are at an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

For many of us who have desk jobs, that's a little concerning – which is why it's even more important to stand up! Consider some of these ideas to help you reduce how much time you spend sitting:

- Keep a small cup of water on your desk and get up often to refill it.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Instead of calling or emailing a co-worker, walk down to his or her desk when possible.
 - If your employer allows it, switch to a standing desk or one that can be switched back and forth from sitting to standing.
 - Incorporate a quick walk during your lunch break.
 - Every 30 minutes or so, stand up at your desk for a couple of minutes.
 - If you're watching television, stand and walk around during the commercial breaks.

10
turn that
frown
upside down



10. \ turn that frown upside down

Never underestimate the power of a smile and a laugh. Research has shown that laughter has many benefits for the human body:

- Boosting the immune system
- Improving the effectiveness of the circulatory system
- Increasing the amount of oxygen to the body
- Stimulating your lungs and heart
- Relaxing muscles
- Releasing endorphins (the body's natural pain relief)
- Easing digestion
- Regulating blood pressure
- Improving memory and creativity

A study by The Royal Society, the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence, shows a direct correlation between laughter and a higher pain threshold.

Try to add a little more fun and laughter to your daily life – it's easier than you might think:

- Practice laughing five minutes each day. Fake it till you make it.
- Share an embarrassing moment with other people.
- Laugh with other people when they laugh.
- Seek out entertainment that makes you laugh.
- Listen to a comedy album.
- Give yourself permission to laugh at life's awkward, but funny, moments.
- Do at least one silly, nonconforming thing a day.

Finally, don't underestimate the power of those crazy cat videos on YouTube. The University of Utah recently reported research that people who watched funny cat videos not only improved their cortisol levels, making them calmer, but also improved T-cell function, which gives the immune system a boost.





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