



Make 2010 Your Healthiest Year Ever!

These 12 new developments will keep you feeling fit

The beginning of a new year is one of our most powerful opportunities to start over. After years of setting and failing to keep New Year's resolutions, you may think you have a problem with self-discipline. More likely, it's that you aren't sufficiently clear about what matters most to you. Once you know what is important, it's easy to say no to the unimportant.

This year, resolve to start a new habit connected to your health. To help, the team at eni has gathered 12 of the newest findings in health research -- one for each month of 2010 -- to keep you well. As always, be sure to consult your doctor before you make any changes. And good luck on a happy, healthy new year!

1. Eat right, breathe easy

Here's a reason to get a handle on your heartburn: A recent study finds chronic heartburn can cause asthma.

About half of asthma sufferers have some degree of gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, characterized by repeated bouts of acid reflux or heartburn. Duke University researchers say that may be because the stomach contents and acidic digestive juices that reflux into the lungs and esophagus injure lung tissue and over time can lead to asthma-causing immune system changes.

To curb GERD: Eat smaller meals; limit trigger foods; and ask your doctor whether you should take medication.

2. Boost your fitness with food

HDL, the "good" cholesterol, reduces the risk of heart disease and limits the damage of LDL, "the bad cholesterol." It also may help you get fitter. In an Italian study, seniors with high HDL levels had greater lower-body fitness and did better

in walking tests than those with low HDL levels.

To boost your HDL: Try exercise, weight control and a diet high in monounsaturated fats, such as olive oil, nuts, avocados and olives. A Finnish study also showed that about two-thirds of a cup of berries daily for two months helped raise HDL and reduce high blood pressure.

3. For energy, move it

Regular exercise, even if non-strenuous, can help you out of a rut. Both low- and moderate-intensity exercise upped energy levels by 20% in sedentary young adults who, like about 25% of Americans, report persistent but non-chronic fatigue, finds a University of Georgia study. Participants who rode exercise bikes for 20 minutes three times a week for six weeks reported feeling energized, regardless of exertion level. Those who took it easier had a 65% reduction in fatigue, while more moderate exercisers reported a 49% improvement. Either way, exercise acts directly on the central nervous system to increase energy and reduce fatigue, researchers say.

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4. Sweat it out ...

... if you are one of the 24% of Americans with metabolic syndrome, a set of physical problems that combine to increase the risk of coronary heart disease, among others. Quick bursts of high-intensity exercise, as opposed to longer, more moderate exercise, can help and even reverse metabolic syndrome, says a recent Norwegian study.

But before you put on your hard-core sprinter's game face, note: The American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week for metabolic syndrome sufferers. Consult your doctor before changing your workout.

5. Ditch depression with D

A low level of vitamin D -- the "sunshine vitamin" -- can put a damper on your mood. Depressed people had 14% less vitamin D in their blood than non-depressed people in a Dutch study of 1,282 seniors. So load up on D: While you're improving your mood, you'll

be helping your bones, too. Adequate levels of vitamin D also are vital for calcium absorption and bone health.

But don't stop there. You can eat your way to a happier day. Omega-3 fatty acids found in foods such as salmon, walnuts, flaxseed, scallops and cod-liver oil also help fight depression, mood disorders, schizophrenia and dementia, found a study in the medical journal "Nature Reviews Neuroscience."

6. Get soles

If you have foot pain, it may be time to invest in customized insoles. For the estimated one in four Americans with achy feet, "foot orthoses" are the cure, finds a recent review of 11 trials. Orthoses provided at least short-term relief from foot pain for people with high arches, prominent toe joints, juvenile arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, the studies found.

7. Go from good to grape

Turns out, juice sippers can enjoy the health benefits of grapes the same as their wine-drinking counterparts. The fruit, consumed in all its forms, can reduce the risk of heart disease, a new study finds. Grape juice improves blood flow and lowers blood pressure; grape-seed extract helps to lower cholesterol.

8. Go soft on sleep

Hard beds are often prescribed for back-pain sufferers, but new research finds soft is better. In a Danish study, people with chronic low back pain who slept on water beds or a body-conforming foam mattress reported less pain and nearly an hour more of sleep a night than those who slept on a hard futon mattress for a month.

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9. Make like a fish and swim

Time to take a dip. Low-impact water exercises can ease pain and improve function in people with osteoarthritis of the hip and knee, concludes a medical review. Exercising in water is especially effective for reducing knee pain. In a Brazilian study, osteoarthritis patients reported 22% less knee pain immediately after aquatic exercise than after conventional exercises. Pool therapy, such as strengthening, stretching and aerobic exercises, lightens the body-weight load on joints.

10. Network your way to happiness

It's no surprise that we are influenced by the moods of those around us. But now, a study shows that people we don't even know can make us happier.

According to a new study, you can be six degrees removed from someone and still catch that person's good karma. In other words, happiness is "viral," and it actually can spread not just from one friend to another, but to friends of friends of friends. That's what researchers at Harvard Medical School and the University of California-San Diego found when they analyzed the social networks of 4,739 people who had filled out a questionnaire about how happy they were.

So if you've resisted joining a social networking website such as Facebook or LinkedIn or trying real-world activities like book clubs or professional networking events, maybe it's time to explore!

11. Pop some pine bark

Herbal supplements have been called everything from magic pills to poison. Now a study touts the benefits of a pine bark extract called Pycnogenol. Sold over the counter, the supplement helped lower blood glucose levels and blood pressure in type 2 diabetics, University of Arizona researchers say. Nearly 60% of study participants who took 125mg of Pycnogenol every day for 12 weeks were able to cut their blood pressure medication by half. They also had drops of 23.7 points in their fasting blood glucose levels and 12.7 points in LDL cholesterol. In other studies, Pycnogenol -- an antioxidant -- also was shown to reduce osteoarthritis joint pain and stiffness.



12. Look for the salt

"Consumer Reports" finds sodium stashed in alarming quantities in some surprising sources, ranging from cottage cheese to Caesar salads.

Among the 37 processed foods the magazine's researchers analyzed:

A Premium Caesar Salad with grilled chicken from McDonald's -- without dressing -- had more than double the salt (890mg) of a large order of fries (350mg).

A maple- and brown sugar-flavored instant oatmeal had more than three times as much sodium as the plain kind.

The recommended daily limit for salt is 2,300mg (one teaspoon). Try to avoid processed food and read food labels to steer clear of the worst offenders.

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