

# 31 days to a healthier you

Take a simple step every day for a month to kick-start a new health regime. By Helen Foster

**W**ho said you must make your health resolutions at the start of the year? Just adding one of our 31 tips here each day over the next month will ensure that even though the days might be colder and darker, you'll be fitter, healthier and bubbling over with energy. Let your month of mega-health begin ...

**1 Move for 30 minutes each day.** Thirty minutes is the minimum exercise you need to avoid Sedentary Death Syndrome – the name American scientists are giving to the 30-plus nasty diseases linked to not moving often enough. “Decide at the beginning of the week what time works best for you to fit your 30 minutes in each day, then write it in your diary and stick to it,” says Dan Clay from Dangerously Fit Training, Sydney. And remember, you can break that 30 minutes into blocks of five-, 10- or 15-minute sets if that works better for you.

**2**



**Spend \$5 on your partner, best buddy, or a charity.** It'll give you a bigger mood boost than spending the money on yourself, say US researchers at Harvard Business School.

**3 Lie down to solve a problem.** If something is stressing you, try thinking about it lying down. According



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to research at the Australian National University, Canberra, we solve problems better when horizontal, as our brain releases less of the chemical noradrenaline, which inhibits creative thought.

**4 Make tonight's dinner fish.**

US researchers say eating fish once a week slows age-related memory decline by 10-13 per cent. Not a fish fan? Try tuna, says Roberta Muir from Sydney Fish Markets: "It's the fish meat-eaters like best," she says.

**5 Add speed bursts to your workout.**

Researchers at Canada's McMaster University found people who added a 30-second fast burst every four minutes of their workout doubled their endurance in two weeks. Remember, allow at least 24 hours between interval training sessions to allow your body to recover.

**6 Put a plant on your desk.** You'll cut your risk of headache by

45 per cent, your risk of a sore throat by 30 per cent and lower fatigue by 20 per cent if you do, as plants increase humidity, reduce dust and lower stress – all of which boost health, says Norwegian researcher Dr Tove Fjeld. ▶

## 7 Clean your windowsills once a week.

They're the most common place mould grows and "mould toxins have been shown to slow the part of the brain that deals with emotions, which could cause depression," says Dr Edmond Shenassa from Brown Medical School in the US.



## 8 Buy a proper water glass.

Drinking plenty of water throughout the day helps fight fatigue, and it revs metabolism. Strangely, US researchers recently found water tastes better if it's drunk from a firm container, rather than a flimsy water-cooler cup!

## 9 Get a mantra.

According to University of California studies, regularly repeating a calming word or phrases reduces stress levels and helps you sleep. "Use any word that feels positive to you or choose one of the traditional Sanskrit mantras out there," says Marita Dortins, a yoga teacher

at Sydney's V Club. "[The Buddhist] *Om mani padme hum* is a good one for creating peace and calm."

## 11 Test your weights.

If the weights you're lifting aren't heavy enough, you won't get optimum results. "The right weight is the one you can lift with good form, but that leaves you totally fatigued on your last rep," says Dave Stocks, from Melbourne trainers The Arena, and lead strength coach on *Gladiators*.

## 12 Stretch your fingers.

Texting, using BlackBerrys or twiddling iPod wheels put our fingers under pressure. "They're not made to do fast, small movements," says Simon Floreani from the Chiropractors' Association of Australia. Stretch things out with daily moves like

circling your wrists with fists closed, then fingers pointed, or putting your hands in a prayer position and lifting your elbows high.

## 13 Only do 'must do' tasks this week.

Cutting out the 'should reallys' from your to-do list will cut stress and free up time, says Sharon Pearson, chief executive of Melbourne's The Coaching Institute. "We fill our life with 'busyness' but if a task won't help you move toward your immediate goals, leave it."

## 14 Add three prebiotic foods to your diet.

These are foods that feed the healthy-digestion and immunity-boosting bugs in your system, and five days of upping your intake increases numbers by 133 million, say researchers at the UK's University of Reading. Prebiotic foods include bananas, garlic, onions and artichokes.

## 15 Try a food you don't think you like.

"As kids we don't like strong or bitter foods but tastes change as you age," says dietitian Sharon Natoli from Food & Nutrition Australia. Olives, brussels sprouts and radishes are just some of the foods you are likely to grow into.

## 16 Buy lupin bread.

People eat 1516kJ less a day when they swap white bread at lunch and breakfast for this bread,

made from lupin flour rather than wheat. "The fibre in lupin flour swells in the stomach, increasing fullness," says University of Western Australia researcher Dr Sofia Sipsas. Available from health-food stores or gluten-free suppliers such as [www.mammothhealth.com.au](http://www.mammothhealth.com.au).

## 17 Set your alarm at the same time every day.

According to sleep expert Dr Leon Lack, from Flinders University, Adelaide, irregular wake-up times disrupt our circadian rhythms, "so we fall asleep too late to get all the rest we need. A regular wake-up time readjusts things."



## 18

### Wash your hands.

At least four times a day is recommended. It's the number one way to cut your risk of catching all known bugs. ▶

## 10 Eat less processed food.

Read the food packet's contents label to check it contains no more than three ingredients.

"It's the easiest way ever to control your weight and eat well," says British nutritionist Liz Tucker ([www.behappybehealthy.co.uk](http://www.behappybehealthy.co.uk)).



## 19 Check your reflection.

Spending five minutes looking in the mirror, “ignoring the things you don’t like, and focusing on those you do”, helped improve body image in as little as three weeks, in trials by Dr Sherrie Delinsky at Boston’s Massachusetts General Hospital.

## 20 Find a wake-up song.

Listening to fast music first thing can totally transform mornings. “It energises the mind, which triggers the same physical effect in the body,” says Dr Mary Ann Bauman, author of *Fight Fatigue: Six Simple Steps to Maximize Your Energy* (Tate Publishing).

## 21 Trade your wine for a beer tonight.

Both contain antioxidants, but research from Göttingen University in Germany found wine drinkers have smaller memory centres of the brain than beer drinkers – possibly because beer contains B vitamins that protect against brain damage.

## 22 Buy a pack of sugar-free gum.

It is a health food! Not only does it reduce risk of dental decay, new research shows

that chewing sugar-free gum before indulging in sweet snacks actually helps you eat less of them, while new British studies say it also helps reduce stress.

## 24 Stretch your neck.

Computer work can be a pain in the neck – literally – but according to research in the journal *Medicine and Science in Sports Exercise*, pulling your chin in toward your neck and holding for 10 seconds will stop any end-of-the-day aches and pains.

## 25 Get a few minutes of sunshine today (outside the peak UV period).

We make vital vitamin D in our bodies when the sun’s rays hit our skin. To stock up your supplies, experts recommend two to three hours per week during the winter months in most states in Australia.



## 23 Snack on a vegetable.

Eat some of your five portions of vegetables a day as snacks, says dietitian Bridget Thompson ([www.newleafnutrition.com.au](http://www.newleafnutrition.com.au)). Try cherry tomatoes, celery sticks or snow peas with a little hummus, cottage cheese or peanut butter.

## 26 Turf old make-up.

Using old make-up increases the risk of skin breakouts and eye infections. Throw out the following, says make-up guru Napoleon Perdis: foundation that has separated or clogs around the lid; lipstick that smells waxy, and mascara that clogs around the wand and flakes on lashes.

## 27 Try focusing your mind with three minutes of meditation.

According to leading alternative health guru The Barefoot Doctor, 180 seconds of mind focus is all it takes to improve energy, reduce stress, or even rev up your libido. Check out his guided meditations at [www.meditatewithbarefoot.com](http://www.meditatewithbarefoot.com).

## 28 Eat only when you’re hungry, stop when you’re full.

“We’ve forgotten how to do this, but if we relearn we’ll never need to diet,” says Michelle May from [www.amihungry.com](http://www.amihungry.com). An easy signal to look out for indicating that your body’s getting full: when food starts to taste dull in your mouth.

## 29 Swap the gym for a team sport twice a week.

Danish researchers at the University of Copenhagen found people lost twice as much weight playing sport for three hours a week compared to spending the same amount of time at the gym. Why? Because it’s fun, you don’t notice how hard you’re working.

## 30 Get your shoes stretched.

Squeezing feet into too-small shoes hurts and increases your risk of osteoarthritis in later life. “Pretty much any leather shoe, except patents, stretch well,” says Josh Rosenthal from Coombs Shoe Repairs in Sydney’s Strand Arcade.



## 31

### Drink three cups of tea a day.

You’re 25 per cent less likely to develop the plaques in your arteries that increase risk of heart attack or stroke. Not considered a tea fan? “Oolong tea has a softer taste than normal black tea,” says Sharon Samson from The Tea Centre. ☘