

15-Minute Fix

19 Quick Tips for Nudging Along Your Healthy Lifestyle

By Sari Harrar



Got a quarter of an hour? That's all you need to give your eating and exercise plan a healthy nudge forward. Whether you're super-busy and only have 15 little minutes to spare, or suddenly find yourself with a smidge of extra time on a normal day, these strategies can help you stay on track with healthy food, feel-good fitness, and loads of ways to de-stress and pamper yourself so you won't be tempted by junk food or oversized portions.

Next time you've got a little time, give one of these 19 tips a try.

Eat Well

1. Morning: Have oatmeal and fruit in a flash. Got 15 minutes? You've got plenty of time for a hot breakfast that cooks itself while you get dressed. First, head downstairs in your jammies and boil a cup of water in a small saucepan. While the water heats, wash and chop a fresh apple, place in a bowl and sprinkle with cinnamon and a dash of ground cloves. Cover with a small plate, plastic wrap or a paper towel and microwave on high for 3-5 minutes. By now, that water's boiling. Toss in a ½ to ¾ cup old-fashioned oats, bring back to a boil, cover the

pan and turn off the heat.

Now go get dressed. When you return to the kitchen, just spoon oatmeal into a bowl, top with hot cinnamon apples and add skim milk to taste. Yum!

2. Morning: Pack a snack. If you're heading into a day that's bound to find you either snacklessly ravenous or so busy you only have time to hit the vending machine or the drive-through doughnut stand, take a minute or two to grab a piece of fruit or throw some carrots or nuts or a small handful of whole-grain crackers into a zipper-lock baggie. Add a bottle of water and you're ready for anything.

3. Morning: Make lunch. Putting together your favorite sandwich, plus a piece of fruit and some portable veggies takes less time than you'd spend picking something up at a fast-food stand or in the company cafeteria. Invest your 15 minutes in lunch and you'll be ahead of the game, in terms of calories and nutrition, on the busiest day.

4. Evening: Plan ahead for a fast dinner tomorrow. Got 15 extra minutes after dinner? Why not wash, chop, and store veggies you can pop into the steamer or microwave tomorrow night—or next week? Broccoli, cauliflower, summer squash, carrots, hearty greens such as kale can all be prepped ahead of time. If you plan to cook'em tomorrow, store in a microwaveable bowl, covered tightly, in the fridge. If you plan to cook'em in a few days, freeze in a zipper-lock bag.

Organize

What do messy drawers or running around like crazy have to do with a healthy lifestyle? It's the stress-eat connection: Any time your stress level goes up, so does the risk for overeating...so it stands to reason that anything you do to take control over your world will cut that risk. Here's how to make a dent in just a few minutes:

5. Tackle one annoying problem. Stop living with the burned-out light bulb in the hall closet, the dirty woodwork behind Fido's food dish, the loose cabinet door. Choose one aggravation that you can resolve and attack it. Instant stress relief!

6. De-clutter one shelf or drawer. Empty and speed-organize the kitchen gadget drawer, the bedroom bookshelf that doubles as an in-box, the sock drawer now populated exclusively by singletons. Don't be afraid to toss anything you haven't used in 6 months to a year.

7. Get ready for tomorrow. Use your 15 minutes to get a jump on the morning: Choose and lay out your clothes, set up breakfast, make and refrigerate lunch, and decide what you'll have for dinner.

Connect

Feeling cheerful and content can help you stick with your eating and exercise goals. Losing touch with the people and the

goodness in life can lead to looking for satisfaction in all the wrong places (the cookie jar, the bottom of a bag of chips during the late movie...) These three swift strategies for staying connected--to friends, family, and the good things in your life—offer true emotional satisfaction:

8. Count your blessings. Somehow, stress and feeling disgruntled go hand in hand. Stop yourself and get in touch with reality by counting your blessings. Sit in a comfortable chair with a cup of tea, a notebook and a pen. Then ask yourself: What five great things have your husband and kids said to you or done for you today? What five ways is life better today than it was a year ago? What wonderful things have happened in the past week? Who's made you laugh? Given you support? And who have you helped out?

9. Write an old-fashioned letter to a friend or relative...then mail it. Pull out that pretty notepaper and your favorite pen, brew a cup of tea and sit at your desk or dining room table. Now choose a person who matters in your life and write her a real letter. Share a story about a good time you've spent together, thank her for helping you, recall a funny experience you've shared.

10. Belly-laugh. Pop in a comedy DVD, read a funny book or call a friend, a sister or your Mom and swap your funniest stories. Laughter's great stress relief, releases a flood of feel-good endorphins and may even lower your blood sugar, a Japanese study found.

11. Pamper and De-Stress Whether it's been a crazy-busy day or one of those lucky days when you get everything done and have time to spare, these self-nurturing strategies can help you feel calm, centered, and on track.

12. Lie down and rest. Once upon a time, shutting your eyes and taking a rest was an accepted and applauded way to rejuvenate. (Some cultures still practice this smart custom—Italians take an afternoon riposo and Spaniards enjoy a good siesta.) You don't have to sleep. Just lie down, pull up a soft blanket, and rest your mind, your body, your spirit.

13. Take an aromatherapy shower. You don't have time for a long bubble bath...but you can fit in a rejuvenating shower. Choose your favorite scented soap or body wash. If you have essential oils, sprinkle a few drops into a plastic cup full of hot water and set it in an out-of-the-way spot on the floor of the shower (or on a shelf in the shower). Set out a fluffy robe and towel, turn on the water and let the hot water soothe tense muscles.

14. Pull out your favorite photo album. Relive your wedding day, best family vacation, or your childhood—curled up in your favorite chair.

15. Play with your dog or cat. Toss a tennis ball, brush her fur, play tug of war with an old sock, or start a game of fetch in the backyard. Pets are proven stress-reducers.

16. Give yourself a hand and neck massage. Rub your favorite hand lotion or massage oil on your hands, then follow these steps:

- Hold your arms up off your lap or the table. Wrap your right hand around the 4 fingers of your left hand and pull them gently downward. Switch hands and repeat.
- Rub and squeeze each finger on your right hand, then on your left hand. Then squeeze the little web between fingers and between your index finger and thumb on each hand.
- Press your thumb into the padded area at the base of your thumb. Hold for 10 seconds. Press any points on your palm that hurt. Hold for 10 seconds.
- Now that your hands are relaxed, use your right hand to knead the top of your left shoulder muscle. Then use your left hand to knead your right shoulder muscle.
- With your right hand, massage the muscle to the right of your spine, moving in little circular motions from the base of your skull down into your shoulder. Repeat on the left side. Breathe deeply the whole time.

“Sparks” of Movement!

Try a mix of mini-aerobic, strength or flexibility sessions during the week to spark your energy level and break up your day. Here are some ideas:

17. Aerobic sparks: A brisk walk outdoors or on a treadmill, fast dancing, part of an exercise tape, or climbing stairs in your home or office building at lunch time.

18. Strength-training sparks: Do a mini routine of Curves strength-training moves. Try crunches, modified push-ups (or the regular type if you've become an iron woman!), overhead press, and squats—you'll work most major muscle groups and feel great! For detailed directions for performing these exercises correctly, go to "My Fitness" and click on links to strength exercises.

19. Flexibility sparks: A little yoga or your favorite stretches are perfect here. Or try these moves:

- **Neck Bends.** Sit up straight. Lower your right ear in the direction of your right shoulder slowly—just until you feel a little stretch in your left shoulder and neck. Hold for 10-15 seconds as you breathe calmly. Repeat on the left side.
- **Neck Half-Roll.** Look forward, then drop your chin slightly. Turn chin toward your right shoulder, hold 5 seconds, then turn to your right shoulder and hold 5 seconds. Repeat 5 times.
- **Shoulder Circles.** Sit or stand. Roll your shoulders back and in a circle. Keep shoulders relaxed and try to make a wide circle. Repeat 5 times, then reverse the direction for 5 more circles.
- **Thigh and Hip Stretch.** Lie on your side with your legs straight and together, one on top of the other. Support your head with the hand closest to the floor by resting your upper arm on the floor and bending it at the elbow. Bend your lower leg slightly if you need to for balance.

Bend the knee of the top leg so that your foot comes back toward your buttocks. Grasp your foot with your free hand and pull the heel in toward your buttocks until you feel a comfortable stretch in the front of your thigh. Hold it there for 20 to 30 seconds, then slowly release. Roll onto your other side and stretch the opposite leg.

- **Hamstring Stretch.** Stand with your feet together and take a very large step forward with your right leg. Keep your right foot pointing straight ahead and turn your back leg slightly so that your left foot points a bit to the left.

Bend the knee of your back leg, place your hands on the upper thigh of your front leg, and slowly lean forward with your torso as far as you comfortably can. Keep your back, neck, and head in a straight line. Bend your back leg further while pushing your hips and buttocks down and back. Lift the front of your right foot off the floor while maintaining pressure on your front heel. You should feel a comfortable stretch in your back and in the inner thigh of your outstretched leg. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then stretch the other thigh. >

- **Side Bend.** Stand and put your right hand on your right hip. Bend to the right and slowly reach over your head with your left hand as far as you comfortably can. Hold for 20 to 30 seconds, then stretch the other side.
- **Bowing Shoulder Stretch.** Get down on all fours on an exercise mat, with your hands and knees about shoulder-width apart. Keep your back flat, your neck straight, and your eyes looking down at the floor. Sit back on your heels, extending your arms in front of you. Push down slightly with your palms and hold for 20 to 30 seconds.

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