

Little Habits, Huge Health Payoffs

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Sarah Kehoe/FITNESS Magazine

By Holly C. Corbett and Anna Roufos

You have tons of health goals -- but not enough time to make them a reality. Now we'll help you reach every one without devoting your life to getting there. Here, super-speedy ways to improve your health in only minutes a day.

Related: [The 7 Worst Health Habits Ever](#)

In 1 Minute You Can...Find Your Focus

Instead of thinking I need to work out, fine-tune your objective to something like I'm going to do my 30-minute DVD workout on Monday before work. "Being detailed forces you to think through the steps necessary to accomplish the goal and makes it harder to find excuses," says Jackie Keller, trainer and author of *Body After Baby*.

In 2 Minutes You Can...Build a Better Brain

Right-handed? Use your left hand to brush your teeth or vice versa. "This improves brain signaling, which helps prevent age-related memory loss," says Frederic Vagnini, MD, coauthor of *Count Down Your Age*.

In 3 Minutes You Can...Set a Healthier Table

Use short, fat glasses for water and tall, skinny ones for drinks that are less healthy. Researchers found you'll drink more with the former and less with the latter. Try portion-controlled plates too. Eating off of them, overweight diabetics lost about 6 pounds in as many months, reports the Archives of Internal Medicine. We like the EZ Weight Plate because, well, it's easy. Each has four compartments with measurements inside (\$19.95, [www.ezweightplate.com](#)).

In 5 Minutes You Can...Get More from Your Doc

Jot down everything you'd like to discuss with her before your appointment. It will improve your chances of leaving satisfied, concluded a recent review of 33 trials.

Related: [Why Little Lies to Your Doctor Could Hurt Your Health](#)

In 6 Minutes You Can...Start Your Day Smarter

Overweight women who ate two eggs for breakfast for eight weeks as part of a low-fat diet lost 65 percent more weight than those who chose bagels. They also experienced an astonishing 83 percent greater reduction in waist size, say researchers at Louisiana State University's Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

In 7 Minutes You Can...Improve Your Zzzs

Do absolutely nothing -- besides silently repeating a relaxing word like "calm" -- for 5 to 10 minutes before hitting the sack. You'll fall asleep faster and sleep better. "Sitting quietly and concentrating on

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your breath tells you how firm it's time to slow down," says Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic!*

In 10 Minutes You Can...Lower Your Blood Pressure

Carve out 10 minutes three or four times a week to relax and slow your breathing to fewer than 10 breaths per minute, and you may lower your blood pressure 5 to 10 points, according to the *Journal of Human Hypertension*. To help get to that snail's speed, try meditation or the expert-recommended Resperate, a device that uses rhythmic tones to help regulate breathing (\$300, www.resperate.com).

In 15 Minutes You Can...Giggle Away Jiggle

As little as 15 minutes of daily laughter can burn up to 40 calories (about half a fun-size bag of M&M's), reports the *International Journal of Obesity*. Gigging also cuts stress-hormone levels and bolsters the immune system. There are even benefits for new moms: the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* reveals that laughter ups melatonin levels in breast milk, which helps ward off allergies in nursing infants.

In 16 Minutes You Can...Sleep Yourself Slimmer

Preliminary research shows that not getting enough shut-eye is related to obesity. Indeed, people who are at a healthy weight sleep 16 minutes a day more than their heavier counterparts, reports the *Archives of Internal Medicine*. Researchers believe this phenomenon may be connected to reductions in leptin, an appetite-regulating hormone.

In 17 Minutes You Can...Flatten Your Abs

Americans get antsy after 17 minutes of waiting in line, finds an AP-Ipsos poll. To sidestep aggravation, tighten your lower, middle, then upper abs for 10 seconds each while you wait. Next, lean to one side slightly, then the other, holding each position for 10 seconds. Repeat the moves until you get to the head of the line. "If you do this every time you have to wait, your core will be stronger in just a few weeks," says Amie Hoff, a fitness consultant for New York Sports Clubs.

Related: [Flat Abs Fast: The Core-Strengthening Workout](#)

In 20 Minutes You Can...

Outsmart the Flu

Doing biceps curls or riding a stationary bike a few hours before getting a flu shot may improve your response to the vaccine, say University of Birmingham scientists. Apparently, exercise activates the immune system, preparing it for the shot.

Walk Off Two Sizes

A University of Missouri-Columbia study found that people who walked their dog up to 20 minutes per day, five times a week, lost an average of 14 pounds in just under a year.

10-Second Eat-Healthy Moves

- Order veggie soup. Starting a meal with it can reduce your total calorie intake by 20 percent.
- Display fruit. Putting it in plain sight inspires good-for-you noshing.
- Drink water, not soda. Swapping it three times a week will save you about 21,216 calories a year.
- Ask for a side salad. Compared with those who skip their veggies, you'll benefit from higher levels of folic acid and vitamins C and E.
- Trade salt for a lemon squeeze. Taking half a teaspoon of salt from your diet every day can help reduce your heart disease risk by 25 percent.

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