

Fast Track TO BETTER HEALTH

These four women made just *one little move* to boost their wellness—and they feel happier and healthier for it.

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN



“Exercising outside eased my depression.”

Between 2005 and 2010, the double whammy of an unhealthy marriage and a failing business left me depressed and overweight. By 2011, I decided I'd had enough. I lived on a lake close to winding trails, so I started walking and swimming outdoors a few times a week. Five months later, I had shed 35 pounds and noticed my mood was significantly better too. Then, in March 2012, I completed a Spartan Race, which is a 3-mile obstacle course. At the finish line, I was caked in dirt, but I felt incredible. Since then I've participated in more than 50 races all over the country (even dyeing my hair green for one of them!). Thanks to outdoor activity, I've gained confidence and a new outlook on life.

ANDI HARDY, Atlanta

WHY IT WORKS All kinds of exercise can help soothe the blues by producing feel-good endorphins, but working out in nature may be extra-beneficial. Research has linked outdoor fitness to elevated self-esteem levels, as well as decreases in depression and anger.



“Eliminating dairy stopped my chronic sinus infections.”

My kids were little germ magnets in grade school, constantly bringing home viruses. Every time I caught one of their colds, it evolved into a painful sinus infection. I tried everything: a neti pot, allergy shots and antibiotics. Meanwhile, my mom's decades-long cancer battle inspired me to clean up my diet five years ago. I was a vegetarian, but I loved yogurt and cheese. One day, I decided to cut out dairy just to see what might happen. Almost instantly, I had more energy. I noticed that I caught fewer colds, and I haven't had a single sinus infection since that decision.

SHARON MCRAE, Columbia, MD

WHY IT WORKS “Dairy can increase mucus production in many people, and that excess mucus backs up into the sinuses,” says Dana Simpler, MD, an attending physician of internal medicine at Mercy Medical Center and Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.



●● Giving up meat slashed my cholesterol. ●●♥

High cholesterol runs in my family, and I watched mine climb to 230 throughout my 40s and 50s. At my physical two years ago, my internist wanted to prescribe statins. I don't like to take a lot of pills, so I asked about ways to manage my cholesterol naturally. He suggested a plant-based diet. I'm not an extremist, plus I'm a huge foodie, but I jumped on the bandwagon to try to improve my health. Within 60 days, my cholesterol plummeted 50 points. My husband joined me and lost 60 pounds in the first year and a half. Now, I love dishes like whole-wheat spaghetti piled with eggplant and zucchini.

JANE ROGAN-DWIGHT, Santa Rosa, CA

WHY IT WORKS Eating less meat and more plants will lower your saturated fat levels and increase your fiber intake—the perfect combination for controlling cholesterol, says Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, author of *The Flexitarian Diet*. (Fiber acts like a sponge, soaking up excess cholesterol in the blood.)



●● Deep breathing relieved my insomnia. ●●

Four years ago, I was traveling a lot for work, and the combination of stress plus being away from my own bed led to sleep problems. I tried melatonin supplements and warm milk, but nothing kept me snoozing soundly. So I called a mind/body specialist and scheduled a session. We created a deep breathing routine that starts with a 4-second inhalation, followed by an 8-second exhalation. Then I take a regular breath and breathe deeply again, repeating the cycle four times. Next, I picture myself at the beach. Within 15 minutes (sometimes sooner), I'm asleep for the whole night, even when I'm not at home.

KRISTEN RITCHIE, Cleveland

WHY IT WORKS The practice of deep breathing reduces blood pressure, clears a frenzied mind and lowers body temperature, all of which promote restful sleep, says Chicago psychologist Michael Merrill, PhD.

{ Super-smart move }

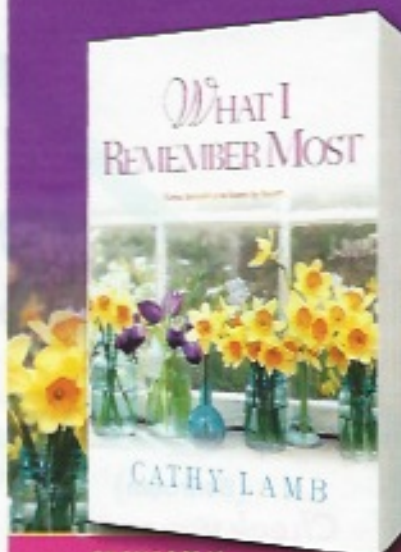
EAT A BIG SALAD EVERY DAY

A study found that people who nosh on one to three servings of fruits and veggies per day are less likely to die from any cause—including heart disease—than those who eat less than one portion per day. (You can also try a vegetable-stuffed omelet.)



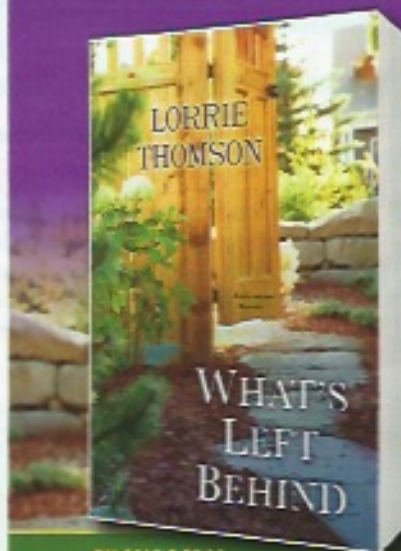
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