

10 Other Paths to Health

So you don't want a bare-bones diet of salad. You don't have the time or opportunity to hit the gym every day. And, excuse me, but you actually like not-so-healthy foods, such as double bacon cheeseburgers.

Still, you keep hearing that poor health habits can put you at risk of an early heart attack, diabetes or even Alzheimer's. Plus, it would be nice to drop a few pounds.

Before you give up and reach for another bacon cheeseburger, consider this: Though eating healthfully and exercising are still the best ways to improve your well-being, there are alternatives. USA Today reporter Kathleen Fackelmann gives you 10 ways—certified by science—to give your health a boost.



TAKE UP YOGA

Beginner yoga classes offer a set of poses that increase flexibility and strength and might help people who have arthritis, says Patience White of the Arthritis Foundation. The poses can also improve balance, which can help prevent falls, especially for older people, she says. Swimming, tai-chi and tennis are other activities that can help you remain flexible and strong.



EAT DARK CHOCOLATE

Dark and bitter-sweet chocolate contains hefty amounts of anti-aging substances called flavonoids, says Carl Keen,

chairman of the nutrition department at the University of California-Davis. Small amounts of

flavanoid-rich dark chocolate might help protect against blood clots and heart attacks, he says. Purple grapes, red wine, apples and tea also contain flavonoids.

GO OUT FOR INDIAN FOOD

Studies suggest that curcumin, the yellow pigment in curry spice, might help protect against heart disease and cancer and perhaps ward off Alzheimer's disease, says Greg Cole, a researcher at the University of California-Los Angeles. His studies suggest that yellow curry spice—a popular ingredient in Indian foods—can protect mice from a disease similar to Alzheimer's.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP

Sleep helps keep memory and attention in top form, and it might help regulate



body weight. Studies suggest that sleep deprivation is linked to obesity, says Meir Kryger, a sleep specialist at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.

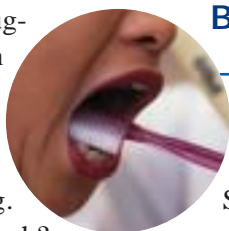
How much sleep is enough? Most people need seven to nine hours a night, says Kryger, who is also a spokesman for the National Sleep Foundation.

LAUGH MORE

At least once a day, have a good laugh, says Michael Miller, director of preventative cardiology at the University of Maryland Medical Center. His studies suggest laughter helps keep blood vessels dilated and protects against heart attacks. Go see a funny movie, read the comics, tell a joke or share a laugh with friends.

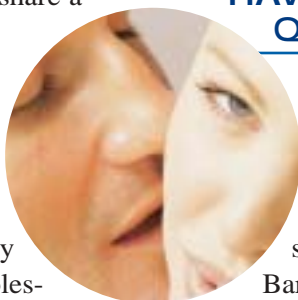
MUNCH ON ALMONDS

Just a handful of almonds eaten daily helps lower LDL cholesterol, the bad cholesterol that contributes to heart disease, and might reduce the risk of developing certain cancers, including colon cancer, says researcher Paul Davis, a biochemist at the University of California-Davis. Almonds and other nuts contain beneficial substances, including vitamin E.



BRUSH AND FLOSS

Brush your teeth and floss every day. Studies suggest that gum disease might contribute to the development of heart disease, diabetes and other risky conditions, says Gordon Douglass, an American Academy of Periodontology spokesman. Scientists believe the bacteria that infect gums can enter the bloodstream and cause problems in other parts of the body, he says. When a toothbrush and floss aren't handy, you might want to eat raisins, which have been shown to fight off the bacteria that can cause gum disease.



HAVE SEX FREQUENTLY

Studies suggest that men who have a regular sex life live longer, says Barbara Bartlik, a psychiatrist and sex therapist at the New York-Weill Cornell Medical Center. People with a good sex life also seem better able to ward off colds and depression and might even gain protection from heart disease, she says. You can also get your heart racing with ballroom dancing or taking a short walk at sunset.

GO TO THE MALL

The benefits of going to the mall can be considerable if you walk at a brisk pace, take the stairs instead of the elevator and comparison-shop by doing the math in your head, says neurologist Marilyn Albert of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and a spokeswoman for the Alzheimer's Association. Shoppers that do those three things are gaining not just a fitness advantage; they are also protecting against Alzheimer's by keeping their brains active, she says. If going to the mall is not your thing, try gardening, join a walking club or play volleyball or another team sport.

PRAY OR MEDITATE

Prayer or meditation might lower blood pressure, reduce anxiety, cut stress levels and perhaps even help people live longer, says Harold Koenig, a psychiatrist at Duke University medical Center in Durham, N.C. How much prayer or meditation is good for your health? Koenig suggests about 20 minutes a day. **CPM**

