

## Simple steps to better health

Little things add up to a healthy lifestyle. Use these tips and get healthy!

by Karen Giles-Smith

**S**taying healthy doesn't have to be complicated. These 10 health habits are easy to incorporate into a busy lifestyle. The key to keeping it real: Just choose one. Or, come up with your own health habit. For at least 30 days, focus on the one health behavior that's the most important to you. Make the goal you choose a top priority.

Once you've gotten the goal down—once it's a positive part of your life—give yourself a pat on the back! Then, when you're ready and willing, choose your next step to better health and create another goal.

**Meals matter.** Ditch deprivation diets and get back to basics: Eat what you enjoy in amounts that are satisfying, and on a regular basis. As often as possible, feed yourself and your family regularly scheduled meals and snacks. Research shows that people who do so are healthier, have lower body weights, and do better emotionally and socially.

**Enjoy breakfast's benefits.** Eating breakfast improves concentration, problem-solving skills, strength and endurance. And people who regularly eat breakfast are more likely to get the nutrients they need and have healthier weights.

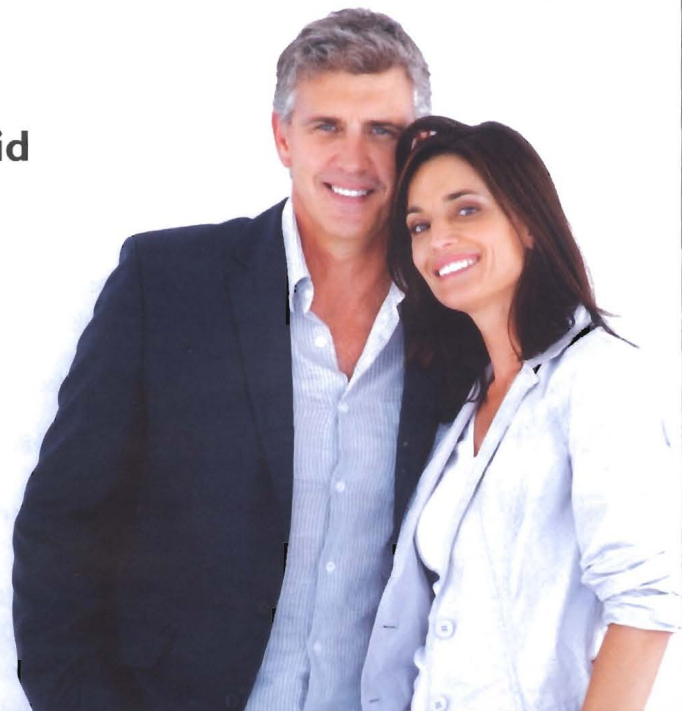
**Just breathe.** We take about 20,000 breaths every day—usually without giving it a second thought—but it helps to pay attention. Breathing more deeply, and slowly can improve overall health, boost mental and physical energy, improve sleep, and help manage pain and anxiety as well as specific health conditions, such as high blood pressure, irregular heart rhythm, and gastrointestinal disorders. Andrew Weil, MD, says, "It's absolutely free, making it one of the best medicines money can't buy. All the equipment you need is right under your nose." Try this: To deepen breathing, instead of trying to

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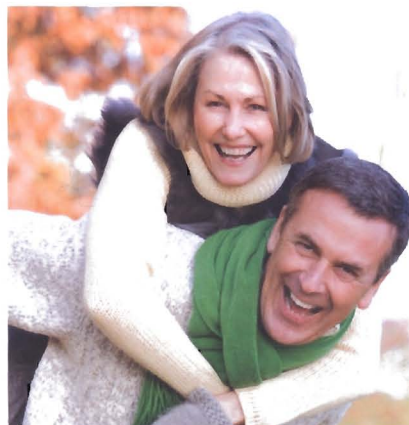
pull more air into your lungs, push more air out. Breathe in; then out. Now try to squeeze out more air.

**Write it down to get it out.** Writing about experiences, thoughts and feelings releases stress, according to an article in the June 2008 issue of Scientific American. Expressive writing may improve memory, improve sleep, boost immune cell activity, speed healing after surgery, and help cancer patients feel better after treatments.

**Fifteen minutes for yourself.** Is your mind going a mile a minute? Regular meditation can improve your health, state of mind and ability to concentrate. In particular, it can reduce tension, stress, anxiety, and help control blood pressure and chronic pain. Sit in a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Wear comfortable clothing. Close your eyes, relax and breathe.

**Fun physical activity.** The benefits of regular exercise for the brain and body are well-documented: It improves cardiovascular health, mood, vitality, alertness and feelings of well-being; and reduces anger, fatigue and tension. The key is to find physical activity that's fun

and feels good. Consider the types of physical activity you've enjoyed in the past. Do you prefer to be by yourself or



would you rather exercise with a buddy or participate in a group? You may wish to test-drive several kinds of exercise or exercise classes to find what's right for you. *Check with your local fitness facility to see what's new.*

**Sufficient shut-eye.** Although the optimal amount of sleep varies from person to person, most adults need 7-8 hours each night, according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

**Go wild.** Spending time in nature reduces stress, blood pressure and cholesterol and improves your outlook on life. It's as easy as a walk in the park or may be as close as your own backyard. In bad weather, look for indoor gardens to meander through or buy a few houseplants to nurture.

**Banish the bothers.** All those little nuisances you put up with day after day (the squeaky car door; the dirty windows; the cluttered closet) can add up to big-time stress. Make a list of 25 things you're tolerating and make a plan to do something about the worst offenders (fix it; clean it; or clear it out).

**Eat adventurously.** Try it, you might like it! Did you know that there are more than 50 nutrients in foods? If you enjoy a wide variety of foods, you're more likely to get a wide variety of nutrients. Make a list of foods you're curious about that you haven't tried before. Decide which you'd like to taste-test at home or the next time you eat out.

*Karen Giles-Smith, MS, RD, is a registered dietitian and freelance writer based in Mason, Michigan. Visit her Web site at: [www.TheWellnessWriter.com](http://www.TheWellnessWriter.com)*

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