

the healthiest

WAYS TO USE

30 minutes

BY ALICE OGLETHORPE

No time to exercise, eat right, and de-stress? Think again. All you need is a half-hour. Turn the page for 10 easy moves to make your life happier and healthier—and have fun while you're at it.

Plan a vacation

Take a break to choose your next getaway, and you'll experience an instant shot of joy. Researchers from the Netherlands found that people who are in the process of planning a trip are happier than those who don't have a vacation on the horizon. Turns out that anticipating all the fun you're going to have is almost better than the actual trip! For a little help with your homework, try using Triplt, an app for Android and iPhone where you can gather itineraries, booking confirmations, reservations, and other vacay details in one place. Whenever you need to access the information, just go to the app and instantly find it.

LOOK AT YOUR PHOTO ALBUMS ON **FACEBOOK**

Much has been made about how all those "look at my great life" posts on social media prompt many of us to feel bad about ourselves. But you've probably generated your own share of positive posts and photos, and scrolling back through them can lift your spirits.

JOT DOWN YOUR NEGATIVE FEELINGS

Can't get that tense conversation with your next-door neighbor out of your head? Put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) and record your thoughts. Then toss the paper or delete the document. This can help you mentally ditch those thoughts. No pen and paper nearby? Use the Evernote app on your phone. Then, when you get home, print it from your home computer, crumple it up, and say buh-bye to bad feelings.



It's the trifecta of health benefits: Gardening is great exercise, doing good is good for you, and getting dirt on your hands can directly improve your physical and mental health. Certain bacteria in dirt can increase levels of serotonin, a mood-boosting brain chemical, a study from the University of Bristol finds. Do the planting in a neighborhood plot, and you'll be even healthier; data show that people who participate in community gardening have significantly lower BMIs.

Challenge yourself to set aside 30 minutes every day to do something that nurtures your body and soul.



You already know that walking can help you lose weight and improve your mood. It's finding the motivation to get moving that can be hard. The secret: adding a buddy to the mix. "People who did a physical activity with a spouse or friend enjoyed the workout more than those who went solo," says Genevieve Dunton, Ph.D., assistant professor of preventive medicine and psychology at the University of Southern California. The benefit is twofold: A companion takes your mind off the physical exertion and encourages you to keep going.

Clear some clutter

A messy desk can drain your brainpower: Having too much stuff in your line of sight can make it harder to focus. Don't attempt a whole-house overhaul, but instead tackle your workstation or wherever it is that you do most of your tasks, like paying bills or helping with homework. Buy pretty folders and organize your desk and drawers so you can clearly focus on one thing at a time. Your frazzled brain will thank you.

DIG INTO A GOOD NOVEL

Instead of turning on the tube, pick up a book and hone your emotional intelligence. A new study found that people who regularly read literary fiction (think Alice Munro or Maeve Binchy) were more in tune to others' emotions—a skill that improves personal and professional relationships. Why literary fiction? The characters and plotlines compel you to decipher complex emotions and relationships.



Need an extra push to exercise? Purchasing cute clothes to wear while sweating it out might make the difference. In a recent Northwestern University study, people who put on specific clothes performed better at tasks that were related to how they dressed. "A sporty outfit is generally associated with great athletic performance," says Hajo Adam, one of the researchers. "So it makes sense that you're more likely to go to the gym and perhaps work out harder." And then there's the dose of body confidence you'll get from wearing new duds. Affordable brands that look great on every body type include Moving Comfort and C9 by Champion.

PLAN YOUR SNACKS FOR THE WEEK

You might already spend Sunday deciding your weekly meals, but remember to map out your snacks, too. Planning might be more important than willpower when it comes to eating healthfully. "You have to think about possible barriers in advance, and come up with strategies to handle them," says Cristina Godinho, a researcher from the Lisbon University Institute who studied the topic. In other words, if you know that the only snacks readily available at work are chips and soda, prep sliced fruit or veggies with a low-fat dip to take in. Having healthy munchies at the ready also makes it easy to say "no thanks" when the tray of leftover cookies is passed around.



Stop scarfing your food and take a full 30 minutes to enjoy your meal. Recent research from Texas Christian University found that the faster people ate, the more calories they consumed—up to 10 percent more. "When people eat slowly, they may become more aware of when they start to feel full and are able to stop eating," says study author Meena Shah, Ph.D. Also, when you eat too quickly, you might not realize how much you're consuming, and it might take more food to feel satisfied. Ways to go slow: Take small bites, chew thoroughly, put your fork down between bites, and try to sip water throughout the meal.



These little moves take just five minutes (or less) and can make a big difference in your energy, mood, and more:

STEP OUTSIDE. A few minutes of exposure to natural daylight can give you a shot of energy and focus.

GET YOUR GIGGLE ON. Cue up the cute cat videos: A hearty laugh improves blood flow.

PLAY SOME TUNES. Silence might be golden, but listening to (upbeat) music is an instant mood-lifter.

CHECK OUT FOODIE PHOTOS ON PINTEREST. They'll help keep a lid on your cravings—really! Research shows that just seeing photos of food gives your brain the sensation of tasting it, too.

SMILE. Even if you're faking it, a study shows that grinning might help relieve stress. ■