



For Beauty's Sake

» If your health isn't reason enough to **change your lifestyle**, maybe your vanity is.

BY Leslie Goldman

EMBRACING A new healthy habit can take some convincing, and sometimes the thing that motivates you isn't exactly noble. But guess what? That's perfectly fine. "Let's be honest," says Ramani Durvasula, PhD, a professor of psychology at California State University, Los Angeles. "In any gym in any city, what percentage of people are there to stave off cardiovascular disease or osteoporosis, and what percentage are trying to look good in a bathing suit? Whenever and however you buy into a healthy behavior, it's all good; the same payout is still there." We couldn't agree more. Read on for three simple tweaks and their science-based beauty benefits.

CUT DOWN ON SUGAR

If you won't do it...to help lower your risk of diabetes and heart disease
Do it for...fewer wrinkles

You know sugar is no angel, potentially contributing to chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease, but "it's the devil when it comes to your skin," says Patricia Farris, MD, a clinical associate professor of dermatology at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans. Once in the bloodstream, sugar grabs onto collagen and elastin molecules, turning their soft and supple fibers rigid and weak. "As a result, that collagen and elastin can no longer do the heavy lifting necessary to keep skin firm," Farris explains. Need proof? When researchers from the Netherlands had subjects rate photos of 602 people, those with lower blood sugar were thought to look, on average, a full year younger than those with higher blood sugar levels. But don't just limit sugar and refined carbohydrates—load up on whole foods like oats, nuts, and berries, which have soluble fiber that helps slow the body's absorption of sugar.



GOOD TO KNOW

Yoga can leave you looking taller. "It strengthens the muscles that support the spine, and the stronger they get, the less effort it takes to maintain good posture," says Kelly Clifton Turner, master trainer at Yoga Six in San Diego and Chicago. For results, she suggests holding downward dog and cobra poses for one minute each twice a day.

DRINK MORE WATER

If you won't do it...to prevent dehydration and sluggishness

Do it for...a flatter belly

A few extra glasses a day may help you stay in your favorite jeans. A 2011 study found that people who drank four or more cups of water daily were 21 percent less likely to develop high blood sugar than those who drank two cups or less. High blood sugar, over time, can trigger a cascade of events that cause the body to store fat—often the kind that settles around the belly. Also, limit diet soda: One study found that people who drank diet soda gained almost three times as much abdominal fat over nine years as those who didn't drink diet beverages. "Artificial sweeteners may trigger sugar cravings," explains Kathryn Boling, MD, a primary care physician with Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

CONSUME LESS SALT

If you won't do it...to lower blood pressure

Do it for...less puffiness under the eyes

When our kidneys detect excess sodium in the blood, they cause the body to retain fluid in an effort to dilute it. During our upright waking hours, gravity directs some of this fluid to the lower extremities; that's one reason why your fingers, ankles, and feet can feel swollen at the end of a long day. "But when you lie down at night," Farris says, "that fluid distributes throughout the body, including the eye area," which can result in puffiness. The good news: "You can easily control general under-eye puffiness by reducing your sodium intake," says Farris, who recommends following the American Heart Association's guideline of no more than 1,500 milligrams per day. If that seems impossible, set an initial goal of not adding salt to your food.