Living Fit and Well

50 Tips for a Healthy Body, Mind and Spirit After Age 50

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Please note the ideas and suggestions contained in this book are not intended to be prescriptive or a substitute for consultation with a health or medical practitioner.
Introduction

For us as women to make our presence count in the area of health and wellbeing, now and in the future, we need to empower ourselves with knowledge.

In the face of huge amounts of advertising from food and drug companies, it’s vital that we become health savvy. That’s a big challenge, given there are so many other demands on our time, but until we make our health and the health of our families a priority, the amount of preventable disease among us will continue to rise alarmingly.

I developed my business Fit and Well to support midlife women committed to improving their health and vitality. Unfortunately, many aspects of modern life aren’t health enhancing. But there’s plenty we can do about it, and I’ve compiled this easy little book to help you along that path.

I hope that by the time you finish it, one thing is obvious: that I’ve said the same thing many times. A few basic actions can improve our health in many ways. Since everything is connected, we support our body, mind and spirit when we eat high quality nutrient-dense foods, and stop ingesting dangerous chemicals and living sedentary and stressful lives. Of course, you don’t have to do it all at once. It’s best to take things one step at a time.

I’ve already updated Living fit and well a couple of times, and I’ll keep doing that as new information becomes available, but as a guide I hope you find it useful. Feel free to pass it on to other women in your life.

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1. Give martyrdom a miss

Too many women think their job is to care for everyone and everything but themselves.

Once the kids (or grandkids) are driven to and from ballet and soccer, once you’ve visited your parents, once you’ve written that report, once your Dearly Beloved is fed, once the washing’s hung out, once you’ve been to the deli, once you’ve made that booking and paid those bills, once you’ve rung your sister, once you’ve taken the dog to the vet, then maybe, there can be time for you. But by then you’re exhausted.

In middle age we’re the ‘sandwich generation’ with kids or grandkids on one side and parents on the other. And they all need us. Add to the mix our jobs, finances, partners, the odd health concern and menopause, and we can really be cooking up some overwhelm.

With so much going on, we need to nurture ourselves without thinking it’s selfish or lazy. How? A massage? More naps? Saying ‘no’? It doesn’t matter as long as it **revives some part of you.** Make sure you slow down long enough to notice what you need.
2. Cut the criticism

Love is about acceptance, so when you look in the mirror and you’re tempted to criticise your less-than-magazine-perfect bits – stop. Stand up straight. Smile. Be proud of yourself and grateful for the body that has served you so well all these years. Real women are more gorgeous than photoshopped images anyway.

3. Foster friendships

Connectedness keeps us healthy and in tough times a wonderful circle of friends can be the difference between staying well and getting sick. Friends of different ages and backgrounds keep our lives rich and our minds open.

4. Get grateful

For the people who love you including the furry, four-footed ones, for the people you love, for the beauty in your life, for your home, for your talents. It’s easy to forget how blessed we are. Say out loud, “I am grateful for…”.

Gratitude makes us more joyful and joy is a great prescription for staying healthy.
5. Cultivate creativity

As kids, life is mostly about play. We draw, sing, dance, act and make things. We get older and tell ourselves we’re too busy or not creative which is a pity given creativity makes our lives vibrant. If you have a hankering to try something, don’t die wondering. **Take a class or just start somewhere.**

6. Soothe away stress

Stress comes from many sources – work, traffic, emails, noise, money, relationships, food and the environment. **Over time it can alter your body’s chemistry and cause disease.** When your body pumps out the stress hormone cortisol, this helps develop a ‘muffin top’ around your waist.

**Meditation is one way to de-stress.** When you meditate, you empty your mind of thoughts. This **alters your brain wave patterns, slows your heart rate, lowers your blood pressure and boosts your immune system.**

**Sex also releases stress.** After orgasm, a woman’s body has more of the hormone oxytocin. Besides making us feel happy and connected, **oxytocin reduces cortisol,** increases healthy estrogen and even helps build bone. There are plenty of other ways to reduce tension. But don’t wait until you’re in dire need. **Include relaxing activities in your daily and weekly regime.** When hard times hit, double your dose of R & R and ask for help.
7. Breathe

Breathing connects your awareness to your thoughts, movements and emotions. It unites mind, body and spirit. The air travelling through your nasal passages stimulates the sensory nerves there and in the brain, making you feel balanced.

When you’re still, observing the rhythm of your breath and being aware of it, your mind is present. Fears and negative thinking dissolve.

A few quiet moments each day focused on your breathing helps you feel peaceful, centred and better able to manage life’s challenges.

8. Raise your resilience

Sh*t happens but resilience gets us through. Resilience is our capacity to be resourceful and bounce back. It doesn’t mean stoic. It’s not about soldiering on with a clenched jaw. Resilient people have friends and family around them and they seek help from their network.

They show self-compassion and reassure themselves they can do what needs to be done. Our spiritual connection with God builds resilience too. For some, God is found through religion. For others, God is found in nature or through music, art or writing. Regardless of the way it shows up for us, spiritual connection is an anchor when we need it.
9. Cherish ‘The Change’

Often we call what happens at midlife or menopause a ‘crisis’ when it’s actually a wake-up call to let go of our old conditioning and step into who we really are. This can be challenging especially when it happens around the same time as other changes, such as retirement, divorce, an empty nest or the death of parents.

But it’s important to respect this transition and what it ultimately makes available. It often leaves us more comfortable in our own skin, more willing to trust ourselves and make mistakes, no longer worried about ‘what people might think’.

10. Get a good night’s sleep

When the invention of the light bulb let us turn night into day, we lost touch with the natural rhythms of work and rest. Many of us now don’t get nearly enough sleep and that’s a health risk.

It can also help to make us fat. Poor sleep is stressful and in response our adrenal glands produce the stress hormone cortisol which encourages the build-up of fat around the waist.

Sleep researchers say we need between eight and nine hours, and we get the best sleep by being in bed by 10:00pm. Work out how much you need
to feel refreshed and ensure you get it most of the time. Nutritious food, exercise, ‘me’ time and relaxation all support good sleep.

11. Ahhh … aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is more than beautiful smells. Essential oils can be invigorating, balancing or relaxing and they can aid concentration and creativity. For example:

- chamomile soothes frayed nerves
- lavender helps insomnia and calms headaches
- geranium and jasmine are uplifting
- peppermint is energizing
- bergamot and ylang-ylang are calming

Instead of reaching for a coffee or a sugar hit to counter the mid-afternoon blahs, try lavender or rosemary. Essential oils can be used as sprays, in candles, in bath gel, massage oils, or burners, or by just smelling the oil. Find a good aromatherapy shop and try it out.
12. Be particular about (skin and hair) products

Many brand name cosmetic and beauty products contain unhealthy chemicals, including phthalates pronounced thalates, parabens, triclosan and synthetic fragrance.

Phthalates are plasticisers (they give PVC its flexibility) and when absorbed into the body, create a risk of birth defects and can damage the DNA of adult male sperm. Children are particularly sensitive to phthalate exposure.

It’s wise to avoid products containing parabens which can encourage hormone imbalance by raising estrogen levels. Parabens are used as preservatives. On labels you can recognize them by the ‘paraben’ suffix.

Triclosan is an antibiotic used in products such as handwashes and toothpaste. Triclosan encourages antibiotic resistance. So stick to soap and water or a liquid soap such as Dr Bronner’s or castile soap.

While most skincare and cosmetic products are fragranced, companies are not required to disclose the ingredients in their fragrances even though they can trigger allergies. Many also contain parabens. Avoid fragranced air fresheners too. You don’t need the air you breathe to be laced with chemicals.

The good news is there are lots of healthy alternatives at wholefood shops. Australian labels include Evohe, Miessence, Mukti and La Mav. So be judicious about what you slather on yourself.
13. Clean without chemicals

When was the last time you did a stocktake of the cleaning products in your home? Many of us keep a chemical cocktail under our sinks and basins.

A 15-year study found women who worked from home had more chance of dying from cancer than women who worked elsewhere. The researchers concluded women at home were more exposed to hazardous chemicals from household cleaning products.

Consider using more health-friendly options such as white vinegar, bicarbonate of soda, hydrogen peroxide or plain liquid soap. Three per cent hydrogen peroxide and white vinegar (one after the other in either order) is better than commercial disinfectants at killing surface bacteria. A mixture of white vinegar and water (1:4) makes an excellent fruit and veggie wash too.

Vinegar also cleans glass and cuts grease, while hydrogen peroxide helps unclog drains. Use bicarb when you need an abrasive cleaner.
14. **Give supermarkets a swerve**

Unless you love queues, the aroma of chemicals and don’t mind where your food comes from, try to **limit the amount of time you hang out with Coles, Woolies, Aldi and co.**

They’re great for some things (where else would you buy toilet paper?) but even the fresh food people might not guarantee you the best in fresh food.

**Most supermarket fruit and veg is grown with synthetic fertilizers and petrochemical-based pesticides, and most of the meat comes from intensive farming.**

The healthiest and most sustainable way to shop is to **buy fresh, local, seasonal produce.** Your best bet is to get to know the markets or growers in your area. It’s a more pleasant way to shop and you won’t come home with impulse buys from the biscuit shelves.
15. **Appreciate plants**

Many common plants can remove indoor pollutants from glues, varnishes, carpet, vinyl or rubber moulding, particle board, printers, cleaning agents and pesticides. Some of the key pollutants are formaldehyde, benzene and trichloroethylene.

Philodendron, aloe vera, pothos, chrysanthemums and spider plants remove formaldehyde, while marginata, peace lily and gerberas reduce benzene and trichloroethylene. **At work or at home it pays to find a green friend or two to clean up the air.**

16. **Balance your blood sugar**

Balancing your blood sugar is critical to your health. Studies of centenarians show the one factor they have in common is stable blood sugar and low insulin.

Refined sweet or starchy foods quickly break down into sugar in your bloodstream. When your blood sugar level rises, your body releases insulin to take the sugar and store it – as fat. If this happens repeatedly, your body loses its sensitivity to insulin and you become ‘insulin resistant’.

**Insulin resistance is the basis of all chronic diseases of ageing. It also contributes to depression, mood swings and anxiety.**

To keep your blood sugar balanced, eat at least every four hours and drink
plenty of water. As a guide, base each meal around:

- Good quality protein – an amount about the size of the palm of your hand is a good guide, half that for snacks
- Low glycemic carbohydrates, especially veggies – at least an amount the size of your fist
- Healthy fats, such as virgin olive oil, coconut oil, butter, avocado, olives, or raw nuts and seeds – and to continue the hand analogy, make this about a finger-sized amount.

Minimise sugary or starchy foods and have them at the end of a healthy meal not on an empty stomach. Since fruit contains sugar, don’t overdo it. A piece or two a day is enough for most of us.

17. Eat a variety of veggies

Bet you nagged your kids to do this. But most of us don’t eat anywhere near enough vegetables. They’re a top source of vitamins, minerals, fibre and water – great for healthy digestion and avoiding bowel cancer, gall stones, diabetes, haemorrhoids, hernias and varicose veins. Many women use fibre supplements to stay regular when more veggies would do the trick. Fibre-rich foods help stabilize blood sugar and need plenty of chewing so they leave you feeling full and satisfied.

Increasingly, people are starting home veggie gardens which is a wonderful trend. And with so many delicious recipes about, it’s not hard to make veggies taste terrific.
18. Be smart about sugar and salt

Processed foods are loaded with sugar and refined salt, so make sure you read labels to know what you’re buying.

Sugar is often listed in ways you may not recognise – as fructose, glucose, maltose, lactose, sucrose and so on, as well as corn syrup, or synthetic sugars, such as mannitol or sorbitol. These stress the body and rob it of valuable nutrients. Sugar can also lead to calcium loss, weight gain, diabetes, fatigue and yeast overgrowth.

Some sugars, such as evaporated cane juice or fruit juice concentrate, sound healthier than they really are. Others, such as agave or rapadura, develop a reputation for being healthier than they really are.

One of the safest sweeteners seems to be stevia. It’s a South American herb, much sweeter than sugar, calorie-free, non-toxic and doesn’t raise blood sugar. It has an after-taste that some people don’t like though. Same with xylitol which is made from fibrous plant sources such as corn husks and birch trees, and also seems relatively safe. Remember any sweetener needs to be used in moderation.

Salt has a reputation for raising blood pressure but this applies to refined salts that have been stripped of their nutrients. Look for mineral-rich salts such as Celtic sea salt or Himalayan salt. These are healthy and won’t upset your blood pressure.

There are other fabulous flavourings besides sugar and salt. Try herbs, garlic, ginger or a squeeze of lemon or lime.
19. Build strong bones

Osteoporosis is a growth industry. We’ve been told calcium supplements and dairy products are our best defence against bone loss. Or worse, that we need drugs like Fosamax or Actinel. Our fear of dowager’s humps and hip fractures have provided a golden advertising opportunity for pharmaceutical companies and the dairy industry.

Interestingly, the countries with the highest dairy intakes also have the highest osteoporosis levels, while populations in China, Africa, Gambia, Sri Lanka, Surinam and South America, who consume little dairy, have low rates of osteoporosis.

That’s not to say that calcium isn’t important. It is, along with a spectrum of other nutrients. It’s just that dairy and supplements aren’t the only, or even the best, sources. Further on you’ll read about stocks and broths. Many cultures that don’t use dairy rely on bone broths to provide calcium in a form the body can easily use. Leafy greens also contain calcium.

Vitamin D is now recognized as important for bone health, as well as immunity and cancer prevention. Sensible sun exposure helps build vitamin D as do supplements but we all need to keep an eye on our levels. Too much is as much of a problem as not enough. An annual blood test, called a hydroxyvitamin D test, is a good idea.

What causes bone loss? Alcohol, low nutrient diets, dieting and anorexia, antibiotics, caffeine, lack of exercise, tobacco, The Pill, stress, some drugs and environmental toxins.

For healthy bones eat a diet high in nutritious wholefoods, ensure your digestion is healthy and your vitamin D level is optimal, do weight-bearing exercise, reduce stress and avoid the factors that promote bone loss. (Oh, and if you read the item on stress, you know sex helps build bones. Now that’s worth advertising).
20. Know the facts about fat

For years fat was blamed for making us fat, so many women have been obsessed with avoiding it, hence, the plethora of ‘fat free’ foods on our supermarket shelves. But fat is important in keeping us lean and most of us don’t eat enough of the right kind. Among other things, fats are important in the manufacture of hormones, the reduction of cravings and the production of energy. Even the saturated fats in animal products are not the bogey they’ve been made out to be.

The harmful fats are ‘trans fats’ found in hydrogenated oils. These are manufactured fats that extend the shelf life of processed food. They’re also used in fast foods and margarine.

The other fats to be cautious about are polyunsaturates, such as sunflower, soybean, safflower and corn oil. When we eat too much of them, they can cause inflammation and disease. They’re also commonly sold in supermarkets for cooking.

You’ve probably heard of omega-3 oils and know fish oil is a good source. So are dark green leafy vegetables and flaxseed. Omega 3 fats boost metabolism, lower triglyceride (blood fat) levels and help keep our skin and brains healthy.

Canola is promoted as ‘heart healthy’ and it’s used in a lot of products because it’s relatively cheap. It’s not as healthy as it’s made out to be though. During processing, its omega 3 fatty acids are converted to trans fats, so it’s best avoided.
21. Consider coconut oil for cooking

Coconut oil is stable and doesn’t change its molecular structure when it’s heated the way that polyunsaturated oils do.

**Coconut also helps eliminate carbohydrate cravings, boosts metabolism and contains lauric acid which keeps viruses at bay.** If you don’t like the taste and smell, there are odourless versions. Just make sure they’re organic and unrefined.

Other fats and oils can work well depending on what you’re cooking. These include butter and ghee, macadamia oil and a little peanut or sesame oil. The latter two are omega-6 oils but they handle heat well and used occasionally they’re fine.

**Olive oil is great for salads, but not for heating at high temperatures.** Use it only for gentle sautéing.

22. Forget ‘fat free’

Check the labels on ‘low fat’, ‘lite’, ‘light’ and ‘fat free’ and other ‘diet’ products. The danger comes in thinking you can eat more of them. But **low fat foods often contain more sugar than other products** and may contain more kilojoules.

These products could also contain artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, sucralose or saccharin. These are neurotoxins which means they’re toxic to your brain and nervous system, and can trigger cravings, depression, anxiety and insomnia.
23. Order organic

Organic farming means more than just chemical or hormone-free farming. It’s a system of sustainable farming that aims to achieve balance between soil, crops and animal life. **Organic farmers follow natural cycles, use organic matter to enrich the soil and produce sustainable yields** without synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, antibiotics or growth hormones.

Is organic food better for the environment? Absolutely. Does it taste better? Taste is personal but most foodies would say so. Is it more expensive? Yes. Is it better for us? That’s a no-brainer.

Since it’s dearer, if you need to economise, pass on buying organic fruit and veggies. Just get the best local produce you can and wash it well.

Grass-fed meat contains more omega-3 fats than grain fed meat. Some so-called grass-fed meat is fattened on grain though so quiz your butcher. **Putting your money into organic, chemical-free meat from grass-fed animals is not just a vote for your health, it’s also a vote for humane farming of animals.**

Meat is expensive but there are cheaper cuts you can put in the slow cooker. Offal is nutritious and relatively cheap. It’s a shame we’ve moved away from it but most people can manage steak and kidney or lambs fry. **When you buy eggs at least choose free-range.** Avoid cage eggs or commercially-raised chicken.

Commercial dairy products that are pasteurised, homogenised, flavoured and sweetened may also contain hormones, antibiotics and pesticides. **Look for organic unpasteurised milk, cream and butter which are more vitamin and mineral-rich than conventional varieties.** Unpasteurised products also contain the enzyme lipase which improves digestion and assimilation.
24. Build stamina with stocks and broths

We can’t move off the subject of meat without addressing stocks and broths. Stocks are made from chicken, fish, beef or pork bones. Broths are made from vegetables. **Both deserve a central role in our diets because they contain nutrients that keep our bones, joints and skin healthy.** In years gone by, stocks and broths were used to cure colds and build stamina. According to an old South American proverb “Good broth will resurrect the dead”.

**Classic gourmet cooking is based around good rich stocks.**

Sadly our generation has forgotten about them but it’s an easy activity to revive. Stock is made by putting bones in cold water with maybe some meat and veggie scraps tossed in for flavour. A little vinegar helps draw calcium from the bones. Adding seaweed (wakame, kelp or kombu) boosts the calcium and mineral content and is a great way to support thyroid function.

Heat the broth slowly and simmer. Remove the scum that comes to the surface. Fish broth takes about 2 hours but chicken and beef take longer. It might need straining at the end. When stocks cool, they congeal due to the gelatin which is excellent for digestion.

Stock keeps in the fridge for a few days, but can be frozen so it’s handy when you need it for soups, sauces and gravies.
25. Wise up about your weight

When you diet, at least 25 per cent of your weight loss is water, muscle, bone and other lean tissue. Your body thinks you’re starving and responds by slowing your metabolism. **That means you accumulate more fat which is the last thing you want.**

So **forget about weight and concentrate on health.** Don’t fall for the idea that slim equals healthy, it doesn’t. You can look slim and still carry unhealthy fat around your organs.

**Learn to eat with awareness – relax, breathe, chew thoroughly and slow down.** Many of us eat mindlessly, so our food disappears before we know it. Enjoy flavours and textures, and finish one mouthful before you start the next one.

The keys to successful long-term weight loss are:

- Eat a diet based on quality protein, veggies, good fats and plenty of water.
- Don’t go more than four hours without eating – eating raises your metabolism.
- Slow down and eat with awareness.
- Move – many overweight people simply don’t do enough exercise. We also need to replace the muscle we lose with age.
- Get enough rest and sleep. Insufficient sleep makes your body produce cortisol which creates fat around your middle.
- Manage stress. Ditto for the cortisol.
26. Understand you’re unique

There’s no one right way to eat. You’re unique and so are your food requirements. But how do you work out what’s right for you?

A good starting point is to eat fresh food, preferably organic, processed as little as possible and to eat so your blood sugar stays balanced.

Then observe how your body responds to various foods. An hour after eating, you should feel satisfied and energised.

The ‘protein, veggies and good fat’ meal formula is a winner, but different people need different amounts of these. Some of us need more protein and fat, while others need more plant foods. If you feel unsatisfied after eating you may need more protein and fat. If you feel heavy or sluggish you may need less protein and fat and more veggies.

Even if you lean towards the plant end of the scale remember that strictly vegan or vegetarian diets aren’t optimal for most of us. Animal products contain important nutrients not replicated in plants.
27. Be alert to allergies

The three big allergenic foods are gluten (in wheat, oats, rye and barley), cow's milk and sugar. Other foods that can trigger allergies include soy, corn, peanuts, eggs, chocolate, yeasted foods and additives and preservatives.

If your intestines have been damaged by gluten, you may also have difficulty digesting dairy, soy and other grains. A milder reaction (gluten intolerance) can cause wind, bloating, bowel irritation and fatigue.

Symptoms of milk allergy include eczema, asthma and a runny nose. People who have difficulty digesting milk may be able to eat yogurt or cheese.

An estimated 80 per cent of people with multiple allergies also have candida (yeast overgrowth). Many symptoms of candida are similar to those of food reactions – fatigue, headaches, bloating, moodiness, foggy thinking and nasal congestion. The foods you crave as a result of your allergies will often be the ones that encourage candida to thrive – beer, sweets, chips, bread, pasta and dried fruit.

Above all, trust your instincts. If you suspect a food doesn’t agree with you, avoid it for a while, then try it again and see what happens.
28. **Toss the boxed breakfast cereals**

This means the flakes, shapes and puffed grains. They’re produced by ‘extrusion’, which exposes the grains to high temperatures and pressures. **Extrusion destroys many of the nutrients in grains, causes fragile oils to become rancid and makes certain proteins toxic.**

Studies in which some rats were fed cornflakes and others were fed the cereal box found the rats eating the cereal died sooner. Cardboard is more nutritious. Moreover, the rats eating the cornflakes became aggressive from the neurotoxins in the cereal.

We’ve come to think a cereal breakfast is healthy but that’s just evidence of the effectiveness of advertising.

If you’re middle-aged or older, unless you’re doing heavy physical work, your body probably doesn’t need those carbohydrates.

**A better start to your day might be a breakfast that includes protein,** such as eggs or last night’s leftovers. If you don’t have time to cook in the mornings, whip up a smoothie that contains enough quality protein to be sustaining.
29. Be supplement savvy

We’re told depleted soils mean we can’t rely on a healthy diet for nutrients. There’s a lot of truth in that but **supplements are big business and many who promote this idea have much to gain from it.** We also have little idea of how much nutrient our bodies absorb from synthetic vitamins and minerals.

We get an abundance of vitamins and minerals from good quality vegetables, fruit, meat, poultry, eggs, sea food, dairy products, nuts and seeds, and fats, along with nutrient-rich foods such as fish oil, sea vegetables, offal and stocks and broths.

Just as important are the foods to avoid – sugary foods such as biscuits, cakes and soft drinks, polyunsaturated vegetable oils, trans fats, processed foods and foods laden with preservatives, flavourings and colourings.

**Eat the most nourishing diet you can, but if your body is out of balance or needs a boost, supplements might be necessary.** Prescribing your own supplements is a gamble though. You need an individualised prescription so go to an expert.
30. Move out your microwave

While microwave ovens fit perfectly with our instant lifestyles, little research was done on the effects of eating microwaved food before this appliance became a part of modern life.

European studies have shown microwaving may have negative effects on fats and proteins making them harder to assimilate. Eating microwaved food alters the blood profile, similar to the early stages of cancer. Resist using microwaves and don’t warm a baby’s bottle in one.

31. Sidestep the soy

Soy is not the health food it’s claimed to be. In Asia, traditional fermented soy products, such as tempeh and miso, are beneficial when combined in small amounts with rice, seafoods, fish broth, organ meats and fermented vegetables. But modern soy products – soy milks, soy protein powders and soy substitutes for meat and dairy products – pose a few problems. They’re hard to digest, they lower thyroid function and they reduce nutrient absorption.

Despite the promotion of soy as an excellent food for menopausal women, there’s little evidence to support this. If you’re experiencing uncomfortable menopausal symptoms take a look at your lifestyle. The tips provided in this e-book should help.
32. Give attention to your gut

Good digestion is vital. Digestion is the central system of your body and if you don’t assimilate nutrients well, your health is likely to be affected.

One of the most important things you can do for your digestion is to relax and chew thoroughly. When you eat, eat. Don’t multi-task. And don’t eat when you’re anxious or upset.

Fermented foods – such as miso, sauerkraut and cultured veggies or milk products – help to replenish gut flora. An occasional course of probiotics can be useful too.

If your digestion is still not up to par, you might need digestive enzymes or hydrochloric acid supplements or help to repair a damaged gut. That’s where a good naturopath can help.

33. Harmonise your hormones

Since research has raised concern about the safety of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), it’s important we understand how to keep our hormones well balanced.

Menopausal symptoms can be the result of our lifestyles rather than ‘estrogen deficiency’. While we often do have lower estrogen levels at menopause, this is a natural adjustment to a time when nature no longer intends us to bear and rear children. It doesn’t imply we’re estrogen deficient.
In fact, **many women have too much estrogen.** Stress, nutritional problems and contact with estrogenic substances (in pesticides, herbicides, plastics, household cleaners and personal care products) all contribute to it. **Symptoms of too much estrogen include low libido, irritability, depression, memory loss and fatigue – the same symptoms often taken as signs of estrogen deficiency.**

Few women realize that if their blood sugar is unstable, their hormones will be too. High blood sugar and high insulin levels mean higher estrogen. Sometimes we have relatively high estrogen because our progesterone has fallen, so we can benefit from natural progesterone.

The currently preferred hormone replacement is with ‘bio-identical’ hormones. These aim to replicate your own hormones rather than being synthetic substitutes. We don’t have long-term research on their safety though.

The best way to set yourself up for menopause is to live a healthy, balanced life:

- Eat nutritiously and keep your blood sugar balanced
- Avoid sugar and artificial sweeteners, trans fats, fried foods, foods containing hormones or antibiotics, alcohol and refined starches
- Get regular exercise and good sleep
- Drink plenty of filtered water
- Deal with unresolved emotional issues
- Find a way to manage stress.

If your lifestyle is healthy, you may need little help to manage your menopause.
34. Deal with depression

The incidence of depression is rising rapidly in Western countries and probably has a range of causes including emotional stress and modern lifestyles. Unfortunately, common anti-depressants such as Prozac and Zoloft can have side-effects such as weight gain, insomnia, fatigue, nausea, headaches, dizziness, tremors and lower libido.

The alternatives? Exercise, meditation, keeping your blood sugar balanced and increasing your intake of omega 3 fats have all been shown to help avoid or reduce mild depression.

35. Love your liver

Your liver is the largest organ inside your body. Researchers believe it’s involved in about 400 different functions – so take good care of yours.

A big glass of warm water with a squeeze of lemon is a great start to the day. The lemon aids bile formation. Bile is the greenish substance made in the gall bladder which sits under and works in tandem with your liver. You need bile for liver health and fat metabolism.

Other liver favourites are eggs, cruciferous vegetables (such as broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts), onions and garlic, ginger root and turmeric.
What causes liver problems? Alcohol, caffeine, sugar, trans fats, insufficient fibre and some medications such as anti-diabetic drugs, anti-convulsants, estrogen in the Pill or HRT, common medications such as ibuprofen, and cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Signs of an unhappy liver include weight gain especially around the abdomen, cellulite, indigestion, high blood pressure, dark circles under the eyes, fatigue, skin rashes, depression and mood swings.

36. Cotton on to the cholesterol controversy

If you eat foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol, you’re at greater risk of a heart attack, right? Your cholesterol readings are a good predictor of your heart attack risk, right?

You may be surprised to know neither of these statements is true. Full-fat dairy, eggs, coconut oil, shellfish and offal are the kinds of ‘dangerous’ foods we’re warned against eating because they’re high in saturated fat or cholesterol. Yet there’s no evidence they cause heart disease. In fact, they’re sources of good nutrition. Cholesterol is also a poor predictor of heart disease risk.

A bigger contributor to heart disease is sugar. It causes inflammation and raises your insulin, triglycerides and blood pressure. This may show up in your cholesterol readings but it doesn’t mean that cholesterol or good quality fat are the culprits.
37. Address your adrenals

In our culture of rushing and juggling the various aspects of our lives, many of us have depleted adrenal glands. These are the small glands on top of the kidneys that, in times of stress, produce the hormones adrenaline and cortisol which set us up for ‘fight or flight’.

Alcohol, coffee, tobacco, dieting and missing meals, mental and emotional stress, food allergies and candida can all wear down our adrenals.

Tired adrenals affect the function of every cell in our bodies. We’re more likely to catch colds, have difficulty getting to sleep, be sensitive to fumes, feel tired in the morning and have allergies and yeast infections, mood swings, low blood sugar, low thyroid function, and chronic fatigue.

Night sweats, which are commonly assumed to be a symptom of menopause, may actually be a sign of adrenal exhaustion.

Support your adrenals by eating high-quality protein at each meal and keeping your blood sugar balanced.

If you have symptoms of poor adrenal function, it’s time to take stock of your life, build in better dietary habits and create more relaxation. An expert can advise on restorative supplements.
38. Don’t risk dehydration

Water should comprise 70 per cent of your food intake, so aim to drink at least six big glasses of water each day. To calculate how many litres of water you need daily, multiply your weight in kilograms by .033. Drink this between meals, since too much fluid with your food will interfere with digestion.

Remember you’ll need more if you’re sweating a lot, or you’re in air-conditioning or travelling in planes.

Dehydration is a major cause of ageing.

Often we think we’re hungry when really we’re thirsty, so it pays to have a glass of water when you feel peckish.

Tap water contains chlorine and even though it’s in miniscule doses, chlorine kills off gut bacteria. And who really knows what impact drinking fluoridated water has on our wellbeing?

When tap water is the only option, you can remove the chlorine by leaving the water to stand and aerate for several hours before you drink it.

You can also filter it to remove harmful bacteria, toxins and additives. Water bottles with filtered heads now make it easy to drink clean water when you’re away from home.
39. Stay well in winter

The best way to prevent a cold is to be proactive. **Get enough sleep, minimise stress, keep physically active and eat a diet based on good quality protein, vegetables and good fats.** Include anti-viral foods such as garlic and coconut oil.

Supplements such as olive leaf extract also inhibit the growth of viruses. Others do a good job of minimising the impact if you do get sick. Ask your naturopath or at a wholefood shop that sells supplements.

40. Curb your caffeine

Coffee is the **most widely used drug** in the world. Even though it’s less dangerous to our health than soft drink and fruit juice, in excess it can cause problems, including **nutrient loss** (such as vitamins B and C, and minerals calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium and zinc) and **bone loss**. Caffeine also boosts secretion of cortisol.

Our capacity to handle caffeine varies from person to person. If it makes you jittery or upsets your digestion, it’s not your friend. But if you feel well drinking it, it’s likely you can handle it in moderation.

All coffee drinkers are wise to limit the sugar taken with it and to use organic brands, since it’s heavily sprayed. Coffee on an empty stomach is not the best way to start your day, so have it with a meal. Good **alternatives for a warm drink are dandelion root, red (rooibos) tea or herbal teas**. Black and green teas also contain caffeine, but only about half the amount in coffee.
41. Round up a range of resources

Aspects of our medical system are not particularly female-friendly or holistic. We need to **trust our intuition when something doesn’t feel right and seek other opinions.**

Look for a team of practitioners to support your health. Depending on your inclinations, **your team might include a holistic doctor, a naturopath, an exercise specialist, a yoga teacher, a Chinese medicine practitioner, a masseur or an osteopath** – whoever you believe can help you live a vital, balanced life.

42. Find ways to be physical

Exercise gives you energy, lifts your mood, helps you manage stress and sleep better, boosts your sex life, lowers blood pressure and harmful cholesterol, improves circulation and makes blood vessels healthier. **If you exercise regularly, you’re less likely to get diabetes, heart disease, stroke and a range of cancers.** But we all know that.

A lot of us think we’re too busy to exercise, but we don’t make it a priority. When our bodies strike problems, we wrongly assume it’s ‘just old age’ and that it’s inevitable. It’s not. **Exercise is your fountain of youth.**

If you have trouble motivating yourself to move, join a group or find sneaky ways to weave walking into your day – get a dog, walk to the shop rather than driving, have walks rather than cappuccinos with your friends or use a toilet on a different floor at work. **The daily recommendation for health is 30 minutes of activity,** but you don’t need to do it all in one go. Three 10-minute bursts work just as well.
43. Strive to be stronger

Western women nowadays are probably physically weaker than any other women in history.

After age 40, if you're sedentary, you lose muscle and bone. So even if you haven't put on weight, exercise is important. If you don't halt your muscle and bone loss, by the time you're 80 you'll have one-third the muscle you had at 40. With less muscle and bone your metabolism slows down. Strength training turns that around.

Look for exercise programs that develop strength in a way that you can apply to everyday life. Most commercial gyms carry machines that move in a limited range, but in real life you need to squat, bend, twist, pull, push and so on. Free weights, using equipment such as balls, bands and dumb bells, are better at simulating reality.

Resist buying the kind of exercise equipment that's advertised on mid-morning or late night TV. We’d all love a flat stomach for $35.95 and not much effort. Of course you’ll be disappointed, so if you can’t keep your hand off your credit card, stop watching the tele at those times.
44. Perk up your pelvic floor

Your pelvic floor gets stretched in pregnancy and weakened by hormonal changes. This can contribute to **backache and a bulging stomach**, since the muscles in these areas work together.

With a weak pelvic floor you’ll have difficulty stabilizing your spine and risk injury from exercise or in carrying out daily tasks.

Strengthening your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles requires a program of corrective exercise, a high-quality diet and a well-functioning gut.

45. Have a healthy heart

Continuous **low-intensity exercise such as walking, hiking, easy jogging, kayaking, dancing, swimming, cycling, yard work or even house cleaning** provides several health and fitness benefits. It helps balance blood sugar, regulates your appetite, strengthens bones and joints, and improves your immunity and heart function. This kind of exercise isn’t strenuous, you can comfortably talk while doing it and you’re likely to finish feeling energized rather than exhausted. Well, maybe not with house cleaning.

It’s different from puffing and panting on a treadmill for 45 minutes or doing an aerobics class which the body can find stressful. As we’ve seen, under stress we produce cortisol which can make us fatter. Some people take up triathlons or marathon running in middle age, hoping to get healthier and delay the ageing process. **Often it has the opposite effect.**
You may have heard **interval training is the best exercise for getting fit.** This is short, intense exercise. You go all out for up to 60 seconds then rest completely until you’re ready to go again. It’s good for your heart but it’s also good for improving your ratio of muscle to fat.

You’ll need some basic fitness before you try it but at any age we can find a form of sprint workout that suits us. It might be walking as fast as you can up a hill, or pedalling harder on your stationary bike for 30 seconds. Start by doing it three or four times and build up to six to eight. Tackle it about every seven to 10 days, when you’re feeling motivated and have plenty of energy.

### 46. S-t-r-e-t-c-h to be supple

Flexible muscles give us **greater mobility and help prevent injuries.** Stretching is also good for our bones – the pull of the muscles against the bones stimulates bone growth. Some of us have muscles that are so tight they’re uncomfortable and stop us from wanting to be more active.

Flexibility varies: we’re all different. Typically, flexible people enjoy stretching, while tight people who need to stretch avoid it because even the thought of it is unpleasant. **But if your muscles feel stiff, it’s worth making the effort to improve your flexibility.**

If you’re cold, warm up before stretching, for example, go for a walk first. The muscles you stretch will depend on the particular muscles that are tight. You might need professional help to identify those. Usually, stretches are held for around 30 seconds, though remedial stretching can be for as long as 2 minutes.
47. Stop sitting so much

Research shows uninterrupted sitting is disastrous for our health. Aside from encouraging us to stoop, it can make us fatter.

This is because the body is designed to work against gravity to function properly. So you need to change your posture regularly. That means if you often have to sit for long periods at work, driving or sitting on planes, make sure you stand up regularly, at least every half hour. Get up and have a drink or go to the toilet. If we stay in the same postural position for too long, our body’s capacity to use fat for fuel diminishes and we get fatter.

Even if you exercise in the gym for an hour, then sit for long periods, you’re at risk of the perils of uninterrupted sitting. Some experts believe this kind of non-exercise is even more important to our wellbeing than regular exercise.

48. Build a better brain

Four things you can do for a healthier brain:

- **Exercise** – improves blood supply to the brain and helps you to grow new brain cells which may be why it boosts your memory, helps stave off dementia and gives you greater capacity to plan and make good judgments.
- **Eat nutritiously** and keep up your omega-3 fatty acids, by taking fish oil
- **Keep a healthy weight.** Weight gain contributes to high blood pressure
and increases your risk of chronic disease

- **Stimulate your brain.** We typically do sudoku and crosswords but many activities are beneficial for your brain including dance, art, sex and playing a musical instrument.

### 49. Enjoy your evolution

Many women complain their body or skin or hair is not the same as it used to be. Of course it’s not. **We’re changing all the time and we can’t expect what we did at 30 will serve us just as well at 50.**

Put your energy into getting to know what works for you and learning how to tweak your diet, exercise and skin and hair care as you evolve.

### 50. Feel fit and fabulous...forever

Our vitality can drop off as we get older, simply because we expect it to. **Our minds influence every cell in our bodies and some of us have mastered the art of thinking ourselves old.**

At the same time, some of us are so obsessed with hanging onto our youth we line up for every available cosmetic procedure.

You have a choice. You can make yourself old, chase your lost youth with surgery, or **live every moment with gusto and commit to feeling fit and fabulous** no matter what number is printed on your birth certificate.
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