



Reader's
digest

HABITS FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

IS YOUR DAILY ROUTINE SILENTLY MAKING YOU SICK? FIXING SNEAKY BAD HABITS AND ADOPTING GOOD ONES COULD MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE WHEN IT COMES TO YOUR PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH.



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3 Ways Your House Could Make You Sick

You may not realize it, but the way you clean, decorate, and live in your home can harm your health. Watch out for these common threats.

TOXIC DUST

The dust in hard-to-reach corners or settled atop your furniture can do more than cause a sneezing fit; it can be toxic. Researchers from George Washington University analyzed dust samples data from across America and found 45 potentially toxic chemicals hiding within, ten of which turned up in 90 percent of the samples. One repeat offender was TDCIPP, a flame retardant frequently found in furniture and other household items that is thought to cause cancer. Phthalates, often found in toys and vinyl flooring, as well as phenols, often used to make plastic, were also found in high amounts. Minimize dust by vacuuming frequently (use the proper attachments to reach into corners and under furniture) and regularly wiping down surfaces.

AIR FRESHENERS

If you're obsessed with keeping your house smelling fresh, you could be affecting your health. Scented candles, oil diffusers, plug-in fresheners, and scented sprays often contain phthalates, chemicals that may disrupt the endocrine system by interfering with

“Phthalates can act as a synthetic hormone in the body ... We start worrying about health issues.”

LARA ADLER

hormones. “Phthalates can act as a synthetic hormone inside the body. When we have synthetic chemicals that interfere with natural processes, we start worrying about health issues,” says Lara

Adler, an environmental toxins expert and certified holistic health coach in Portland, Oregon. Burning incense can send large amounts of particulate matter into the air, which can then settle in the respiratory tract, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. It also often contains trace amounts of chemicals that may cause skin irritation. Safely freshen your home by using natural essential oils, buying flowers, or simply opening the windows.

PLASTIC STORAGE CONTAINERS

Plastic storage containers often contain harmful chemicals such as BPA (a chemical that may interfere with your hormones and potentially raise your risk of developing cancer or diabetes), which can leach into your food when reheating or even when filling containers with still-hot leftovers. And don't let *BPA-free* on the packaging fool you. “Many manufacturers simply replaced BPA with another similar chemical in the same family, which may be just as bad,” says Adler. Avoid plastic whenever possible, says Adler, and opt for glass storage containers.

COMMUTE HEALTH HAZARDS

Commutes are rarely fun (the average commuter has a 26-minute trip each way), and over time, they can take a toll on your health.

SLEEP DEPRIVATION

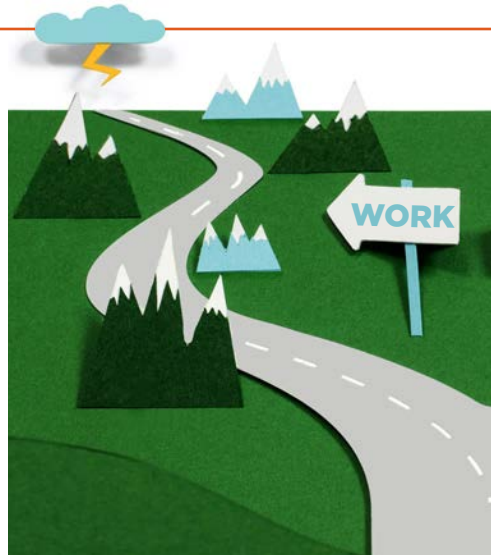
Getting up earlier and earlier to avoid traffic can lead to health issues related to sleep deprivation. “We know that it slows our reaction time and that driving when tired or drowsy can be like driving when drunk. It also slows cognition, so you won’t make decisions nearly as well as you would if you were not sleep deprived,” says Los Angeles sleep expert Michael J. Breus, PhD.

UNEVEN SKIN AGING

Whether you’re a driver or a passenger, the side of your face exposed to the sun can show greater sun-related damage than the other, even with tinted windows. Apply sunscreen with at least SPF 30 every morning.

POTENTIAL HEART TROUBLES

If your commute is stressful because you’re running late or someone cuts you off in traffic, it could put your heart health at risk. The connection between



stress and heart problems is unclear, but some experts think that stress-induced inflammation promotes heart disease. Or, stress may trigger behaviors harmful to your heart, such as consuming artery-clogging fatty foods, smoking, or drinking alcohol.

● **Carry a commuting survival kit: antibacterial hand sanitizer or wipes; sunscreen; and a relaxing playlist, podcast, or book to calm any stress.**

COLD AFTER COLD

Public transit commuters, beware: Certain viruses such as norovirus and colds can linger on surfaces such as poles or seats for hours or days, says New York City internist and pulmonologist Len Horovitz, MD. “Just touching something does nothing. You get sick when you introduce germs

into your mouth, eyes, or nose,” he says. Avoid touching your face, use hand sanitizer after touching a public surface, and wash your hands as soon as you get to work.

5 Harmful Makeup Mistakes

Makeup might make you feel pretty, but if you're not careful, your products and routine could take a toll on your health.

CARELESS MASCARA APPLICATION

If you don't give your mascara application your undivided attention, you could wind up with something a lot worse than excess black around your eyelids. "Some of my patients get scratches on their cornea from mishandling the mascara wand. It's something that gets so close to the actual eye that you can scratch yourself if you don't have a good technique," says Michelle Rhee, MD, an ophthalmologist with the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City.

MAKEUP MADE OVERSEAS

Beware of makeup products manufactured abroad and imported into the United States. These products can become contaminated with harmful bacteria known to cause infections in various parts of the body; poor packaging and shipping or storage

conditions may be to blame, according to the FDA. Makeup made in the States can become contaminated, too, because of factors like the materials or ingredients used and manufacturing conditions. It's a good idea to pay attention to recalls and safety alerts specific to makeup, just as you would with food.

DIRTY BRUSHES

"Theoretically, you should clean your makeup brushes as often as you clean your face, but obviously that can't always happen," says Mona Gohara, MD, of Advanced Dermcare in

Danbury, Connecticut. Clean your brushes once a week with a mild non-soap cleanser and let them dry overnight. Dead skin cells and other germs can get caught in the bristles and get into your skin as you swirl makeup onto your face. You should also sanitize your makeup bag, especially if you store your brushes loose and without protective covers.

HARD BRUSHES

"The softer the bristle, the better," says Dr. Gohara. Soft bristles are gentler on the skin and less likely to cause irritation that could lead to an acne breakout or rosacea flare-up.

SCRUBBING OFF MAKEUP

The skin around your eyes is especially delicate, and scrubbing too hard can lead to popped blood vessels and dark circles. Use a mild cleanser to remove makeup, and avoid rubbing too roughly.



DISTRESS SIGNALS

Americans are more stressed than ever, according to an American Psychological Association survey, and nearly one third say stress affects their physical or mental health.

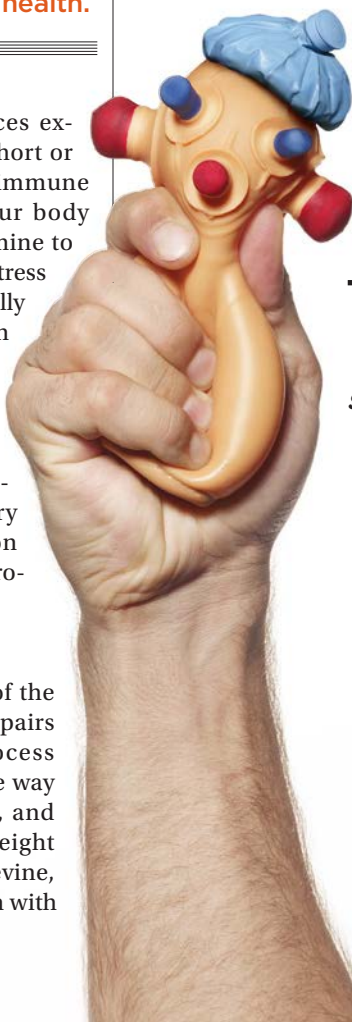
HIVES

When your body experiences excessive stress (for either a short or long period of time), your immune system gets wonky and your body releases the chemical histamine to fight off your ailment. If the stress doesn't go away, you essentially develop an allergic reaction and, boom, hives galore. Apply a cold compress or towel doused in cool water to the outbreak area to reduce swelling and tame itchiness. If that doesn't work, try an antihistamine, a common allergy treatment that may provide relief.

WEIGHT FLUCTUATIONS

"Stress triggers the release of the hormone cortisol, which impairs your body's ability to process blood sugar and changes the way you metabolize fat, protein, and carbs, which can lead to weight gain or loss," says Shanna Levine, MD, a primary care physician with

the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City. Stress can also cause people to engage in unhealthy behaviors like overeating or undereating. Try to maintain a healthy diet no matter how frazzled you feel. Keep nutritious snacks on hand, such as whole wheat crackers and peanut butter, or almonds and apples. ➔



"When people are stressed, they get sick. It could be a cold or cold sores, which pop up because the immune system can't suppress the virus."

SHANNA LEVINE, MD

TUMMY TROUBLES

Stress can cause the body to produce more digestive acid, leading to heartburn. “It can also slow the emptying of food from the stomach, which causes gas and bloating and may even increase the number of times your colon contracts, leading to cramping and diarrhea,” Deborah Rhodes, MD, a Mayo Clinic internal medicine physician, told parents.com. Keep heartburn medication on hand and pop one at the first sign of discomfort. Ginger also soothes an upset stomach; try ginger tea or ginger candy.

HEADACHES

Stress releases chemicals that can cause changes to blood vessels in the brain, which brings on a headache. Prone to migraines? Stress can spark them or make them worse. It’s also common for your muscles to tense up when you’re stressed, another headache trigger. If you don’t want to pop a painkiller to stop the throbbing, try acupressure that you can do at your desk. Firmly grip the web of skin between the base of your thumb and forefinger, then massage it in a circular motion for a few minutes on each hand. Dabbing a bit of peppermint oil on your temples may also provide natural relief.

CONSTANT COLDS

Stress suppresses the immune system, which makes it easier for you to get sick and harder to fight off bugs.

● *Add stress relief tactics that work for you (a short meditation, stretching on the hour) into your daily routine.*

“When people are stressed, they get sick. It could be a cold or cold sores, which pop up because the immune system can’t suppress the virus,” says Dr. Levine. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh infected volunteers with a cold virus; those who reported that they were coping with stresses were more likely to get sick than those with fewer problems. Stop a cold in its tracks with zinc supplements or lozenges; one study found that zinc can shorten the length of a cold by about a day if taken within 24 hours of feeling sick. Meditation, regular exercise, and plenty of sleep can also help boost your immune system and help you de-stress.

ACNE

When you’re stressed, your body pumps out more hormones, which can cause skin glands to produce more oil. This excess oil can get trapped inside hair follicles, along with dirt and dead skin cells, producing pimples. Topical creams containing benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid can clear up acne if applied regularly.

FUZZY BRAIN

Too much of the stress hormone cortisol can make it harder to focus or concentrate, causing memory problems as well as anxiety or depression, says Dr. Levine. To calm yourself, close your eyes and breathe in and out slowly and deeply, concentrating on your breath; do this until you feel your tension ease.

What Not to Do for a Good Night's Sleep

Sleeping may seem like the simplest part of your day, but there are actually mistakes you can make while snoozing that can affect or give clues about your health.

WEAR THE WRONG PJ'S

Your body temperature plays a part in your sleep cycle—a slight drop in temperature is what induces sleep, says Raj Dasgupta, MD, a fellow of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and assistant professor of clinical medicine at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California. Silk pajamas are ideal, according to sleep.org, because they keep you warm when you're cold and cool when you're hot. If silk is too pricey, try breathable cotton in warmer months and cozy flannel during colder ones.

HAVE A NIGHTCAP

A glass of wine might put you to sleep, but alcohol actually prevents you from sinking into the deeper stages of sleep, says Dr. Dasgupta, so you

wake up feeling tired. It also causes levels of your antidiuretic hormone to drop, which forces your kidneys to produce more urine; you then wake up for a middle-of-the-night bathroom trip.

USE YOUR PHONE

Research shows that blue wavelength light from LED-based devices like phones, ➔



tablets, TVs, and laptops increases the release of cortisol in the brain (making you more alert) while inhibiting the production of melatonin (the hormone that lulls you to sleep). In fact, Harvard researchers found that people who read an e-book before bed took longer to fall asleep and released less melatonin than those who read a paperback.

LET LIGHT IN

Your circadian rhythm is ruled, in part, by lightness and darkness, so even the smallest slit of light can throw it off-kilter. Make sure the blinds are drawn completely, and consider low-wattage lamps to help you wind down before bed.

TURN ON THE HEAT

The temperature of your bedroom can interfere with your body temp's natural rise and fall, which is tied to your sleep cycle. Sleep experts say that a cool room (around 65 degrees) makes for the best sleep.

LIE ON AN OLD MATTRESS

A well-loved mattress can leave you with an achy back and too few snoozing hours. The National Sleep Foundation recommends replacing

“Pets bring dander and allergens into the bed, which can irritate your nose.”

RAJ DASGUPTA, MD

your mattress about every eight years. If you've lost track of time, check for worn or sagging spots in the middle or at the edges; these signal it's time for a change. Similarly, it's important to refresh your pillows for the sake of your neck. If you fold your pillow in half and it doesn't spring back into shape, it's time to replace it.

WEAR CONTACTS

Unless your lenses are approved for overnight use, you should always remove them before bed. Regularly sleeping in contact lenses can increase the risk of eye infection, pain, light sensitivity, corneal ulcers, and even loss of vision.

SLEEP IN

Sleeping in on Saturday feels refreshing at the time, but it can sabotage the rest of your week. “Next thing you know, you get ‘Sunday insomnia,’ which leads to a sleep debt during the rest of the week that you

can't make up. Then it's a vicious cycle,” says Dr. Dasgupta. Try to stick to regular sleep and wake times that allow you to get seven to eight hours of shut-eye, even on the weekend.

SLEEP WITH A PET

Sharing the bed with man's best friend isn't as comforting as it sounds. “Pets bring dander and allergens into the bed, which can irritate your nose; once that gets inflamed and filled with mucus, you start snoring, and next thing you know, you've gotten no sleep,” says Dr. Dasgupta.

SLEEP WITH MAKEUP ON

Leaving makeup on overnight can clog pores and oil glands, which can stretch them out and make them appear larger, according to Dennis Gross, MD, founder of Dr. Dennis Gross Dermatology in New York City, in an interview on womenshealthmag.com. And once the damage is done, there's no going back: As you age, your skin collagen levels decline, so stretched-out pores won't bounce back as easily, he said. Skipping the face wash each night can also cause inflammation, another aging risk.

6 Surprising Causes of Dehydration

Even if you think you're drinking enough water, some of your daily habits could be silently dehydrating you. If any of these conditions apply to you, drink up!

A POOR DIET

Fresh produce quietly hydrates you. "Fruits and vegetables are super hydrating, especially zucchini, cucumber, and watermelon. Adding these to your diet can really help extend your fluid status," says Elizabeth Shaw, MS, RDN, CLT, a wellness consultant who runs the health blog shawsimpleswaps.com. Eating processed foods or sandwiches with deli meat also dehydrates, since those foods are typically high in salt.

STRESS

Stress causes your adrenal glands, which sit right above the kidneys, to release more of the stress hormone aldosterone, which regulates fluid and mineral levels in the body. More aldosterone signals your kidneys to take in more sodium, which then

leaves the body in the form of urine, depleting your fluid levels, says Shanna Levine, MD, a primary care physician with the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City.

FREQUENT IMBIBING

Pair your cocktail with a glass of water to help

ward off dehydration. "Alcohol turns off an antidiuretic hormone, which is why people urinate a lot when they drink. Then you replace that fluid with more alcohol, which is not good for hydration," says Dr. Levine.

TOO MUCH CAFFEINE

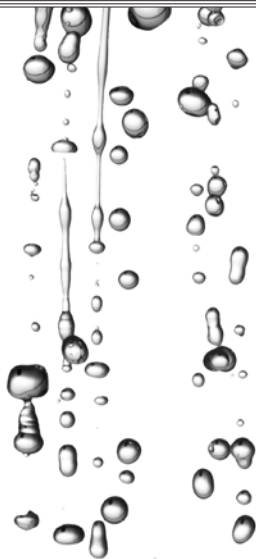
"One or two cups of coffee or tea a day is fine, but excessive amounts are known to have a slight diuretic effect, which makes you urinate more and lose more fluid," says Dr. Levine.

SUNBURN

Skin is a barrier to fluid loss; when it's compromised by a burn or sunburn, it can struggle to maintain proper hydration levels, says Dr. Levine. Natural aging can also make it harder for the skin to maintain moisture, so it's important to properly moisturize and use sunscreen.

PREGNANCY

Moving water, proteins, and minerals from your body to your baby's (both in the womb and after) can lower your hydration levels, making it especially important to drink up so you can replenish your supply, says Dr. Levine.



DON'T WASH YOUR HANDS WRONG

Improper handwashing can leave you susceptible to germs. Make sure you're not making common handwashing mistakes.

DON'T SKIP NOOKS

If you just rub soap between your palms, rinse, and call it a day, your hands are probably still dirty. "Germs love to hide under fingernails and in the pockets between fingers, so you should scrub these areas every time you wash," says Roshini Raj, MD, attending physician at New York University Langone Medical Center. Be sure to scrub vigorously to work up a good lather—friction is key to eliminating dirt, grease, and microbes from the skin.

WASH LONG ENOUGH

A recent Michigan State University (MSU) study found that 95 percent of people don't wash their hands long enough to effectively kill germs—that's 20 seconds of scrubbing with soap and water, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "We tell kids and adults to sing the

"Germs love to hide under fingernails and in the pockets between fingers."

ROSHINI RAJ, MD



'Happy Birthday' song twice," says Dr. Raj. The average handwashing time was only about six seconds, the MSU study found. What's more, 15 percent of men and 7 percent of women didn't wash their hands at all after using the restroom.

USE ANY WATER YOU HAVE

A recent study by researchers at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee found that cold water reduced levels of bacteria just as well as hot water, as long as hands were scrubbed, rinsed, and dried properly.

DRY THOROUGHLY

Germs love to breed in moisture, so leaving the restroom with damp hands can make it easier to pick up germey microbes from the next surface you touch. If you have the choice of paper towels or air blowers, choose the towels. A study in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* analyzed all handwashing studies from 1970 to 2011 and found that paper towels don't spatter germs or dry out skin.



Brush Your Teeth Right

As far as difficult tasks go, brushing your teeth doesn't seem like one of them. And yet, it's easier than you think to make tooth-brushing mistakes, putting your oral hygiene—and your smile—at risk.

TAKE ENOUGH TIME

The American Dental Association recommends brushing for two minutes. To take out the guesswork, use an electric toothbrush that beeps when you've reached two minutes, or use a timer on your phone.

DON'T BRUSH TOO HARD

"When you press hard against your teeth and gums, you get a satisfying sensation that you're really getting the teeth clean," says Ed Hewlett, DDS, a dentist in California. But the point of brushing is to remove plaque (a bacterial film), which is sticky but also soft, so you don't need to work hard to remove it. "Pushing too hard can overstress the gum tissue and cause it to recede, exposing part of the tooth's root," he says.

USE THE RIGHT ANGLE

Brushing straight across isn't the best way to brush your pearly whites. Hold the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle

to the gums—upward for your top teeth and downward for your bottom teeth. Gently brush your teeth in small strokes as wide as each tooth. If you use an electric toothbrush, you're not off the hook. You should still angle the brush head at 45 degrees and gently run the bristles over each tooth for the recommended amount of time.

GET THE RIGHT TOOTHBRUSH

Choose soft or ultrasoft bristles that can gently get down under the gumline. "Hard and medium brushes don't do that and can actually abrade the gum," says Sally Cram, DDS, a periodontist in Washington, DC. As far as brush head size, choose whichever fits most comfortably in your mouth.

● *Treat yourself to a new toothbrush every three months to get the most out of your twice-daily brushing.*

NEVER SKIP THE FLOSS

"Toothbrushes reach a little between teeth, but they don't remove all the plaque there. That's where daily flossing comes in," says Dr. Hewlett.



4 HEARING RISKS

Age isn't the only reason you could be losing your hearing. Some everyday habits may be putting your eardrums at risk.

HAIR DRYERS

A blow-dryer near your head could be putting out 85 or more decibels of noise, the point that the National Institutes of Health says could put you at risk for hearing loss. You'd probably have to dry your hair for

eight hours straight before it did any damage, but that loud part of your beauty regime could add up over time, says Kit Frank, AuD, supervisory audiologist with New York University Langone Medical Center.

EARBUDS

Earbuds are typically more damaging than over-the-ear headphones because they rest deeper in your ear canal, says Frank. Resist the urge to crank up the volume to drown out honking horns and blaring sirens, which only does more damage. Instead, try over-the-ear headphones (ones that say they're sound-blocking are even better), which muffle outside noise.

EXERCISE CLASSES

Music-centric workout classes could be damaging your hearing while you get in shape. "If you walk out of spin class and your ears are buzzing, that's an indication that you may have done damage to your ears," says Craig A. Kasper, AuD, of New York Hearing Doctors in New York City.

APPLIANCES

Frequently using noisy appliances like blenders and coffee grinders could damage your ears over time. "If you're in the kitchen using a blender all day, that's a problem," says Frank. "If you use it for ten seconds once a week, it's probably not a problem."

7 Sneaky Reasons for Chronic Back Pain

Back pain is one of the most common medical issues, with eight in ten people experiencing some form of it at some point in their lives, and it's a leading cause of disability worldwide. You'll usually know why your back suddenly hurts—moving boxes, a killer workout, shoveling snow—but it's trickier to uncover the root causes of an ache that won't go away.

STRESS

“Emotional outlook can be a big predictor of back pain,” says Todd Sinett, a New York City-based chiropractor, because mental distress often manifests itself physiologically. “If you're uptight

for a long period of time, that muscle tension can lead to aches and spasms.” Common areas for stress-triggered back pain include the neck and shoulder region and lower back. Try relaxation techniques like deep breathing (in-

hale slowly for a count of four, hold the breath for a count of four, exhale for a count of four), yoga, or a simple walk.

SITTING ALL DAY

“Inactivity is one of the most detrimental things you can do to your body,” says William Suggs, a personal trainer and sports nutritionist in New York City. “Your muscles get used to being in that seated position, so they tighten up.” To combat sitting-induced muscle stiffness and tightness, stretch your lower posterior muscles like the Achilles, calves, ➤➤



hamstrings, and glutes, when you wake up. “When those start to tighten, your lower back starts to feel the brunt of the pain,” says Suggs, who also suggests a quick stretch midday and before bed. “It’s a good idea to get up and walk around a few times throughout the day, and make sure your back is supported and not slouched when you are seated,” he adds.

DEHYDRATION

The bones of your spine have disks between them, each partly made up of a jelly-like substance that is 90 percent water. Your body needs a steady stream of fluid coming in to help keep that cushioning intact, according to the Cleveland Clinic. Drinking plain or sparkling water is the best way to hydrate, but eating water-filled fruits and vegetables also helps.

HIP IMBALANCE

Many people can’t tell that their hips are slightly uneven; this imbalance can cause lower back pain in day-to-day life, especially when working out, says Suggs. “It affects how your body responds to certain moves and will feel different for everyone.” If you have persistent back pain during or after a workout, a chiropractor can evaluate you and detect potential imbalances, he says.

HIGH HEELS

Your fashionable shoe collection might be bothering your back. “High heels

throw off your center of gravity,” says Suggs. Heels make you lean forward to walk, put extra pressure on the feet, and cause you to not fully extend the calf. This puts more strain and stress on the lower back, which can cause pain. “If you must wear heels for work, invest in a nice pair of walking shoes for the commute and change at the office,” says Suggs.

“Inactivity is one of the most detrimental things [for] your body.”

WILLIAM SUGGS

SMOKING

A Northwestern University study found that smokers are three times more likely than nonsmokers to develop chronic back pain. “[Smoking] affects the way the brain responds to back pain and seems to make individuals less resilient to an episode of

pain,” researchers said. Smoking can hinder circulation throughout the body, reducing the flow of nutrients to back muscles, tissues, and spinal disks.

SKIPPING AB WORKOUTS

“If your abs are weak, your lower back has to work harder, which can lead to back pain,” says Suggs. Try plank, superman, or bird dog exercises, which engage your erector spinae, the muscle that keeps your spine erect and helps maintain correct posture, he says. Pay attention to your midsection throughout the day. “Your core should never be relaxed, whether you’re sitting or walking; that’s when you put yourself at risk for developing pain,” says Suggs.



How Pain Doctors Avoid Arthritis

It is estimated that 26 percent of American adults will be diagnosed with some type of arthritis by the year 2040. You can reduce your risk by adopting these habits that pain doctors follow.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY GUT

Having plenty of good bacteria in your gut can help reduce the pain and inflammation from arthritis. Food, toxins, stress, and medication can do damage, leading to inflammation all over the body—especially in your joints.

SUSAN BLUM, MD, founder and director of the Blum Center for Health in New York

MONITOR OR LOSE WEIGHT

Bone grinding on bone causes osteoarthritis, so any extra weight puts extra stress on bones and joints.

JORDAN TISHLER, MD, president and CMO of inhaleMD in Massachusetts

LIFT WEIGHTS

It may seem counter-intuitive, but muscle mass is key to preventing osteoarthritis and ameliorating any pain. Strengthening the muscles around the joints helps take some of the load off, thereby keeping joints healthy.

MEGAN R. WILLIAMS KHMELEV, MD, family and obesity medicine specialist and owner of the Elemental Weight Loss & Wellness Clinic in Texas

WATCH WHAT YOU EAT

Reduce inflammation through diet by eating cultured foods like yogurt or fermented vegetables like sauerkraut. Limit refined sugar, and focus on eating good fats found in nuts, avocado, and fatty fish.

SUSAN BLUM, MD

TRY YOGA

To avoid osteoarthritis, also known as the “wear and tear arthritis,” it’s important to keep muscles and joints flexible and strong. I like exercises like yoga, Pilates, and martial arts.

EDWARD LEVITAN, MD, of the Ultra Wellness Center in Massachusetts

16 THINGS DOCTORS DO TO PROTECT THEIR HEARTS

Skipping these cardiologist-approved everyday habits could put your heart health at risk.



1 LAUGH LOTS

"Seeing the humor in everyday situations helps me maintain perspective and allows me to laugh as often as I can. Laughing about things that are not in your control not only decreases stress but also dilates arteries and keeps blood pressure down."

SUZANNE STEINBAUM, MD,
cardiologist and spokesperson for the American Heart Association's Go Red for Women movement

2 KEEP A GRATITUDE JOURNAL

"Studies have recently shown that expressing gratitude may have a significant positive

impact on heart health. One study showed that volunteers who were asked to focus on feelings of deep appreciation had increased heart rate variability, which is a marker that predicts decreased death from cardiac disease. It's become clear to me that gratitude isn't just good for the soul; it's good for the body too."

NICOLE VAN GRONINGEN, MD,
internal medicine physician at University of California at San Francisco Medical Center

3 SLEEP WELL

"Getting a good night's sleep is essential. I make a point of getting seven

to eight hours of sleep every night so that I feel rested and prepared for my busy day ahead. Poor sleep is linked to higher blood pressure, which is a risk factor for heart disease."

JENNIFER HAYTHE, MD,
cardiologist and assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University Medical Center

4 MEDITATE OR DO YOGA

"Each day, I engage in activities that alleviate stress and make me laugh. Negative thoughts and feelings of sadness can be detrimental to the heart. Stress can cause catecholamine ➔

release, which can lead to heart failure and heart attacks. I have found a great sense of comfort in 20 minutes of meditation daily. It gives me the reset I need when pressure is rising. Yoga also relaxes you.”

ARCHANA SAXENA, MD,
*cardiologist at
New York University
Lutheran Medical Center*

5 PLAN YOUR MEALS

“Good nutrition is essential to heart health. Unfortunately I often miss meals and instead ending up grabbing junk food during the work day. A meal delivery service is totally worth it for me, as it helps guarantee that I will have healthy meals and snacks. Another great option is to prep your meals for the week in advance so you can just grab and go.”

NICOLE WEINBERG, MD,
*cardiologist at Providence
Saint John's Health Center*

6 DITCH CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTS

“More is not always better when it comes to vitamins and mineral supplements. We recently conducted a study that found that taking calcium in the form of supplements may raise the risk of plaque buildup

in arteries and heart damage. But the good news is that a diet high in calcium-rich foods appears to be protective.”

ERIN MICHOS, MD, MHS,
*associate director of
preventive cardiology and
associate professor of
medicine at the Ciccarone
Center for the Prevention
of Heart Disease at the
Johns Hopkins University
School of Medicine*

7 DRINK WATER

“Drinking five or more glasses of water a day can lower the risk of heart disease deaths, since dehydration leads to increased hematocrit and increased blood viscosity, both of which have been associated with cardiovascular events. A recent study showed that increasing water intake by as little as just 1 percent also

improves overall diet because you eat less sugar and salt, and overall calorie intake decreases.”

JASON GUICHARD, MD,
*a cardiologist in
Birmingham, Alabama*

8 HAVE SEX

“Sex is like interval exercise, which is very good for the heart. One easy and fun way to help your heart is to have more sex!”

RICHARD WRIGHT, MD,
*cardiologist and chairman
of the Pacific Heart
Institute at Providence Saint
John's Health Center*

9 MAINTAIN YOUR SOCIAL CIRCLE

“The quality and quantity of your social relationships have been linked to overall health and a lower risk of death. Heart disease has been associated ➔



10 TAKE THE STAIRS

“It is no surprise that the number of heart attacks greatly increased after the introduction of the elevator. Exercise, even little bits throughout the day, are so important to heart health. So I take the stairs at every opportunity.”

RICHARD WRIGHT, MD

with stressful life events and social strain, job strain, and psychological distress at any point in life—all things that good friends and family can help with.”

JASON GUICHARD, MD

11 BRUSH YOUR TEETH

“Good oral hygiene can lead to less systemic inflammation in the short term. While more research is needed to determine whether this decreases heart attacks or strokes—the link has been debated for decades—having a healthy mouth is important to overall wellness.”

JULIE CLARY, MD,
cardiologist at Indiana University Health

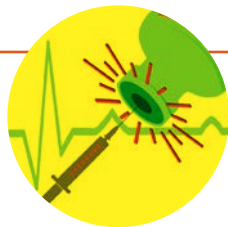
12 TAKE A PROBIOTIC

“Certain kinds of probiotics—such as *Lactobacillus acidophilus* and *Bifidobacterium lactis*, both of which are commonly found in over-the-counter probiotic formulations—have been shown to significantly decrease bad cholesterol and decrease inflammatory markers that may lead to heart disease. Although these results are promising, more studies are needed. In the

13 GET A FLU SHOT

“Getting a flu (influenza) vaccination is good for nearly everyone—but especially for people with existing heart disease and heart failure. The flu vaccine has recently been shown to offer protection against new-onset atrial fibrillation.”

JASON GUICHARD, MD



meantime, taking probiotics may also help with other health concerns such as gastrointestinal discomfort.”

NICOLE VAN GRONINGEN, MD

14 LIMIT THE BOOZE

“I actively monitor my drinking, and I tend to drink a small amount regularly, which is better than drinking large volumes on a single occasion. Moderate drinking of one to two servings a day can offer protection from heart disease. But that does not mean you should start now—if you do not drink at all, keep it that way. If you find yourself drinking more than one or two drinks in a single occasion, it can increase your risk of a stroke.”

SAMUEL MALLOY, MD,
medical director at DrFelix.co.uk

15 WATCH YOUR WEIGHT

“Almost all advice for reducing your cardiovascular risk includes recommendations for diet, weight reduction, exercise programs, and stress reduction. One simple thing I do to make sure I’m at a lean weight is to set a target weight and then weigh myself daily to make sure I’m maintaining it.”

STEVEN TABAK, MD, FACC,
medical director for quality and physician outreach at Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute

16 GO OUTDOORS

“Recently I realized I had been indoors too long, so I ‘prescribed’ myself a hike! This nature hack relieves stress and allows me to get vitamin D from the sunshine.”

MONYA DE, MD, MPH,
internal medicine doctor in Los Angeles

BUST BELLY FAT

Belly fat is the most dangerous kind of fat because it settles around your organs and ups your risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, and other serious health issues. These are the simplest four fixes that can help you keep belly fat at bay.



GET OFF SOCIAL MEDIA

Scientists suspect that social networks influence what people perceive as normal and acceptable—if you see your high school friends getting heavier, you feel like it's OK if you do too. A large study found that if participants had a friend who became obese, their chance of also becoming obese rose by 57 percent.

PAY ATTENTION

Be a mindful eater instead of a mindless one. “When you don’t plan what and when you’re going to eat, you end up eating whatever is available,” says Rasa Kazlauskaitė, MD, an endocrinologist at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. “People treat their bodies like a garbage bin, and that can really contribute to belly fat.”

EAT AT THE TABLE

Distracted eating, like eating while watching television or working at your desk, can make you eat more, according to Harvard Health Blog. A study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that slowing down and savoring what you eat can help you eat less.

GET MOVING

Aside from diet, exercise has the biggest impact on belly fat, and it goes beyond hitting the gym—any bit of movement helps. If you sit all day, get up and stretch or take a walk at lunch. “When you exercise, muscles use fat as energy instead of storing it,” says Dr. Kazlauskaitė. “That’s why many people notice they lose inches from the waist first.”

Signs You're Eating Too Much Bad



Eating too much saturated and trans fats can hurt more than your heart. But just how much is too much? If any of the following signs sound familiar, it might be time to change your diet.

FRIED FOOD OVERLOAD

French fries and chicken wings might be treats for your taste buds but not for the rest of your body. Deep-fried foods are packed with trans fat. Harvard researchers found that for every 2 percent of calories from trans fat daily, the risk of heart disease rose by 23 percent.

THINKING ALL FAT IS EQUAL

"Not knowing which types of fats are healthier than others is a big reason people might eat too much of the bad," says Georgia Gianopoulos, CDN, a senior dietician at New York-

Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell in New York City. Swap foods high in saturated fat (like butter or red meat) for foods high in healthier monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (like olive oil, nuts, avocados, and fish). Avoid trans fats altogether.

NOT READING FOOD LABELS

Trans fat is the sneakiest type of dietary fat because it can hide in plain sight. If you eat a lot of processed foods, you could ingest way too much. It's often listed as *partially hydrogenated oil* and wreaks havoc by increasing the amount of LDL (bad) cholesterol

in the bloodstream and reducing the amount of HDL (good) cholesterol. It also triggers inflammation and can even make you insulin resistant, increasing your risk of developing heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

REGULAR ANTACID USE

If you take your morning coffee with a side of Tums, you could be eating too much saturated fat, a common trigger of indigestion and heartburn.

"SENIOR MOMENTS"

Researchers from Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston analyzed the diets of 6,000 women ages 65 and older and found that those who consumed the highest amount of saturated fat had worse overall memory and cognition over four years of testing.

PERILS OF EXCESS SUGAR

The average adult consumes triple the American Heart Association's recommendation for daily allotment of added sugar (what's not found in fruits or veggies)—no more than six teaspoons for women and nine for men.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

A high-sugar diet can push your blood pressure over the normal threshold of 120/80, according to a study in the *Journal of the American Society of Nephrology*. What's more, experts declared limiting sugar more important than

reducing sodium in combatting high blood pressure, according to a research review in the journal *Open Heart*.

ACNE

A study in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* found that people with moderate to severe acne reported

consuming more sugar than those who had mild or no acne.

LOW ENERGY

Sugar overload can cause an initial spike in energy followed by a crash, thanks to roller-coaster blood sugar levels.

WEIGHT GAIN

Studies have found a clear link between consumption of sugary drinks (filled with lots of empty calories) and weight gain and obesity.

HIGH CHOLESTEROL

Sugar in excess may decrease the levels of HDL (good) cholesterol and increase the number of triglycerides (fats) in the body, according to research in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

DEPRESSION

Data on nearly 70,000 females in the Women's Health Initiative found that those who ate more sugar and refined grains increased their risk of depression. Sugar triggers inflammation, which may be linked to depression.



What Happens When You Overindulge in Salt

Too much sodium can wreak havoc. Here are clues you may need to cut back.

FOGGY BRAIN

According to a Canadian study of about 1,200 older sedentary adults, those with high-sodium diets had a greater risk of cognitive decline than those with less salty diets. Researchers speculate that sodium may compromise the integrity of the blood-brain barrier, which helps keep cognition-harming substances out.

EXTREME THIRST

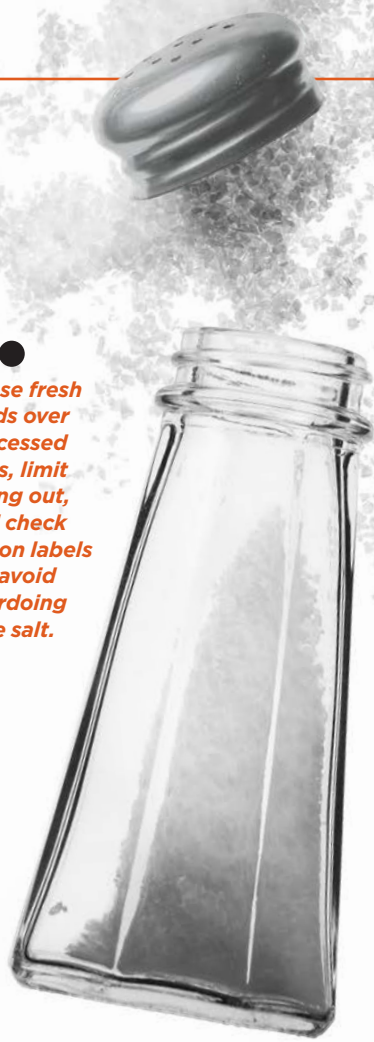
Salty foods make you thirsty because sodium messes with the balance of fluid in your body.

BLOATING

Yes, just one sodium-filled night can make you look and feel bloated in the morning. That's because sodium causes tissues to retain fluid.

KIDNEY STONES

According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, too much sodium can increase the amount of calcium excreted in your urine, a major risk factor for kidney stones.



● *Choose fresh foods over processed ones, limit eating out, and check nutrition labels to avoid overdoing the salt.*

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Americans consume an average of almost 3,400 mg of sodium a day, more than double what the American Heart Association recommends (1,500 mg). Too much sodium can raise blood pressure because the body holds on to more fluid, which increases your blood volume, making your heart pump harder.

BEWARE OF LIQUID CALORIES

Unless you're drinking water, beverages can add a lot of calories to your daily diet, causing you to pack on the pounds.

GULPING SMOOTHIES

"I always recommend that my patients make their own smoothie. That way, they can keep it low calorie," says Shanna Levine, MD, a primary care physician with the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City. Store-bought smoothies often rack up the sugar content by adding juice on top of fresh fruit and use fatty bases instead of skim milk or low-fat yogurt, which can all add up to hundreds of calories, she says.

DRINKING EVERYTHING BUT WATER

Believe it or not, drinking too many non-water beverages can do the opposite of quench your thirst. "Consuming sugary drinks on a regular basis can lead to chronically high blood sugar, which means you may

be thirsty all the time, urinate more, and even feel dizzy," says Dr. Levine. Be mindful of fancy cocktails, which often contain sugary mixers plus caloric liquor. A diet high in sugar can also lead to type 2 diabetes or weight gain, especially of belly fat, the most dangerous kind.

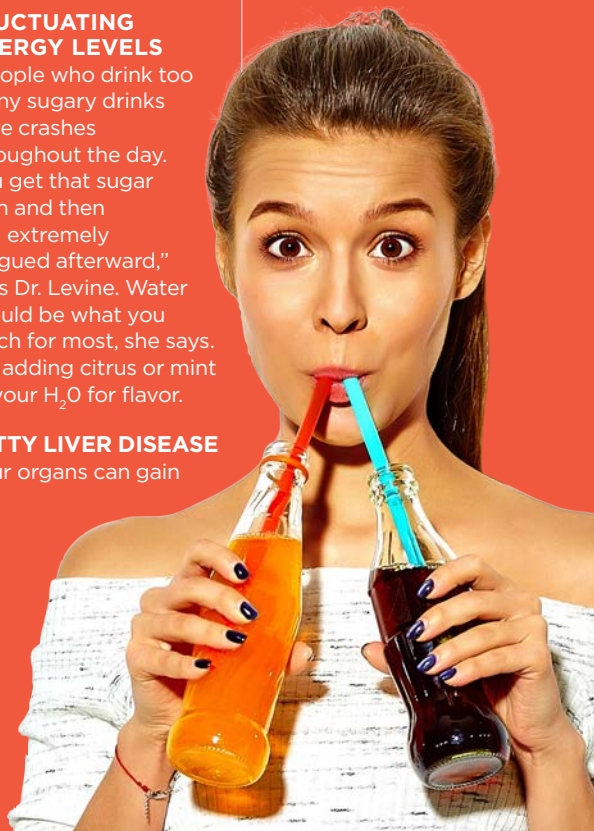
FLUCTUATING ENERGY LEVELS

"People who drink too many sugary drinks have crashes throughout the day. You get that sugar rush and then feel extremely fatigued afterward," says Dr. Levine. Water should be what you reach for most, she says. Try adding citrus or mint to your H₂O for flavor.

FATTY LIVER DISEASE

Your organs can gain

weight, too, and that's pretty much what happens with nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD); fat is deposited on your liver, says Dr. Levine. "This is an epidemic we are seeing of people developing NAFLD because of poor food or beverage choices," she says.



Symptoms Of Too Much (Or Too Little) Protein

Protein plays a role in energy, muscle building and repair, appetite control, and even immunity. Going overboard can trigger symptoms from head to toe—as can not getting enough of this key nutrient.

WEIGHT GAIN

A high-protein diet—that also includes lots of veggies and whole grains—may contribute to weight loss and lean muscle gains. But it's easy to get too much of it, which can tip the scale in the opposite direction. Steer clear of fatty cuts of meat such as bacon or T-bone or rib-eye steak (instead, go for lean cuts such as pork tenderloin or flank steak), and stick to a serving that's about the size of a deck of cards.

THIRST

Too much protein can cause mild dehydration because your kidneys need to work overtime to remove the excess, causing you to pee more.

ACTING HANGRY

If you're both hungry and angry, a



nutritionist might point to not enough protein in your diet. Protein gives you energy and keeps you full longer.

ODD-LOOKING FINGERNAILS

Your fingernails are made up of keratin, a vital protein needed to help them grow long and strong. When your body doesn't get enough, you may find unusual ridges that weren't there before running along the middle of your nail.

● *Try to build meals that include a healthy protein (like chicken breast, fish, or beans), plenty of vegetables, and a whole grain, which helps the body digest and use the protein efficiently.*

FLABBY MUSCLES

If you've still got jiggly arms no matter how many biceps curls or triceps dips you do, you may not be getting enough protein in your diet. Lean protein is an important component of muscle growth, and not getting enough could put the brakes on your fitness progress.

PRESERVATIVE OVERLOAD

Preservatives are added to many foods to extend shelf life and prevent growth of harmful bacteria. More research on their health effects needs to be done, but they may increase your risk of cancer, weight gain, or headaches. Cut back on these sources.

DELI SANDWICHES

Deli and cured meats like bacon often contain nitrates and nitrites, preservatives that make them last longer and

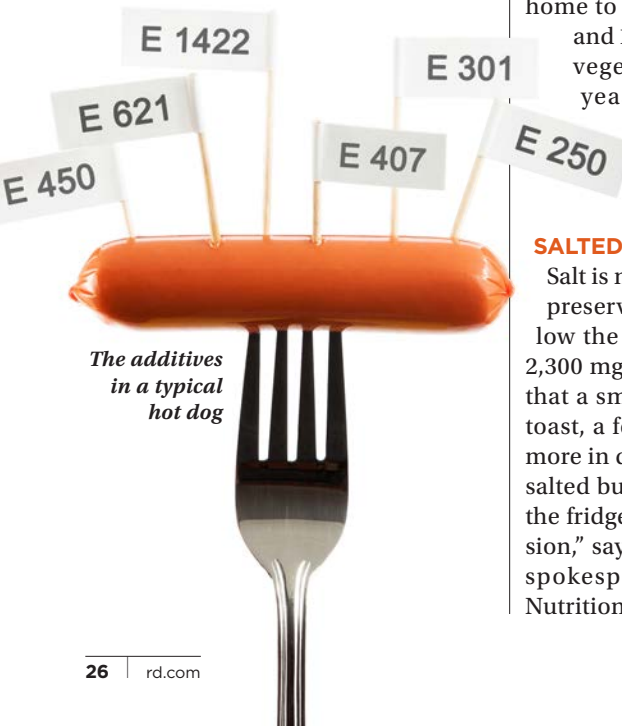
prevent the growth of mold or bacteria. They may trigger headaches in people prone to them, and studies show that regularly eating processed meat could up your risk of developing certain cancers. Beware of *naturally cured* or *contains no nitrates* on labels; if you see celery powder or celery juice, know that both are naturally high in nitrates, which may cause some of the same effects that added sodium nitrate does.

PACKAGED FOODS

A cupboard full of salty snacks, TV dinners, and breakfast cereals is also home to preservatives like BHA, BHT, and MSG (often called hydrolyzed vegetable protein or autolyzed yeast). If you see ingredients that wouldn't appear in your grandma's recipes, steer clear.

SALTED BUTTER

Salt is naturally occurring, and it has preservative properties. To stay below the government-recommended 2,300 mg of sodium a day, remember that a smear of salted butter on your toast, a few pats in your veggies, and more in dessert quickly adds up. "Unsalted butter might not last as long in the fridge, but you'll get a fresher version," says Libby Mills, MS, RDN, LDN, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.



The additives in a typical hot dog

How to Tell If You're Getting Enough **Vitamins**

Even healthy eaters may fall short of key vitamins and minerals. If you have any of these symptoms, you may be deficient in critical nutrients.

BRITTLE NAILS

Anemia isn't the only sign of iron deficiency. Brittle nails (on fingers and toes) can signal you're low in this mineral, found in dark leafy greens, legumes, and red meat.

LOW BLOOD PRESSURE

A lack of vitamin B12 can prevent your body from producing enough red blood cells, causing you to become anemic, which in turn prevents the body from naturally bringing blood pressure back up when it drops. If you can't get enough from foods like eggs, poultry, shellfish, or fortified cereal, consider a multivitamin that contains it.

LEG CRAMPS

The electrolyte potassium builds muscle and protein, so a dip in levels can cause

muscle cramping, particularly in the calf. Deficiency is rarely related to diet; diarrhea and vomiting are more likely culprits.

FATIGUE

Low vitamin C levels may zap your energy, especially if you smoke. A study in the *Academy Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that smokers' vitamin C levels were roughly 30 percent lower than nonsmokers', probably due, in part, to increased oxidative stress caused by the toxins in cigarette smoke. Load up on citrus, berries, peppers, and leafy greens.

MANY FRACTURES

Several recent fractures may signal you're at risk for or have osteopenia, a low bone mass condition that heightens the risk of osteoporosis. Ask your doctor if a calcium supplement may help.

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