

# fitness

## 10 All-Natural Ways to Stay Young

Hello, fountain of youth! Stay young with these amazing, completely natural age erasers that boost brain power, stop stress, and smooth skin.

By Marisa Fox

### Stress Less

Getting older — without being doomed to wrinkle-dom and jiggly thighs — does not require a high-priced trainer and a bucket o' Botox. We swear it. We know it. We asked top researchers to share their stay-young secrets for winding back time naturally. Their advice will help you stay young and have you looking and feeling everyday fabulous, by doing everyday smart things: exercise, eat healthy, de-stress — not so hard, right? Try it today.

#### 1. Give yourself a break

Recent studies show that stress causes physical changes in the body that can accelerate aging. Surges of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol cause blood pressure to rise and the heart to beat faster. These days, when our stressors seem unrelenting (a steady stream of job pressures, traffic jams, money problems), chronic doses of adrenaline and cortisol take a heavy toll on our physical and emotional health. "Sixty to 90 percent of all doctors' visits each year are related to anxiety, depression, obsessive anger and hostility, insomnia, [high blood pressure](#), heart attacks — all problems caused by stress," says Herbert Benson, MD, author of the landmark book *The Relaxation Response* and a founder and director emeritus of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine in Boston.

The most effective way to halt this destructive chain of events is to meditate, using what Dr. Benson calls "the relaxation response." The technique involves repeating a mantra — a word, sound, phrase, or prayer — for as little as 10 minutes a day. A 2005 study conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston showed that [meditation](#) helped prevent age-related changes in the brain.

**Try it!** Once or twice daily, for 10 to 20 minutes (yes, you do have the time — you just have to make it), sit in a quiet place, close your eyes, relax your muscles, roll your head, neck, and shoulders, and breathe deeply. On each exhale, repeat your mantra. If other thoughts try to invade, says Dr. Benson, tell yourself, "Oh, well," and return to your word or phrase. When you're done, keep your eyes closed for an extra minute; slowly allow everyday thoughts to flow back into your mind. Still not into the idea of meditation? Do yoga, or something active and

repetitive, like running, instead. Focus on your breathing and how your feet land with each stride. Get your to-do list out of your head, says Dr. Benson.

## 2. Consume more fat

The healthy kind, that is. Omega-3 fatty acids (found in salmon, walnuts, and seeds) help stabilize your mood, maintain bone strength, and help prevent visible signs of aging by reducing inflammation in the body, explains Nicholas Perricone, MD, a leading anti-aging expert and author of *7 Secrets to Beauty, Health, and Longevity*. "Omega-3s also boost the ability of the body's enzymes to pull fat out of storage — from your hips, say — and use it as energy," he says. "Omega-3s keep you healthy and your [skin](#) radiant."

**Try it!** "Virtually every expert agrees that you need two grams of omega-3 fatty acids a day," says Michael Roizen, MD, chair of the division of anesthesiology at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio and coauthor of *You on a Diet*. Eat plenty of fatty fish such as wild salmon (a 3-ounce serving has 6.9 grams), as well as walnuts (one-half ounce has 9.2 grams), says Dr. Roizen. If you aren't getting enough omega-3s from your diet, consider taking fish-oil supplements.

## 3. Get off the couch

Not only does regular exercise help you [lose weight](#), tone muscles, build healthier bones, and boost mood, it can also help you think clearly. Studies cited by the National Institute on Aging demonstrate a connection between physical exercise and better brain power. "Walking for just 10 minutes a day lowers your risk of Alzheimer's by 40 percent," says Gary Small, MD, director of the UCLA Center on Aging and coauthor of *The Healthy Brain Kit*. "Physical conditioning reduces [stress](#) and anxiety, which wipe out your memory bank."

**Try it!** Make time for three 20-minute workouts a week. Run, bike, swim, dance — do whatever you enjoy most.

## 4. Feel the love

Anyone who's ever fallen head over heels or discovered an activity that makes them eager to jump out of bed in the morning knows that passion is a powerful drug. "It's the central motivation of all human activity," says Gail Sheehy in her new book, *Sex and the Seasoned Woman*. The ability to embrace life boosts self-esteem, fuels the immune system, and improves cardiovascular health. Passion in bed can be particularly beneficial: "Loving touches release hormones, including oxytocin, that reduce stress and anxiety," says Mehmet Oz, MD, professor of surgery and vice chairman of cardiovascular services at New York-Presbyterian/Columbia University, as well as the coauthor of *You on a Diet*. "If sex is a purely hedonistic process, it won't have the same results."

**Try it!** Banish boredom and isolation at all costs. Rekindle the flames with your partner. Or discover a new love in the form of a mental or physical pursuit: Take up painting, join a book club, start a running program (you'll find motivation and tips and connect with other women like

you through Team FITNESS, our personalized online exercise community, at [fitnessmagazine.com/teamfitness](http://fitnessmagazine.com/teamfitness)). Do whatever it is that makes you feel energized and alive.

### 5. Drink red wine

Last fall, a groundbreaking study showed that mice on a high-fat diet supplemented with resveratrol, a substance found in the skin of grapes, had longer average lifespans than those not given the resveratrol. According to the study's co-lead researcher Rafael de Cabo, PhD, of the National Institute on Aging, resveratrol clearly reduced the risk of diabetes and liver problems in mice, leading to a significant decline in obesity-related deaths. But here's the catch: "You'd have to drink 180 bottles of red wine a day to get the same benefits," says Dr. Roizen.

Researchers are working now to improve the potency of resveratrol in order to develop a pill that contains the optimum amount of the substance. In the meantime, there's plenty of evidence that a little red wine can offset a host of health problems. A new animal study from Johns Hopkins University suggested that red wine can diminish brain damage caused by stroke by as much as 40 percent. And research released last year showed that grape-seed procyanidins, found in red wine, helps reduce arterial clogging, resulting in lower blood-cholesterol levels and a reduction in deaths from heart disease.

**Try it!** Until an optimally potent resveratrol pill is available, enjoy red wine, but it's best to follow the latest alcohol guidelines from the American Medical Association and drink no more than one glass (5 ounces) a day for your health.

### 6. Do yoga

More energy, better posture, greater flexibility, improved mood, and less stress are just some of the rewards of this mind-body workout. "Yoga means 'union' in Sanskrit," says Cyndi Lee, founder of New York City's Om Yoga and a FITNESS advisory board member. "Through conscious yoga breathing, you become aware of the connection between mind and body." That translates into major anti-aging advantages. Yogic breathing has been shown to oxygenate the cells, ridding them of toxins, helping prevent illness, and making skin radiant. Unlike other exercises, says Lee, [yoga poses](#) are designed to work the inside of your body as well as the outside, which helps rejuvenate the digestive system, the reproductive system, even the immune system. "Yoga is like wringing your body out like a washcloth," she says. "It's one of the best ways to keep things moving."

**Try it!** Practice yoga or other mind-body activities at least twice a week, says Lee, to give yourself an energy boost, help build bone mass, and de-stress.

### 7. Bite into a superfruit

There's a good reason we're hearing so much about pomegranates these days. "Current studies show that they are more beneficial than other fruits," says Dr. Oz. Pomegranate juice has been found to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, possibly delay the onset of atherosclerosis, and potentially help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease; researchers believe it may also help

prevent some forms of cancer from starting or progressing. Pomegranates can also protect the skin from damage caused by UV rays, according to a study published last March.

Another promising anti-ager is the goji berry, a fruit native to Tibet that boasts 500 times more vitamin C by weight than an orange and is considered to be the most abundant source of carotenoids, a type of antioxidant, on earth. This little nutritional powerhouse — which tastes like a denser, sweeter cranberry — also contains more iron than spinach, 18 amino acids, calcium, magnesium, zinc, selenium, and vitamins B1, B2, B6 and E, according to Dr. Perricone. The goji berry stimulates the release of human growth hormone, a natural substance in the body that improves our ability to sleep, helps us look younger, reduces fat, improves memory, boosts libido, and enhances the immune system, he says.

Try it! Snack on a handful of dried goji berries (available at Whole Foods Market) throughout the day. Be sure to buy ones from Tibet, because they have high serum levels, advises Dr. Perricone. In addition, drink pomegranate juice. Not a fan of the flavor? Buy it in concentrate and add a tablespoonful daily to kefir (or plain yogurt), suggests Dr. Perricone. For dewy skin, try Rodial's Wrinkle Smoother, a pomegranate-infused anti-aging serum with marine extracts and vitamin C created to plump wrinkles, block sun and give a youthful glow (available at [blissworld.com](http://blissworld.com)).

## 8. Sip green tea

The health buzz about this brew keeps getting stronger: Last year, green tea was found to reduce the risk of breast cancer and prevent remissions, and now it's being tested as a way to help prevent bladder, colorectal, and [lung cancer](#) recurrence. "Green tea is an amazing compound in terms of blocking the signaling network that is linked with the progression of cancer," says Amy Yee, PhD, a professor of biochemistry at Tufts University and principal investigator of the cancer study. It's also an effective weight-management agent because it appears to rev up metabolism, says Dr. Roizen. Preliminary research indicates that green tea may even help prevent Alzheimer's disease. A Japanese study published last year in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that drinking at least one cup a day can help keep your brain sharp as you get older.

**Try it!** Sip two or three cups daily for the ultimate health benefits, says Yee. We like Tazo China Green Tips tea. [tazo.com](http://tazo.com)

## 9. Slather your skin with supplements

Retinol, a type of vitamin A (and a nonprescription, weaker-strength relative of Retin-A), is considered the most effective over-the-counter treatment to smooth the skin and prevent wrinkles, says David Colbert, MD, founder of the New York Dermatology Group and a member of the FITNESS advisory board, who practices in New York City. Retinols cause the skin to gently peel, revealing a silkier, rosier, and more supple layer. Dr. Perricone touts the benefits of alpha lipoic acid, a potent antioxidant that naturally occurs in the body. "Alpha lipoic acid is a wonderful anti-aging mechanism," he says. It has been shown to reduce fine lines, improve skin texture, tighten pores, and give skin a general radiance.

Another powerful age-defying ingredient is madecassol, or madecassoside (found in La Roche-Posay's Redermic, available at select CVS locations), an Asian plant extract that helps plump the skin, minimize fine lines, and restore a youthful glow, says Dr. Colbert. Madecassol has been used in France for decades to help heal scars and wounds. European studies have also found that it helps diminish wrinkles, restores firmness to skin, and hydrates skin cells.

**Try it!** Look for skin creams containing retinols, such as La Roche-Posay's Biomedic Retinol Cream (available at dermatologists' offices) or RoC's Retinol Actif Pur Night (at drugstores). Use it only at night, since it doesn't include an SPF. Or try products containing alpha lipoic acid.

Another good way to ensure cell turnover, protect [your skin](#) against free radicals, and stimulate collagen growth is to apply vitamin C serum under your moisturizer and makeup, says Dr. Colbert. Some expert-approved choices: IS Clinical C & E Serum (available at dermatologists' and other specialists' offices), SkinCeuticals C E Ferulic (at dermatologists' offices), Noah's Naturals Honest to Goodness Anti-Oxidant Serum Gel (at select [Wal-Mart](#) locations), and Pond's Age defEYE Anti-Circle Anti-Puff Eye Therapy (at drugstores). Finally, be sure to use a broad-spectrum sunblock every day to protect against UVA and UVB rays, which cause aging and skin cancer. One we like: Anthelios SX Daily Moisturizing Cream with Mexoryl SX (available at select CVS locations).

## 10. Do mental aerobics

A study published in last December's *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that brain exercises can prevent cognitive decline, and the benefits can last for as many as five years. In his own research, Dr. Small has found that a two-week program of mental training can actually rewire the brain. "We've seen evidence on brain scans that memory improves," he says.

**Try it!** Strengthen your mind every day by doing crossword puzzles, Sudoku, or Brain Games, a handheld electronic game developed by Dr. Small that uses numbers, sequences, and word play to condition the left and right spheres of the brain (available at [Wal-Mart](#) and Target stores).