



The New Numbers to Live By

By Leslie Goldman • Photography by Heather Weston

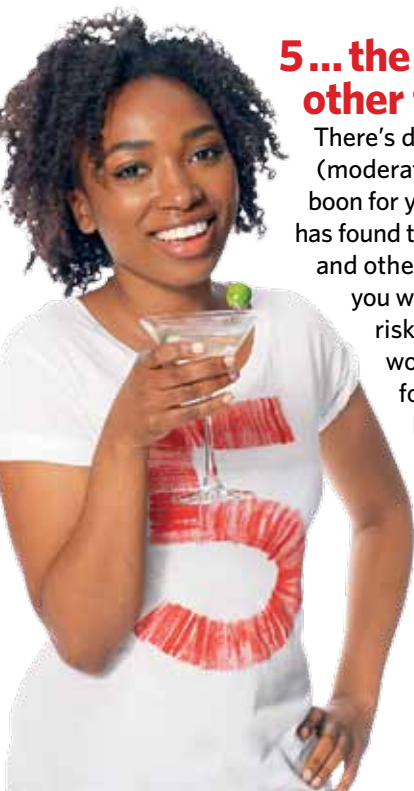
You probably know how many calories there are in a FrozFruit, how many miles you logged on the treadmill, and maybe even your BMI. But there are new (and more interesting) numbers that are key to your physical and emotional health.

5... the upper limit for martinis (or other types of booze) each week

There's debate about the health benefits of alcohol (moderate drinking has been shown to be a potential boon for your heart) versus the downside (other research has found that drinking can up your risks of breast cancer and other cancers), so the exact amount that's safe for you will depend on your personal health history and risk factors. But as a general guideline for healthy women, Mary Ann Bauman, MD, spokeswoman for the American Heart Association's Go Red For Women campaign, advises patients to cut themselves off at five drinks per week. (One drink equals 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.) What's more, seltzer sippers should not start drinking just for cardiac benefits.

1... ORGASM!

One happy ending a day might actually be ideal. What's most important is that you don't go without for too long. Experts say that, in general, we need more orgasms—and masturbation is also a great way to get them. Orgasms release natural opiates, which have anxiety- and stress-relieving properties, says psychiatrist Paul Dibransky, MD, director of WomensHappiness.com and author of *The Secret Psychology of How We Fall in Love*. Lowering your stress level, in turn, benefits your heart. Plus, orgasms help keep blood flowing down south, which keeps your pink tissue healthy, he says.





3 ... HOURS OF YOGA IT TAKES PER WEEK TO SOOTHE LOW-BACK PAIN

WHEN YOUR BACK HURTS, JACKKNIFING INTO DOWNWARD DOG IS PROBABLY THE LAST THING YOU WANT TO DO. BUT A STUDY IN THE JOURNAL *SPINE* FOUND THAT PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC LOW-BACK PAIN WHO TOOK TWO 90-MINUTE IYENGAR YOGA CLASSES A WEEK FOR SIX MONTHS EXPERIENCED LESS PAIN AND DEPRESSION, AND THEY WERE ABLE TO DO MORE THAN THOSE WHO FOLLOWED CONVENTIONAL TREATMENTS.

500... the number of calories to cut each day to lose one pound in a week

It only *sounds* like a lot: Spend 30 minutes on the stair-climber and eighty-six the slice of office coffee cake (who knows how long it's been sitting out, anyway?) and—poof!—you're there. Creating a daily 500-calorie deficit via a combo of physical activity and painlessly skipped mindless munching can total 3,500 calories a week, which equals a pound of fat that's no longer on your hips. Plus, shedding even a small amount of weight can do wonders for your health. Besides reducing your risk for heart disease, research shows that losing just 5 to 7 percent of your body weight (that's just 7½ to 10½ pounds for a 150-pound woman), combined with regular physical activity for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, may prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes. And for every 11 pounds you lose, your risk of developing painful osteoarthritis of the knee is cut in half.



8 THE DAILY TEASPOON CAP FOR ADDED SUGAR

We down about 97 pounds of sugar per year—about 30 teaspoons per day, according to the consumer watchdog group the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Most of that's from foods in which sugar is added (as opposed to fruits or milk, in which it occurs naturally). Sugar has its place in a healthy diet, but too much can edge out more nutritious foods, so the U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends capping added sugar at 32 grams, or 8 teaspoons (based on a 2,000-calorie diet).

1,000 ... INTERNATIONAL UNITS OF VITAMIN D YOU NEED DAILY

While there's no formal consensus on the exact amount of D you need, many experts recommend about 1,000 IU each day. Vitamin D deficiency—very common in adults and children—has been preliminarily linked with everything from high blood pressure and diabetes to depression. Recent research published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* suggests that low D levels may double your risk of stroke death. Mary Ann Bauman, MD, recommends daily supplementation with 800 to 1,000 IU of vitamin D, in addition to incorporating foods like salmon, canned tuna, egg yolks, and milk into your diet. You can get vitamin D from the sun, too, but getting it through food means you don't risk sun damage.

Clock photo: Creative Crop/Getty Images





3 ... THE NUMBER OF SUSHI ROLLS YOU CAN SAFELY ENJOY EACH WEEK

Fish is a great source of lean protein and omega-3 fatty acids, but those who eat fish daily risk ingesting too much mercury. The Food and Drug Administration recommends that women who are pregnant or planning to get pregnant have no more than 12 ounces a week of lower-mercury fish like shrimp or salmon. Assuming a six-piece roll has 4 ounces of fish, that's about three rolls a week—the amount many of us eat in a meal. If it's a higher-mercury fish like tuna, says Toby Smithson, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, "limit it to 6 ounces a week," about a roll-and-a-half. The risk of mercury poisoning is one of cumulative exposure, so eating lower-mercury fish and no more than three large rolls a week is a healthy way to go. Mercury aside, those at greater risk for foodborne illness (pregnant women, young kids, older adults, those with weak immune systems) should skip raw or partially cooked fish or shellfish entirely.

6 the max number of over-the-counter NSAID painkillers you can have in a day

Sixty million Americans regularly swallow OTC nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen. But up to 30 percent will experience gastrointestinal (GI) ulcers, and even more battle upper-GI symptoms like heartburn or upset stomach because these drugs can irritate the digestive tract. Healthy women taking OTC meds for cramps or pain shouldn't take more than two tablets of ibuprofen three times a day, says Byron Cryer, MD, professor of gastroenterology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School and a spokesman for the American Gastroenterological Association;

if taking naproxen, no more than three in 24 hours. If your pain is extreme or doesn't improve in 10 days, talk to your doctor: he'll want to rule out a more serious problem or perhaps give you the go-ahead to increase your dosage, Dr. Cryer says. (If you're on blood thinners, avoid them altogether. If you're pregnant, check with your doctor first.)



1 THE NUMBER OF HOURS A DAY MAX YOU SHOULD BE "SOCIAL" ONLINE

Networking on Facebook or Twittering can be fun and even help you with work. But spending more than an hour a day doing it, at the expense of things or feelings you're trying to avoid, could be a sign that your real life needs some attention, says Toni Galardi, PhD, author of *The LifeQuake Phenomenon: How to Thrive (Not Just Survive) in Times of Personal and Global Upheaval*. While research on social networking is still scarce, the hour-a-day figure is widely accepted in addiction-treatment circles as the amount of time over which being online may start to negatively affect your offline relationships or work, Galardi says. Ask yourself, "What's going on in my life that I'm not feeling challenged or not wanting to deal with?" Looking up from the monitor may give you time to think about how to make some positive changes.



1 the number of dress sizes you can drop by gaining—yes, gaining!—3 to 4 pounds

If those pounds are muscle, not fat, you lose inches, even as the number on the scale is a bit higher. Why? Because not only does denser muscle tissue take up less space, but the number of calories incinerated by a body with lots of lean muscle is a wee bit higher than if the person's weight is made up of fat, which means you may lose a bit more fat in the bargain. Experts suggest working out with weights or using your own weight as resistance two days a week (on top of your cardio) to reach that 3 to 4 pound goal.

1... THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF TIMES YOU SHOULD WEIGH YOURSELF EACH DAY

YOUR SCALE IS THE ULTIMATE FRENEMY. WHEN IT LIKES YOU, YOU'RE ELATED. BUT WHEN IT DOESN'T—LIKE AFTER A NIGHT OF TOO MUCH CHINESE FOOD OR A FEW WEEKS OF SKIPPING THE GYM—IT HAS THE POWER TO MAKE YOU FEEL NOT SO GREAT. THAT'S WHY ADRIENNE RESSLER, A BODY-IMAGE SPECIALIST WITH THE RENFREW CENTER FOUNDATION IN PHILADELPHIA, ADVISES WOMEN TO STEP ON THE SCALE NO MORE THAN ONCE A DAY, AND PREFERABLY LESS OFTEN. "WEIGHT DOESN'T SHIFT MUCH IN SUCH A SHORT TIME," SHE SAYS. FOR MANY WOMEN, WEIGHING MORE THAN ONCE A DAY CAN BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE—NOT TO MENTION CRAZY-MAKING. IF SEEING AN EXTRA POUND OR TWO MAKES YOU PREOCCUPIED WITH FOOD OR YOUR BODY, IT MAY BE TIME TO STASH YOUR SCALE IN THE CLOSET FOR A WHILE.

3 the number of packets of artificial sweeteners you're OK to have daily

Artificial sweeteners let calorie-conscious women (not to mention diabetics) enjoy a wider selection of food choices. Still, questions about the safety of aspartame and other sweeteners persist, which worries many women. "Based on the

preponderance of evidence, these things are safe," says Elisa Zied, RD, author of *Nutrition at Your Fingertips*, but to be cautious, she advises moderation. By that she means, don't stir several packets in your coffee *plus* eat a diet yogurt and drink diet soda. "A couple of packets or a couple of diet sodas a day probably isn't going to hurt," she says.

How much is too little?

6... HOURS OF SLEEP

In the past eight years, the number of Americans clocking fewer than six hours of shut-eye a night leapt from 13 to 20 percent. And nearly a third of us are losing even more zzz's over financial concerns, according to a 2009 National Sleep Foundation poll. Sleep-deprived women often find that their work—and workouts—suffer, and they're more prone to driving drowsy (as dangerous as drunk driving!). They may find their weight creeping up, too. Lack of sleep causes a rise in the level of the hormone ghrelin, which increases the desire for food, and a decrease in the level of leptin, the body's appetite suppressant. Most adults need 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night. If you allot the time but can't fall asleep, first check your prebedtime diet and exercise habits. (For instance, besides avoiding caffeine and alcohol, don't work out within three hours of bedtime.) If you're still having shut-eye problems, see your doctor to check for any underlying medical conditions that may be keeping you up. ■

