

what your doctor wants you to know...

...but doesn't have time to tell you in an all-too-brief appointment.

Here, **insider stay-well tips from 10 specialists.**

MOST DOCTORS tell you to eat right, exercise, watch your weight, and avoid smoking. But during the typical 15-minute office visit, there's little time to impart more than that, in addition to getting through the original reason for the appointment. To bridge the information gap, *Real Simple* asked 10 specialists—in fields such as orthopedics, cardiology, and gynecology—to divulge the sort of advice they share with their friends and families over cocktails or home-cooked meals and the things they wish all their patients would heed year-round. Some of their tips are surprising (who knew your dentist sees lemons as weapons of mass destruction?), and some are simply wise words that bear repeating. Read on to learn what will help keep you well and perhaps save your life.

WRITTEN BY **SALLY WADYKA**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **YUNHEE KIM**

“The doctor and the patient together are to cure or mitigate the disease. They must be coworkers.”

Harriet K. Hunt, U.S.
physician and feminist

FOR Anna Clarke DATE May 6th
ADDRESS 101 West End Ave

Rx

- Do that crossword puzzle
- Stop going barefoot
- Get a cat

Prescriber Signature X

Michael Katz



the oncologist says

Edward T. Creagan, a professor of medical oncology at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, in Rochester, Minnesota

- **Turn down the grill.** When meat is charred at a high temperature, amino acids in the meat break down and form carcinogens. "Lower the flame or move the rack up higher," says Creagan. Cooking may take longer, but you'll avoid the risks.
- **Adopt a furry friend.** Spending time with an animal produces endorphins (which can enhance immunity) and the hormone oxytocin (which fosters a sense of well-being) and decreases the stress hormone cortisol, says Creagan.
- **Have a European lunch.** You know how Italians linger over meals? It may not be their intention, but that leisurely repast keeps them out of the sun during the peak times for sun damage, which can lead to skin cancer. At the very least, try to limit outdoor activities when the sun's rays are the strongest.

the gynecologist says

Mary Jane Minkin, a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the Yale University School of Medicine

- **Don't play doctor.** If you think you have a yeast infection, there's little harm in doing one round of a

drugstore treatment (like Monistat), but if the symptoms don't clear up, consult your doctor. "Two-thirds of the time, it's a simple irritation or a bacterial infection, not a yeast infection," says Minkin.

- **Reconsider the Pill.** "The benefits often outweigh the downsides," says Minkin. Birth-control pills have been shown to reduce the risk of ovarian cancer by about 35 to 50 percent (and early-warning symptoms for this deadly disease are hard to spot).
- **Take a bathroom break.** Urinating after intercourse will help flush out bacteria before they have a chance to cause a urinary-tract infection. Also, a glass of cranberry juice every day can help keep bacteria from binding to the bladder walls.

the dentist says

Jennifer Jablow, a cosmetic dentist in New York City

- **Eat your antioxidants.** The teeth and gums are made up of collagen, and foods containing antioxidants, like blueberries and broccoli, help protect them from inflammation.
- **Limit lemons.** It's fine to sip some lemon-spiked water on occasion, but don't overdo it, and never suck on lemons. The high acid content of lemon juice can wear away tooth enamel.
- **Soften up.** "Hard-bristle brushes can abrade tooth enamel and cause gum recession," says Jablow. Consider the newer soft-bristle electric ones, which alert you when you brush too hard.

the podiatrist says

Marlene Reid, a podiatrist in Westmont, Illinois, and a spokesperson for the American Podiatric Medical Association

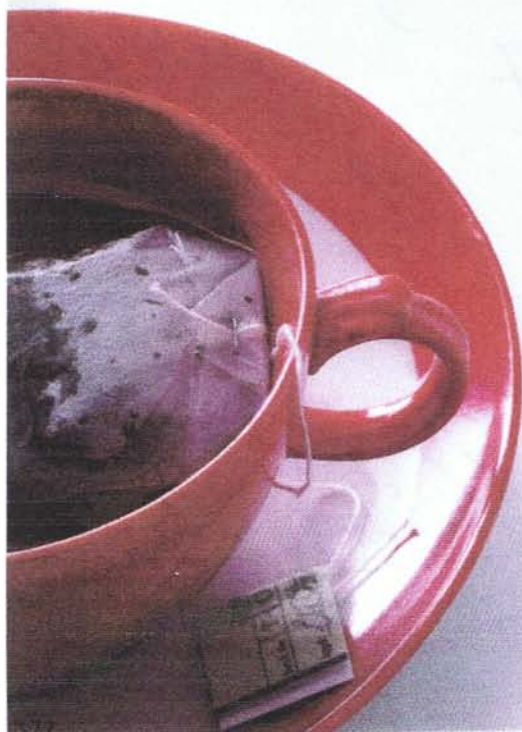
- **Size yourself up.** Have your feet measured every few years—especially after a pregnancy or if your weight has changed. "Don't just routinely buy the size you've always worn," says Reid, because wearing shoes that are too small can exacerbate foot problems, like bunions, corns, and hammertoes.
- **Change your shoes.** You shouldn't wear the same heel height every day. "Even half an inch of difference changes the pressure on the foot and stretches out the Achilles," says Reid. Take that as a good excuse to buy those cute flats or kitten heels.

doctors' don'ts

A few things most doctors advise against.

- 1. Believing everything you read.** While all the experts say they appreciate a patient who is well-informed and does her research, they also caution against assuming all the information you find online is accurate. Googling your symptoms can lead you to misinformation, and you could end up focusing on scary stuff that doesn't apply to your situation.
- 2. Keeping secrets.** To treat you properly, your doctor needs to know your health history, all the medications and herbal supplements you're taking, and any alternative therapies you're using, as well as symptoms you wouldn't share at the dinner table.

(continued on following page)



TO ALLERGY MEDICINE
IS NOW AVAILABLE WITHOUT A PRESCRIPTION
SO KIDS CAN BE KIDS IN DOORS AND OUT

■ **Banish bare feet.** When you go barefoot or wear shoes that have no arch support or motion control (like flip-flops), the plantar fasciae, the connective tissue that runs under the feet to the heels, can get overworked. The result is often heel pain.

the cardiologist says

Nieca Goldberg, an associate professor of medicine and the medical director of the Women's Heart Program at New York University, in New York City

- **Do some navel-gazing.** "Even if you're slim, storing fat around your belly is linked with a higher risk of heart disease," says Goldberg. Measure your waist regularly. Ideally, it should be less than 35 inches. To manage your middle, get daily aerobic exercise and avoid simple carbohydrates, such as pastries and white bread, which can increase belly fat.
- **Take your numbers.** "If you are over 35 and don't know your blood pressure and cholesterol, see your doctor," says Goldberg. Having that information lets you and your doctor assess your heart-disease risks.
- **Go (a little) nuts.** Walnuts, which contain healthy fats and alpha linoleic acid, may be good for your heart. Have a handful a few times a week.

the sports-medicine doctor says

Kathy Weber, the director of women's sports medicine at Rush University Medical Center, in Chicago

- **Risk making a fool of yourself.** When it comes to exercising, doing the things you *aren't* good at will help you the most. "People tend to gravitate toward the activities they're best at and ignore everything else," says Weber. (The naturally flexible become yoga addicts; those with good cardio endurance focus on running.) But always doing the same activity can cause imbalances in your muscles, which can lead to overuse or injury.
- **Get your rear in gear.** Women tend to be naturally weak in the hips and the gluteals, but if those areas are not strong, the knee and hip joints must absorb all the impact. Strengthening the backside helps prevent a lot of injuries, such as hip bursitis, tendinitis, and gluteal strains. For a good rear-end workout, go to www.realsimple.com/rearmoves.
- **Buy new sneakers.** Runners and walkers should get a new pair of sneakers after the old ones have gone 300 to 400 miles, which is about every five months if you go three miles a day, five days a week. "Wearing them after they break down can lead to problems ranging from achy feet to knee or hip injuries," says Weber. If you've lost track of how long you've had your sneakers, compare them with a new pair and look for signs of deterioration in the soles, the arch support, and the overall cushioning.

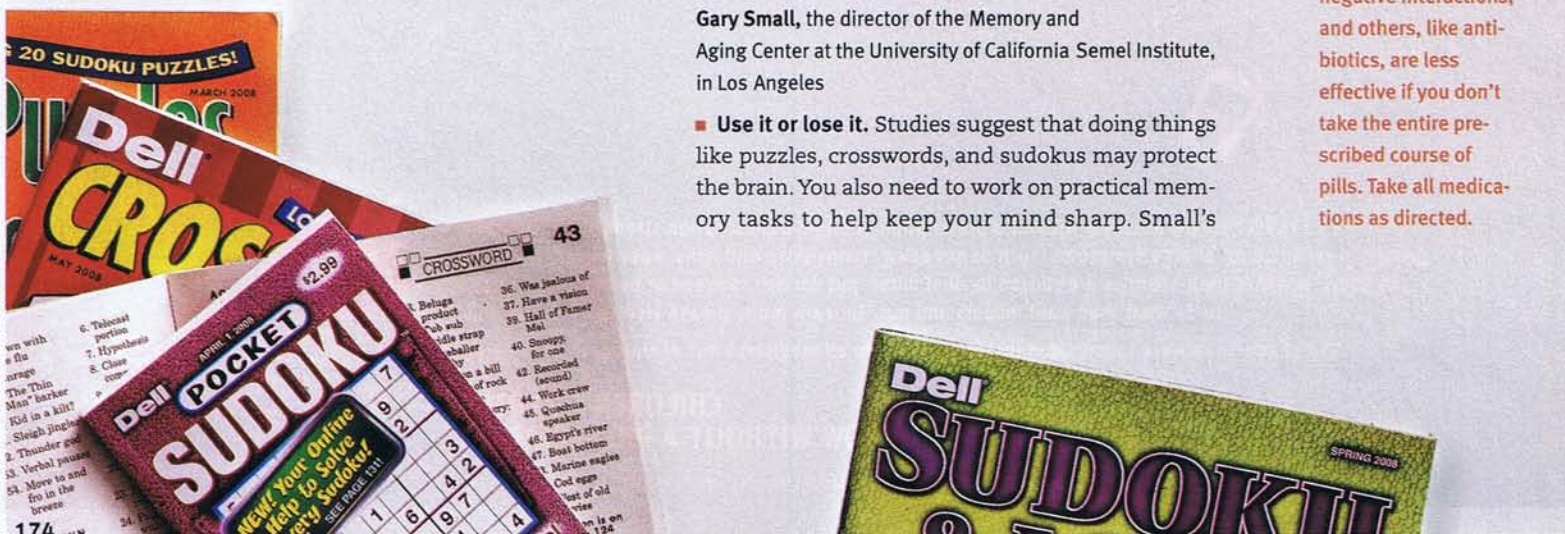
the neurologist and memory expert says

Gary Small, the director of the Memory and Aging Center at the University of California Semel Institute, in Los Angeles

- **Use it or lose it.** Studies suggest that doing things like puzzles, crosswords, and sudokus may protect the brain. You also need to work on practical memory tasks to help keep your mind sharp. Small's

doctors' don'ts (continued)

- 3. **Assuming that over-the-counter equals safe.** Over-the-counter drugs are safe only if you're taking the recommended amounts and following directions. But exceeding the labeled dosage can be dangerous.
- 4. **Jumping to take newfangled tests or scans** (like a virtual colonoscopy or a full-body CT scan) just because they are on the menu. Talk it over with your doctor to see if a simpler test is just as informative.
- 5. **Messing with your meds.** There's a reason your doctor recommended a specific dosage or combination of medications. Certain drugs can have negative interactions, and others, like antibiotics, are less effective if you don't take the entire prescribed course of pills. Take all medications as directed.



technique for improving the recall of names, faces, and lists is called "Look, snap, connect." *Look*: Focus your attention. *Snap*: Create a visual picture in your mind. *Connect*: Put it into a context that will help you recall it later.

- **Put stress in its place.** Chronic stress shrinks the memory centers in the brain, and the stress hormone cortisol can hamper a person's learning ability and recall. So cutting stress is the first step toward improving and preserving memory.

- **Swirl some red.** "Choose a glass of red wine over white," says Small. Resveratrol, the antioxidant compound in red wine, may have protective effects on the memory. But don't overdo it: Having more than one drink a day for women and two for men may increase the risk of cancer and other diseases.

the spine surgeon says

Sean McCance, a codirector of orthopedic spine surgery at Mount Sinai Medical Center, in New York City

- **Work your core to save your back.** Focus on exercises that strengthen your abdominals and back in tandem. McCance suggests the "Superman." Lie on your stomach, arms extended overhead. Arch your back and lift your arms, shoulders, and head off the floor. Hold for a few seconds, then release.

- **Move in close.** Each time you bend over to pick up something at arm's length, the forces acting on your spine are four to five times as great, which can lead to back injury. Instead, stand close to the object, get low, then lift.

- **Don't sit still.** "When you remain in one position for too long, your muscles get stiff, putting pressure on the discs in the spine," says McCance. By getting up and moving around every 30 to 45 minutes or so, your back gets to change position, your blood flow increases, and fluid flows back into the area to rehydrate the discs that cushion the spine.

the psychologist says

Karla Umpierre, a clinical psychologist at the Miami Institute for Age Management and Intervention, in Miami

- **Be selfish.** Whether you seek counseling, practice meditation, or keep a journal, it's important to take some time to learn about yourself, your fears, and

what you want in life these days. "When you don't set priorities or make time for yourself, you rob yourself of the chance to clear your mind and gain perspective," says Umpierre.

- **Hit the party circuit.** "It's a rare person who can lead a solitary existence and still be happy," says Umpierre. Having a strong social network has been shown to improve physical as well as mental health, so seek out events where you'll connect with people you care for.

- **Get high on exercise.** To keep your spirits high, schedule in some physical activity every day. Exercise may be a natural antidepressant. Anything from a vigorous workout to a casual stroll around the neighborhood may lift your mood.

the family physician says

Davis Liu, a family physician with the Permanente Medical Group, in Sacramento, California

- **Let your birthday be a health reminder.** Think of this day as an annual opportunity to assess your health. Have you reached a milestone birthday that means it's time for a test like a mammogram or a colonoscopy? Look back at the calendar and make sure you aren't overdue for a visit to the gynecologist or the dentist. "Think about whether or not you've done everything you need to for your health in the past year, and plan what you should do in the year ahead," says Liu.

- **Come in with an agenda.** "Don't wait till your hand is on the door to leave the doctor's office to bring up what's bothering you," says Liu. Arrive prepared with a handful of issues you want to discuss, and describe them succinctly. "Don't wander off on tangents," says Liu. "Your doctor may interrupt you because he thinks he knows where the story ends. You need to give clear information and control the interview."

- **Powwow with your family.** As your parents and brothers and sisters age, stay on top of what medical conditions they have, and let your doctor know of any major developments. "Your immediate family members are like a window into your future," says Liu, "and heeding the warnings of any medical issues they're experiencing is one proactive thing you can do for yourself."

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