


living FITandWELL

A woman's guide to a healthy mind, body and spirit

Dr Rhonda Anderson





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Please note that 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.

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*Women are beautiful.
The female species is truly grand.
It's important to honour being a woman
and make our presence in this world
Count for something special.*

Susan Griffin (author)

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 is 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 enhancing their health and vitality. Unfortunately, many aspects of modern life that we now take for granted aren't health enhancing. But there is plenty we can do about it.

I've compiled this little book to start showing you how. My intention is that it's easy to read and helps you sort the facts from the fantasy.

In the context of the book, 'fit and well' is used as a holistic term that encompasses the mind, body and spirit and the connections between them.

Living fit and well is a guide to having a healthy mind, body and spirit. It offers ideas and information to help you opt for health enhancing rather than health depleting ways of living.

Its message in a nutshell is: by all means let's take advantage of technological advances, but let's stop eating synthetic foods, breathing dangerous chemicals in our homes and offices, and living sedentary and stressful lives.

At the end of most sections I've provided references for those of you who want more information on the topic. These are by no means the only good references, but they are some I've found valuable.

At the end of the book I've made a summary of all the topics I've covered, for quick reference. There's also a shopping list to help you get started in making changes you want to make. But remember you don't have to do it all at once. One step at a time is likely to be the most effective strategy.

No doubt *Living fit and well* will need updating regularly as new information becomes available, but as a guide I hope you find it useful. Please pass its messages on to other women in your life.



Dr Rhonda Anderson

CONTENTS

Keep your blood sugar balanced	1	Settle unresolved issues	30
Understand the 'GI'	2	Keep plants at work	31
Eat your veggies	3	Listen to classical music	31
Watch the sugar and salt	3	Take breaks	32
Build strong bones	5	Ahhh ... aromatherapy	32
Know the facts about fat and cholesterol	6	Cultivate relationships	33
Be wary of 'fat free' foods	8	Nurture yourself	33
Go organic	8	Have a regular massage	34
Kiss dieting goodbye	10	Say no (at least sometimes!)	35
Eat what's right for you	11	Stay away from supermarkets	35
Be alert to allergies	12	Move! Every day	35
Soak foods for better digestion	13	Be strong	37
Toss the boxed breakfast cereals	13	Tone up your pelvic floor	38
Think twice about vegetarianism	14	Have a healthy heart	39
Take vitamins and minerals naturally	15	S-t-r-e-t-c-h	40
Avoid microwave ovens	16	Ignore weight loss gizmos	41
Sidestep the soy	17	Set goals and pick up after setbacks	41
Say goodbye to cellulite	17	Eat outside	41
Maximise digestion	18	Think chemical-free	42
Pass on the Pill	18	Be comfortable with uncertainty	43
Replace HRT naturally	19	Fall in love with yourself	43
Deal with depression	21	Get inspired	44
Love your liver	21	Think young	45
Care for your adrenals	22	Be grateful	46
Drink more (filtered) water	23	Your <i>Living fit and well</i> summary	47
Avoid colds	24	Your shopping guide for <i>Living fit and well</i>	53
Seek a second opinion	24	About Dr Rhonda Anderson	57
Kick the coffee habit	25		
Read labels	25		
Make time to meditate	26		
Sweat away toxins	28		
Get good sleep	28		
Breathe!	29		
Don't smoke	30		

Keep your blood sugar balanced

Let's start with blood sugar, since it is such an important key to life-long health. Studies of centenarians show that the one factor they have in common is relatively low blood sugar and low insulin.

When your blood sugar level rises, insulin is produced to take the sugar and store it - as fat. If this happens repeatedly, your cells may lose their sensitivity to insulin, and you become 'insulin resistant'. Insulin resistance is the basis of all chronic diseases of ageing.

To keep your blood sugar balanced, you must eat at least every four hours and drink plenty of water. Each meal needs to contain the following:

- good quality protein (an amount about the size of the palm of your hand is appropriate for major meals; about half that amount is appropriate for snacks);
- low glycemic carbohydrates, especially vegetables (in a 2:1 ratio with protein - look on the next page for more on the glycemic index); and
- some healthy fats (such as virgin olive oil or flaxseed oil, avocado, olives or raw nuts).

Many symptoms of premenstrual stress (PMS), depression, mood swings and anxiety are really the result of an imbalance in blood sugar. High blood sugar also puts stress on the adrenal glands (see page 22).

For more:

Leslie Kenton's *The X-Factor Diet* (Random House, London 2002)

Julia Ross's *The Diet Cure* (Penguin, Ringwood 2000). This includes a chapter on unstable blood sugar and is an excellent book for anyone interested in weight control, hormonal balance, dealing with cravings and allergies, and correcting the physical imbalances that cause us to overeat and put on weight.

Cardiologist Dr Ross Walker's book, *The Cell Factor* (Pan Macmillan, Sydney 2002) addresses blood sugar along with a number of other root causes of disease.

Understand the 'GI'

The glycemic index or GI is a rating system for carbohydrates that reflects the speed at which they are converted to glucose in the body. When you eat these, your body releases insulin slowly and that keeps your insulin levels lower. Foods that convert quickly to glucose rate high on the GI (anything over a rating of 70 is high). It's not only refined carbs that are on the high end of the scale: high GI foods include potato, parsnip, mango, watermelon, papaya, white rice, honey, shredded wheat, shortbread and icecream.

Examples of low GI foods (a rating under 55 is low) are green leafy vegetables, apples, pears, pineapples, long-cooking rolled oats and lentils.

The GI is not as simplistic as 'if a food's rating is high don't touch it and if its rating is low eat as much as you like'. Many high GI foods are fine if eaten in moderate amounts. However, if you want to reduce body fat, improve your cholesterol levels or improve your sensitivity to insulin, you should emphasise low to medium GI foods in your diet.

Note that juices produce a high GI reaction. If you drink juice, you need to puree the whole fruit or vegetable to a drinkable pulp. The inclusion of the fibre will help modify the impact on your blood sugar.

For more:

Australian professor Jennie Brand-Miller, along with co-authors Kay Foster-Powell and associate professor Stephen Colagiuri, has written extensively on the GI. See *The New Glucose Revolution* (Hodder, Sydney 2002) for clear explanations and lots of recipes. See also www.glycemicindex.com.

Eat your veggies

Parents have been telling children this for years. The trouble is, most parents don't eat enough fresh vegetables themselves. Veggies contain a lot of water and are a great source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Fibre-rich foods need plenty of chewing and leave us feeling fuller and more satisfied. They also keep digestion healthy and help avoid many age-related diseases, such as bowel cancer, gall stones, diabetes, colitis, haemorrhoids, hernias and varicose veins.

Watch the sugar and salt

You need to be vigilant as so many processed foods contain sugar and salt. You also need to be aware that sugar is often listed on labels in ways you may not recognise — fructose, glucose, maltose, lactose, dextrose, sucrose, corn syrup, or synthetic sugars, such as mannitol or sorbitol. These sugars stress the body and rob it of valuable nutrients.

You would have heard people say that sugar is an important source of energy. The best energy sources are the healthy fats and the slow-release carbohydrates. Refined sugar can lead to calcium loss, weight gain, diabetes, nervous disorders and fatigue. Sugar also feeds candida, a yeast overgrowth that stresses the liver.

At this stage, stevia seems to be a good option for sweetening. Stevia is a herb that's indigenous to South America. It's many times sweeter than sugar, contains no calories, is non-toxic and does not raise blood sugar. It also inhibits the formation of dental cavities. Stevia is sold in wholefood shops.

Salt has been maligned for raising blood pressure, but we need salt for a lot of metabolic functions. The problem is, most table salts and sea salts are stripped of a lot of nutrients and this impairs the way they function in our bodies. France is the home of the world's best salt. Known as Celtic sea salt, it is harvested by hand to retain its rich mineral balance. Ask for it at wholefood shops.

Of course, there are other wonderful flavourings for food besides sugar and salt. Try herbs, lemon juice, garlic and ginger.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington 2001). This book contains over 600 pages of information on food and recipes. Its subtitle is: *the cookbook that challenges politically correct nutrition and the diet dictocrats*.

Ann Louise Gittleman's *The Fat Flush Plan* (McGraw-Hill, New York 2002). This is a popular but well-informed book on weight loss.

Julia Ross's *The Diet Cure* (Penguin, Ringwood 2000)

Build strong bones

Osteoporosis has become a growth industry. Women have been told over and over that calcium supplements and high calcium foods, such as dairy products, are our best defence against bone loss. Menopausal women are prescribed long-term estrogen. Our fear of dowager's humps and hip fractures has provided a golden opportunity for pharmaceutical companies and the dairy industry.

But the claim that calcium wards off osteoporosis is not as clear-cut as it seems. The countries with the highest dairy intakes actually have the highest osteoporosis levels, while populations in China, Africa, Gambia, Sri Lanka, Surinam and South America, where calcium intake is low, have low rates of osteoporosis. As for estrogen, there is no scientific evidence that taking it will increase the strength of our bones.

So what really causes bone loss? Alcohol, antacids, low nutrient diets, dieting and anorexia, antibiotics, caffeine, sedentary lifestyles, tobacco, oral contraceptives, stress, drugs such as Valium and Librium, and environmental toxins. And what supports healthy bones? A diet high in nutrients, including fresh fruit and vegetables, good digestion, weight bearing exercise, and a lifestyle that avoids the factors that promote bone loss.

For more:

www.betterbones.com for information on natural ways to prevent and reverse osteoporosis

Dr Miriam Nelson's series, including *Strong Women Stay Young* (Lothian Books, Melbourne 1997); *Strong Women Stay Slim* (Lothian, Melbourne 1998); *Strong Women, Strong Bones* (Lothian, Melbourne 2000); and *Strong Women Eat Well* (Berkley Publishing Group, New York 2001), emphasises the importance of resistance training for women. See also www.strongwomen.com

Women's health researcher Sherrill Sellman has written an insightful article *Osteoporosis — The Bones of Contention* (Light Unlimited Productions, Box Hill 2000).

Know the facts about fat and cholesterol

For years fat was blamed for making us fat, so we've been obsessed with avoiding it — hence, the plethora of 'fat free' foods on our supermarket shelves. So it may come as a surprise to learn that fat is actually important in keeping us lean, and that most of us don't eat enough of the right kind of fat. 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 were once made out to be.

The harmful fats are the 'trans fats' found in hydrogenated oils and polyunsaturated vegetable oils. Trans fats are used in processed food and fast foods.

Margarine and shortening are both made from trans fats. When cooking, it's best to use butter (be sure it's real butter and not blended with oil) or ghee, cold pressed virgin olive oil or coconut oil.

Two of the most important fats are omega 3 and omega 6. Good sources of omega 3 are fish oils, some dark green leafy vegetables, walnuts and flaxseed. Omega 3 fats boost metabolism and lower triglyceride (blood fat) levels. Omega 6, which can also increase metabolism, is found in unprocessed safflower, sunflower and corn oil, as well as grains, nuts and pulses. Mostly, our bodies receive too much omega 6 and not enough omega 3, so we need to increase our consumption of omega 3 fats.

Another healthy fat is in coconut. The lauric acid in coconut has a potent anti-viral and anti-microbial effect. Coconut helps eliminate carbohydrate cravings because it burns steadily in the body, preventing a drop in blood sugar. It also boosts metabolism and promotes weight loss.

An oil that has received a lot of 'heart health' promotion is canola. However, canola goes rancid quickly, and some research suggests it can lower vitamin E levels. During processing, the omega 3 fatty acids in canola apparently turn into trans fats. For now it seems best avoided.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington 2001)

Dr Joseph Mercola has a site at www.mercola.com. He addresses a myriad of health topics in a regular e-newsletter.

For the good oil on coconut and many other nutrition topics see www.westonaprice.org

Be wary of 'fat free' foods

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

These products may also contain aspartame, saccharin or other artificial sweeteners. These are neurotoxins: they can trigger cravings, depression, anxiety and insomnia.

For more:

See the previous references on fat and cholesterol.

Go 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 pesticides or growth hormones.

Is organic food better for the environment? Absolutely. Does it taste better? That's a matter of opinion. Is it more expensive? Yes. Is it better for us? The scientific evidence isn't conclusive, but if we are committed to our health, the choice between chemical and chemical-free is easy.

Where possible, buy organic meat from grass-fed animals — it has fewer calories, less saturated fat and more healthy omega 3 fats than grain fed meat.

Dairy products that are pasteurised, homogenised, flavoured and sweetened may also contain hormones, antibiotics and pesticides. Sometimes it's possible to locate organic unpasteurised milk, cream and butter. If these products come from healthy cows, they will contain more vitamins and minerals than commercial varieties.

Unpasteurised products also contain the enzyme lipase, which promotes digestion and assimilation. Modern milk is difficult to digest because the lipase has been removed.

Avoid processed cheeses, with their emulsifiers, extenders, phosphates and hydrogenated oils.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (New Trends Publishing, New York) 2001. Her articles can also be found at www.westonaprice.org.

Want to grow your own organic food? See Jeffrey Hodges' *Natural Gardening in Australia* (Viking/Penguin, Ringwood 2002).

Kiss dieting goodbye

When you diet, at least 25 per cent of your weight loss is water, muscle, bone and other lean tissue. Your body thinks you are starving and responds by slowing your metabolism. That means you accumulate more fat, and that's the last thing you want. Dieting doesn't work.

So forget about weight and concentrate on health. Don't fall for the idea that slim equals healthy. It doesn't. Aim for a healthy body. Some of us were meant to be thin and some of us weren't. We can all look attractive and healthy no matter what nature handed out. Avoid any sort of extreme eating or quick loss 'crash' diets. Never skip meals. Learn to eat with awareness — enjoy flavours and textures, and finish one mouthful before starting on the next one.

The keys to successful long-term weight loss are:

- eat a healthy diet based on quality protein, high fibre carbohydrates, and 'good' fats;
- don't go more than four hours without eating — eating raises metabolism;
- get moving — most overweight people simply don't do enough exercise; and
- do strength training that builds muscle tissue — the more muscle you have, the more energy your body burns (this is especially important as you get older, since muscle tissue diminishes past age 40).

For more:

Julia Ross's *The Diet Cure* (Penguin, Ringwood 2000)

Eat what's right for you

Nutrition can be baffling. Are carbs good or bad? Are eggs good for the liver or bad for the heart? There are contradictions everywhere.

The solution lies in acknowledging that there is no one-size-fits-all diet. You're unique and so are your food requirements. You need to consider your ancestry, your body type, your environment and your lifestyle. You need to find a way of eating that suits your own unique metabolism and biochemistry.

But how do you work out what's right for you? Some valuable work has been done in this area, but a good starting point is to eat fresh food — preferably organic — that has been processed as little as possible, and to eat to keep your blood sugar in balance.

Then you need to observe how your body responds to various foods. You should feel good an hour after eating. If you feel tired, sluggish, headachey, bloated, have cravings or any other negative symptoms, you should avoid those foods for a while, then try them again and see what happens. You may be allergic to or intolerant of them.

For more:

William Walcott and Trish Fahey's *The Metabolic Typing Diet* (Broadway Books, New York 2000)

Be alert to allergies

The three big allergenic foods are grains that contain gluten (wheat, oats, rye, 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 a major reaction to gluten, you may also have difficulty digesting foods such as dairy, soy and other grains. A milder reaction (gluten intolerance) causes wind, bloating, bowel irritation and fatigue.

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

If eating sugar gives you a headache, makes you feel heavy, groggy or high, you probably have an allergy. Sugar and white flour are addictive and may not be easy to give up.

An estimated 80 per cent of people with multiple allergies also have candida or yeast overgrowth. A lot of the 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.

For more:

Julia Ross's *The Diet Cure* (Penguin, Ringwood 2000)

Soak foods for better digestion

Grains and legumes are a good source of vitamins and fibre, but are not always well tolerated. They contain enzyme inhibitors that interfere with digestion as well as phytic acid that blocks the absorption of some nutrients. Overnight soaking, and even sprouting, 'predigests' grains and legumes so their nutrients are more available.

It pays to buy organically or biodynamically grown grains and legumes to avoid pesticides and other sprays used to inhibit mould and vermin.

Few of us can healthily eat large amounts of these foods, so ensure that they suit your metabolism before making them a staple part of your diet.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington 2002)

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.

Instead, start your day with soaked oatmeal or other porridge grain, whole grain pancakes or muffins, eggs, fish, or homemade soups.

Studies in which some rats were fed cornflakes and others were fed the cereal box found that 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. The growing incidence of behavioural problems among children may be related to the amount of processed food they eat.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington, 2002)

Think twice about vegetarianism

While it has been claimed that animal products shorten our lifespan, studies of the diets of long-lived populations show otherwise.

Groups renowned for their longevity — the Hunza and people from Vilcabamba in South America, and the Soviet Georgian and Russian people from the Caucasus Mountains areas — all eat milk and/or meat products. Animal products contain a wide range of important nutrients that are not replicated in plant foods.

If you choose a vegan or vegetarian diet for moral or spiritual reasons, it is very important to pay particular attention to eating a good balance of nutrients and to seek advice on supplementation.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington, 2002)

Take vitamins and minerals naturally

We are increasingly told that depleted soils mean we can no longer 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.

Provided you are already healthy, a balanced approach could involve eating the best diet you can for your body and lifestyle, and adding a good multivitamin and mineral preparation for insurance. However, if your body's system is out of balance or needs replenishing, supplementation with good quality products will be important.

You can get a lot of vitamins and minerals from good quality vegetables, fruits, meats, eggs, dairy products, nuts and seeds, grains, legumes and fats. You can also include nutrient-rich foods, such as acerola (a natural source of vitamin C), flaxseed oil or fish oil as a source of omega 3 fats, and sea vegetables, such as kelp, as a source of iodine and important trace minerals. Stocks, bone broths and stews, which were popular in years gone by, are wonderfully nutritious. Acidic wine or vinegar added during the cooking of broth helps draw minerals from the bones into the broth.

Just as important as the foods to include are the foods to avoid — sugary foods such as lollies, cakes and soft drinks; vegetable oils; processed foods, and foods laden with preservatives, flavourings and colourings.

Self-administration of vitamins and minerals is a gamble. If you want an individualised prescription, it's best to go to an expert.

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington 2002)

Dr Christiane Northrup's *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* (Piatkus, London 1998) is a big book — over 800 pages — but is an incredibly comprehensive collection on everything from feminine intelligence and intuition to menopause, diet and exercise.

Avoid microwave ovens

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 research has shown that microwaving may have negative effects on fats and proteins, making them harder to assimilate. Eating microwaved food alters the blood profile, similar to that in the early stages of cancer. Resist using microwave ovens and never warm a baby's bottle in one.

For more:

www.mercola.com

Sidestep the soy

Soy is not the health food it has been claimed to be. In Asia, traditional fermented soy products, such as tempeh and miso, which are usually made with organically grown soybeans, 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 number of problems. They are hard to digest, highly allergic and depress thyroid function. Their phytic acid content also restricts absorption of essential minerals. In the West, we have taken the soy idea too far and eaten it in excess.

Despite the promotion of soy as an excellent food for menopausal women, there is little in the way of strong research evidence to support this. If you are experiencing mild hot flashes, at this stage, the best advice may be to look at where you can make a difference to your lifestyle. (see page 20).

For more:

Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions* (NewTrends Publishing, Washington 2002)

www.mercola.com

Say goodbye to cellulite

Cellulite is caused by a combination of factors — a sluggish lymphatic system, weakened connective tissue, not enough exercise, not enough muscle and too much fat!

Exercise is a big part of the solution to cellulite, especially resistance training with weights that develops lean muscle. Exercise, and drinking plenty of pure water, will also improve the function of the lymphatic system.

For more:

Ann Louise Gittleman's *The Fat Flush Plan* (McGraw-Hill, New York 2002)

Maximise digestion

Good digestion is imperative. If digestion is not up to par, digestive enzyme or hydrochloric acid supplements can help. Probiotic supplements, as well as fermented foods, such as miso and cultured milk products, are also great for replenishing gut flora. An occasional course of probiotics helps maintain healthy digestion.

For more:

www.bodyecologydiet.com

Pass on the Pill

Today's oral contraceptives are made up of estrogen/progestin formulations (the 'Combination Pill') or progestin only (the 'Mini Pill' or implants such as Depo-Provera). Although we are told the Pill is safe, research shows that it increases our risk of coronary artery disease, breast cancer, cervical cancer, infertility, strokes, liver dysfunction, nutritional deficiencies and high blood pressure. The risks increase with the length of use.

Any woman taking the Pill should be taking supplements to address the vitamin and mineral deficiencies it brings about.

The Pill is a potent steroid. While it may have at one stage seemed like a Godsend, the price women have paid for convenience is too high. Author Sherrill Sellman suggests we get back in touch with our feminine wisdom and learn about the cycles of our bodies and how to manage our fertility naturally.

For more:

Sherrill Sellman's *Hormone Heresy* (GetWell International, Tulsa 2000) or her article, *A Bitter Pill to Swallow — The Oral Contraceptives Betrayal* (Light Unlimited Productions, Box Hill 2000)

Replace HRT naturally

Since research has raised concern about the safety of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), it is important that we find viable alternatives.

Menopausal symptoms can be the result of unbalanced lifestyles rather than estrogen deficiency. While we do have lower estrogen levels at menopause, this is a natural adjustment to a time when nature no longer intends us to be bearing and rearing children. It does not imply 'estrogen deficiency'.

In fact, many women have too much estrogen in their bodies. Stress, nutritional deficiencies and contact with estrogenic substances in pesticides, herbicides and plastics all contribute to it. Symptoms of too much estrogen include lower sex drive, irritability, depression, memory loss and fatigue — the exact same symptoms often taken as signs of estrogen deficiency!

An excess of estrogen relative to progesterone causes PMS and can be a precursor to breast cancer.

Authors such as Dr John Lee and Sherrill Sellman have pointed out that the missing factor in balancing our hormones at menopause may not be estrogen but natural progesterone, and some women benefit from natural progesterone.

The currently preferred hormone replacement is with 'bio-identical' hormones. These replicate your own hormones rather than being chemical 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 too many sweets, trans fats, fried foods, foods containing hormones or antibiotics, aspartame, alcohol and refined starches; get regular exercise and good sleep; drink plenty of filtered water; deal with unresolved emotional issues; and meditate or use some other form of relaxation. If your lifestyle is healthy, the assistance you need to manage menopausal symptoms is likely to be minor.

For more:

Dr Marilyn Glenville's *The New Natural Alternatives to HRT* (Kyle Cathie Ltd, London 2002)

Dr John Lee's books *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Menopause* [1997] and *What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Perimenopause* [1999] (Warner Books, New York). His website is at www.johnleemd.com

Dr Christiane Northrup's *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* (Piatkus, London 1998)

Sherrill Sellman's *Hormone Heresy* (GetWell International, Tulsa 2000). See her website at www.ssellman.com

Deal with depression

The incidence of depression is rising rapidly in Western societies, 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.

For more:

Julia Ross's *The Mood Cure* (Thorsons, Los Angeles 2002)

Love your liver

The liver is the largest organ in the body and researchers believe it's involved in about 400 different functions — so you need to take good care of yours.

A big glass of warm water with lemon is a great start to the day. The lemon aids bile formation (bile is the greenish substance made in the gall bladder that sits under and works in tandem with your liver).

Bile is essential for liver health and fat metabolism. Other liver favourites are eggs, cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts), onions and garlic, flaxseed oil, ginger root, turmeric and milk thistle.

What causes liver problems? Alcohol, caffeine, sugar, trans fats, insufficient fibre and some medications (anti-diabetic drugs, anti-convulsants, estrogens 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.

For more:

Many people swear by Dr Sandra Cabot's *The Liver Cleansing Diet*. See her website at www.liverdoctor.com

Ann Louise Gittleman's *The Fat Flush Plan* (McGraw-Hill, New York 2002)

Care for your adrenals

In our culture of rushing and juggling the various aspects of our lives, many of us may 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 that 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'll be 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.

You can 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 taking beneficial supplements, such as vitamins B5 and C and licorice root extract.

For more:

Julia Ross's *The Diet Cure* (Penguin, Ringwood 2000) and *The Mood Cure* (Thorsons, Los Angeles 2002)

Drink more (filtered) water

Water should comprise 70 per cent of your food intake, so be sure to drink at least six big glasses of pure water each day. You need more if you are in air conditioning or travelling in planes, both of which are dehydrating. (Dehydration is a major cause of ageing.)

A good way to start the day is with a glass or two of filtered water or a big glass of warm water with a squeeze of lemon — it's a great liver toner. Often we think we are hungry when really we are thirsty.

Don't drink tap water. When it's the only option it's better to boil it, expose it to the sun and aerate it before you drink it.

A great investment that will eliminate harmful bacteria, minerals and toxins is a reverse osmosis water filter.

For more:

www.mercola.com

Julia Ross's *The Diet Cure* (Penguin, Ringwood 2000)

Avoid colds

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, fruit and vegetables, and good fats. Include anti-viral foods such as garlic and coconut. Olive leaf extract also inhibits the growth of viruses. If you do get a cold, try taking zinc lozenges in frequent small doses, such as a quarter of a tablet every 30 minutes.

For more:

www.mercola.com

Seek a second opinion

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

It's a good idea to find a team of practitioners to support your health. The team might include a holistic doctor, a naturopath, an exercise specialist, a yoga teacher, a Chinese medicine practitioner, or an osteopath — whoever you believe can help you live a vital, balanced life.

Kick the coffee habit

Coffee is the most widely used drug in the world, and even though it's probably a lot less dangerous to our health than soft drink and fruit juice, it puts stress on our liver and kidneys, worsens insulin sensitivity, aggravates PMS, increases the loss of some nutrients (vitamins B and C, and minerals calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium and zinc) and causes bone loss. Caffeine also boosts the secretion of the stress hormone cortisol, and this ultimately reduces our capacity to manage stress.

Coffee lovers should aim to cut down, limit the sugar taken with it and switch to organic brands (coffee is heavily sprayed). Good alternatives for a warm drink are dandelion root tea/coffee, red (rooibos) tea, or herbal teas such as rosehip, peppermint, fennel, ginger or chamomile. Don't drink lots of regular tea as an alternative to coffee. Black and green teas also contain caffeine, although only about half the amount found in coffee.

For more:

Mim Beim's *Nutrition for Slobs* (ABC Books, Sydney 2001)

Read labels

Not just on food, but also on products you put on your face and body. A report released in 2002 (called *Not Too Pretty*) by a coalition of environmental and health professionals found that 72 per cent of the brand name off-the-shelf cosmetic and beauty products tested (including nail polish, hairspray, perfume, mousse, hair gel, deodorants, skin creams) contained dangerous chemicals called phthalates (pronounced 'thalates').

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.

How do you recognise phthalates on the label? Look for diethyl phthalate (DEP), di-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), di-butyl phthalate (DBP), benzyl butyl phthalate (BBP), and di-isononyl phthalate (DINP). Avoid products containing phthalates — there are plenty of safe alternatives.

For more:

To download the report, go to www.ewg.org and click on cosmetics, then scroll down to *Not Too Pretty*.

Make time to meditate

You need to heal yourself of the effects of stress nearly every day. Stress comes from a variety of sources — work, relationships, food, and your environment. If you don't let go of it, the tension will build and may alter your body's chemistry in the long term. Stress is now considered a prime cause of disease.

When you meditate, you empty your mind of thoughts. Some people do this by focusing on their breath, others focus on an object, such as a candle or a flower, and some people tune into the sound vibration of music or chanting. Meditation can alter brain wave patterns, heart rates, blood pressure — indeed, the entire immune system.

There's a range of other relaxation and visualisation techniques you can use to feel positive, peaceful, well and nurtured. These include autogenic training which involves progressively tightening and relaxing the parts of your body from top to bottom or vice versa. (Or you could just relax each body part by having it feel warm and heavy.)

Visualisation is unlimited. In your mind's eye you could see your busy mind transformed into calm lake, or rinsing the stress of the day from your body by standing under a healing waterfall. You can even try imagining that you're wrapping your tension in a package and tying it to a balloon that floats up in the air and takes it far beyond the horizon.

Some people create a special place to meditate or relax, but you can do it anywhere — on the bus if need be! If meditation doesn't appeal, at least make time to let your mind rest by, for example, writing in a journal, spending time in nature or listening to relaxing CDs.

For more:

Stephen Austin has written a beautifully illustrated book, *Meditation for Everyday Living* (Godsfield Press, Hampshire 2002).

A well-known meditation teacher in Australia is Ian Gawler, who after recovering from cancer in the 1970s, has taught tens of thousands of people to meditate in his workshops. His books include *Meditation Pure and Simple* (Hill of Content, Melbourne 2001) and a new edition of *Peace of Mind* (Michelle Anderson Publishing, Melbourne 2002).

Sweat away toxins

Since we are the first generation of human beings to be exposed to such a cocktail of chemicals, and since these chemicals have been implicated in so many illnesses, it makes sense to find ways to remove as much of the chemical buildup in our bodies as possible.

Saunas increase elimination, detoxify the body, make infections heal more quickly and help drain sinuses. They're also safe. You can even buy portable saunas to use at home.

Get good sleep

When the light bulb allowed us to turn night into day, we lost touch with the natural rhythms of work and rest. Too little or too much sleep are major health risks. Some experts say that we need between seven and nine hours, and we get the best sleep by being in bed by 10.00pm. Others say that what counts is the quality of our 'deep sleep'. Sir Winston Churchill was known to sleep only a few hours at night, and to supplement his sleep with catnaps.

Work out how much you need to feel refreshed and ensure you get it most of the time. If you consistently sacrifice sleep to meet other people's demands, ultimately you pay the price with your health. If you have difficulty getting to sleep, work out whether what prevents you from sleeping is something physical, mental or emotional, and take steps to deal with it. Eating good food and keeping your blood sugar balanced, getting enough exercise, taking some time for yourself and finding effective ways to reduce stress will support you in getting good sleep.

For more:

www.mercola.com

Breathe!

Breathing connects your awareness to your thoughts, movements and emotions. It's what helps you unite and balance 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 are still, observing the rhythm of your breath and being aware of it, your mind is in the present and your fears and negative thinking dissolve. Breathing can be stimulating or calming, depending on the type of breath you use. It can also be healing and energising.

In recent years, recognition of the beneficial effect of the breath has encouraged huge interest throughout the Western world in Eastern practices such as yoga, qigong (or chi-gung) and tai chi.

Even spending just a few moments each day, preferably in nature, breathing away any tension and breathing in peace and calm makes a difference. The extra oxygen in the body is very refreshing.

For more:

Gary Khor's *Tai Chi for Fitness Over 40* (Simon & Schuster, Sydney 2002)

There are so many attractive books now available on yoga or Pilates, the choice is yours. Find one that appeals to you — or better yet, go to a class.

Don't smoke

Smoking puts a major stress on the body and is a risk factor for heart disease, stroke, lung disease, osteoporosis and a number of cancers. Smoking while taking the Pill doubles the risk of blood clots and strokes, and is a definite no-no.

Women who smoke should see a practitioner to address the nutritional deficiencies it brings about.

For more:

Mim Beim's *Nutrition for Slobs* (ABC Books, Sydney 2001)

Settle unresolved issues

Guilt, anger, resentment and anxiety are powerful causes of disease, but when we let them go, our bodies begin healing themselves. The brain regulates all of our other organs. It also influences our immunity. So it's not only good food that nourishes us — good thoughts also keep us well. Peace, love, faith, happiness, enthusiasm, self-confidence, acceptance and forgiveness are recipes for lasting health.

When we can accept people and circumstances as they are, and are willing to create a future that excites us, it shows in our bodies.

For more:

Read any of Dr Bernie Siegel's books, such as *Living, Loving and Healing* (Aquarian Press, London 1993)

Keep plants at work

A lot of common plants can remove indoor pollutants that come from adhesives, varnishes, carpeting, vinyl or rubber moulding, particle board, copying machines, cleaning agents and pesticides. Some of the key pollutants are formaldehyde, benzene and trichloroethylene.

Philodendron, aloe vera, pothos, chrysanthemums, mother-in-law's tongue and spider plants can remove formaldehyde. Marginata, peace lily and gerberas reduce concentrations of benzene and trichloroethylene.

Listen to classical music

While rock music stimulates the nervous system, classical music — especially Baroque music, which comes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries — soothes it. So when you need balance and calm, it's time for Bach or Handel.

For more:

Try Don Campbell's set of five CDs entitled, *Music for the Mozart Effect*. The first CD is to aid learning and intelligence, the second is to heal the body, the third is for encouraging creativity, the fourth brings focus and clarity to study and projects, and the fifth is for relaxation and unwinding. Don Campbell has also written a book, *The Mozart Effect* (Hodder, Sydney 2001).

Your choice of classical music is a matter of taste, so look for composers, orchestras and pieces that *you* find uplifting.

Take breaks

A go-go-go lifestyle has its price. We all need breaks. Remember to get out in nature as much as possible, spend time connecting with people in a relaxed atmosphere, do things that are fun for you, take holidays and feed your spirit.

Ahhh ... aromatherapy

Aromatherapy is much more than smelling beautiful oils. 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 energising; and
- bergamot and ylang-ylang are calming.

Instead of reaching for a coffee or something sweet to counter the mid-afternoon blahs, try lavender or rosemary. Essential oils can be used in many ways — as sprays, scented candles and incense, in bath gel, massage oils, moisturisers or burners, or simply by smelling the oil. Find a good aromatherapy shop and indulge.

For more:

Horst Rechelbacher's *Aveda Rituals* (Henry Holt and Company, New York 1999). Rechelbacher is the founder of Aveda beauty products. In *Aveda Rituals* he outlines his daily rituals, including the use of aromatherapy. He also covers meditation, organic food, massage and the Ayurvedic approach to wellbeing.

For delicious aromatherapy recipes, see Judy Chapman's *Aromatherapy — Recipes For Your Oil Burner* (HarperCollins, Sydney 2000).

Cultivate relationships

Connectedness keeps us healthy — even if that connection is with the cat! Relationships are our base, our foundation, and we need to take care of them. A woman has fewer labour complications when there's another woman there to rub her back and hold her hand. The healthiest old people are the ones who are the most socially active. We must tend to our relationships. Putting them first helps guarantee a healthy future.

Nurture yourself

Day to day, a lot of us live in our heads. We're on automatic pilot, juggling work, families, home life, appointments and countless other things. Women often take on the task of keeping everything working for everyone else — husbands, bosses, children, parents. But if you spend your life looking after everyone but yourself, sooner or later you suffer. Nurturing yourself is grounding and it's essential for your wellbeing. You can't fill another's cup if your own is empty.

You can nurture yourself in many ways, using all of your senses. Eat nourishing food and pure water. Breathe fresh air or the aromas of essential oils. Listen to soothing or uplifting sounds and music. Meditate.

Create spaces to live, work and relax that are attractive and welcoming to the spirit. Exercise. Have sex, a massage, hugs and cuddles. Do yoga or tai chi. Bathe and pamper yourself. Seek support from health professionals. Spend time in nature.

You are unique and you must decide what you need to feel grounded and nourished. When life gets really challenging, it's time to take special care of yourself. Get more sleep, eat well and find some nurturing activities.

For more:

Need a nudge to relax the furrow in your brow? Try reading Richard Carlson's *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff ... And It's All Small Stuff* (Bantam, Sydney 1997). Richard's wife Kristine has written a companion volume called, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff — For Women* (Bantam, Sydney 2001).

Nelly Kaufer and Carol Osmer-Newhouse's *A Woman's Guide to Spiritual Renewal* (HarperCollins, San Francisco 1994) has two parts: healing your spiritual alienation and seeking spiritual connection.

Horst Rechelbacher's *Aveda Rituals* (Henry Holt and Company, New York 1999)

Have a regular massage

Massage soothes away the tension in the body and strengthens the immune system. Have massages regularly. Enroll in a massage course with a friend and swap massages. Even when you don't have much time, having your scalp, hands or feet massaged is a treat. And if you're by yourself, self-massage is a great alternative.

For more:

John W. Travis and Regina Sara Ryan's *simply well* (Ten Speed Press, Berkley 2001). This pair has been working and writing together on holistic approaches to healthy living since the 1970s. This book covers a broad range of topics — massage is just one of them.

Say no (at least sometimes!)

As much as it's tempting to say yes to everything, you need time for naps and daydreams and moonlit walks and baths and good books and playing ...

Stay away from supermarkets

Unless you love queues and the smell of plastic, it's much more pleasant to shop in a way that soothes your soul. Go to the farmers' market and enjoy the colours and textures and being outside. Or investigate food co-ops or wholefood shops.

Move! Every day

Exercise gives you more 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 are much less likely to contract diabetes, heart disease, stroke and a range of cancers.

A lot of us think we're too busy to exercise. The truth is, we don't understand the importance of exercising or the cost of not exercising, so we never make it a priority.

When our bodies decline we wrongly assume it's 'just old age' and that it's inevitable. It's not. Exercising is one of the most important things we can do for our health.

As with eating, you need to work out what activity suits you best. Some women love the water, some don't. Some women were born to run and many of us definitely weren't. Here are a few tips for enjoying a fit lifestyle.

- Exercise with a friend or fitness buddy, a partner or a personal trainer to keep motivated.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise — take a drink bottle.
- Be time smart by combining walking with socialising: instead of meeting a friend for coffee, meet for a walk. Use exercise time as a chance to talk with your partner or children, or do strength training while listening to a favourite radio program.
- Exercise at a consistent time if possible. Plan. Make a regular appointment for exercise.
- Make it fun and don't overdo it.
- Warm up and cool down, and always stretch after exercising.
- Wear comfortable gear.

There are ways to get extra exercise time during the day. Walk the dog, get off the bus a couple of stops early and walk the rest of the way, walk to the local shop rather than drive, or use a toilet on a different floor at work. If you don't have time to do one main exercise session of, say, 30 minutes, break it up into 10-minute bursts.

For more:

Dr Mark Awerbuch's *Live Longer, Live Stronger* (McGraw-Hill, Sydney 2001) is an excellent book, especially for the over 40s.

Joanna Hall's *The Exercise Bible* (Kyle Cathie, London 2002) is a practical and beautifully illustrated book containing lots of sample exercise programs for women.

Be strong

We can all benefit from being stronger. Western women nowadays are probably physically weaker than most other women in history.

After age 40 women start to lose muscle, which makes us weaker and less flexible. So even if you haven't put on weight, exercise is important to retain your muscle and bone. If we as women don't halt our muscle and bone loss, by the time we're 80 we will have one-third the muscle we had at age 40. Since muscle is what burns the kilojoules, losing muscle means putting on fat. That's why we so often get fatter as we get older.

With strength training, the changes go the opposite way. Strength training boosts the metabolism, tones and trims the body, and ensures retention of muscle and bone and loss of fat. It's absolutely our best defence against osteoporosis. It also improves balance and joint flexibility, and the increased feeling of competence and wellbeing it brings boosts self-esteem and self-confidence. Strength training is the secret to making your body more youthful!

One of the concerns a lot of women have about strength training is that they'll get big and bulky like body builders, but body builders follow extreme programs. Strength training for health is not at all extreme. Even women with a naturally heavy and muscular build won't necessarily get bigger by doing weight training — it all depends on the program they follow. Another concern some women have about strength training is that they won't be strong enough to lift weights. But you don't have to be strong to do weight training — it will make you strong!

For more:

Dr Mark Awerbuch's *Live Longer, Live Stronger* (McGraw-Hill, Sydney 2001)

Dr Miriam Nelson's *Strong Women Stay Young* (Lothian Books, Melbourne 1997); *Strong Women Stay Slim* (Lothian, Melbourne 1998); *Strong Women, Strong Bones* (Lothian, Melbourne 2000); and *Strong Women Eat Well* (Berkley Publishing Group, New York 2001). See also www.strongwomen.com

Tone up your pelvic floor

Strength training doesn't just mean lifting weights. Some exercise programs — for example, those that use a fitball or Swiss ball — strengthen our deep abdominal and spinal muscles, which stabilise the core area around the spine. This helps prevent lower back injuries and tone the pelvic floor muscles (they run from our pubic bone at the front to our tailbone at the back, and they work in conjunction with our other core stabilising muscles).

These muscles get stretched in pregnancy and weakened by hormonal changes, and a weak pelvic floor can contribute to backache and a spreading tummy.

Pilates is another form of exercise that benefits our core stabilising muscles.

For more:

Anna Louise Bouvier's book, *Fix Your Back* is an easy read for anyone interested in improving posture, stretching stiff muscles or strengthening the stabilising muscles. There's a section on page 84 about training the pelvic floor.

Lisa Westlake's *Strong to the Core* (ABC Books, Sydney 2002) outlines a comprehensive set of fitball exercises.

Have a healthy heart

The kind of exercise that is best for keeping a healthy heart is 'aerobic' exercise — the sort that keeps you moving continuously and gets you puffing. Aerobic exercise, such as walking, jogging, kayaking, dancing, swimming, roller blading or cycling, tames the appetite, improves circulation and breathing, helps burn fat in the abdominal area and gives an emotional lift. Swimming and cycling support body weight so they're easy on joints.

For health benefits, you need to do aerobic exercise at least three times a week for at least 20 minutes. But if you want to burn fat, you need to do more. The fitter you are, the better your body can burn fat. So, if weight loss is your goal, you'll need to build up to working longer and harder.

For more:

Dr Mark Awerbuch's *Live Longer, Live Stronger* (McGraw-Hill, Sydney 2001)

Joanna Hall's *The Exercise Bible* (Kyle Cathie, London 2002)

S-t-r-e-t-c-h

This is the aspect of fitness many of us skip, but having flexible muscles and joints gives us a greater mobility and ensures we don't injure ourselves. Stretching is also good for our bones — the pull of the muscles against the bones stimulates bone growth.

Some of us have some structurally tight muscles that upset our alignment, and we need to stretch to keep pain free or to give us more range of movement.

It's a good idea to warm up your body a little before stretching — walk or jog until you are slightly warm, then do your stretching. The muscles you stretch will depend on the exercise you are doing or which particular muscles are tighter in your body. Hold each stretch for at least 15 seconds.

For more:

Anna-Louise Bouvier's *Fix Your Back* (ABC Books, Sydney 2002)

Francine St George's *Bodyworks* (ABC Books, Sydney 2002)

Ignore weight loss gizmos

Don't spend money on anything that promises to vibrate away 'love handles' or melt spare tyres while you lie swathed in plastic. Firming your body and burning fat take consistent exercise and balanced nutrition. Anything that promises to do it for you is a scam.

Set goals and pick up after setbacks

You need to decide what you want for your health and set specific goals, preferably something you can accomplish in two to three months. Find a way of monitoring your achievements, so you can see yourself reaching your goal.

Sometimes you'll miss your morning walk or eat everything you promised yourself you'd avoid. At those times, simply acknowledge it and recommit to your goal.

Sometimes you'll find you've set a goal that is unrealistic. Again, acknowledge it and create a new goal that is challenging but achievable.

It's important to reward yourself when you reach your goal. Go somewhere wonderful for the weekend or buy that new dress!

For more:

www.mygoals.com

Eat outside

Have more picnics! All that's needed is a big blanket, a shady hat, food that's healthy and easy to eat, and a few friends.

Think chemical-free

Not just for your food and water, but under your kitchen sink and in your bathroom cupboard. Many of us keep a chemical cocktail in our homes! A 15-year study found that women who worked from home had more chance of dying from cancer than women who worked outside the home. The difference was attributed to the daily exposure of women at home to hazardous chemicals from household cleaning products.

Consider using more health-friendly cleaning products, such as white vinegar, bicarb soda, hydrogen peroxide or plain liquid soap. Spraying bacteria contaminated surfaces with three per cent hydrogen peroxide and white vinegar (one after the other in either order) is more effective than commercial disinfectants. The same sprays are also excellent for cleaning fruit and vegetables.

In addition, vinegar cleans glass and cuts grease, while hydrogen peroxide is a remedy for clogged drains. Use the bicarb soda whenever an abrasive cleaner is needed.

We also need to be conscious of the chemicals in products we use on our bodies. Don't use anything that irritates your skin, and avoid nail polish if it makes you unwell or if your immune system is weak. Revlon and L'Oreal make nail polish without the toxic chemicals toluene and formaldehyde. Look for organic cotton menstrual products at wholefood stores rather than use chlorine bleached synthetic products. The dioxin released during the bleaching is a known carcinogen.

For more:

You'll get lots of ideas for chemical-free living from www.safe2use.com or www.alternativemedicine.com.

Be comfortable with uncertainty

Nothing in life is permanent — our looks, relationships, jobs, homes, environment and thoughts all change — yet we live like life is certain and absolute. It's not! The only thing we can count on is the unexpected.

We pretend we aren't going to die, but if we can acknowledge that we are, and that we may have no clue as to when it will happen, we can live richer, more vibrant and more meaningful lives. People with life-threatening diseases often say they only learned how to live when they confronted dying.

Don't wait! Identify the life of your dreams, the one you long to live, and start living it straight away!

For more:

For a fun little book see Maureen Smith's *Full Tilt Living* (Red Wheel/Weiser, York Beach 2001). This is a book about 'finding the juicy parts' of life.

Fall in love with yourself

When you look in the mirror and you're tempted to criticise the bits of yourself you think aren't perfect, it's time to stop! And smile instead. It's important to be proud of yourself. Stand up straight. Feel sexy. Expect miracles. Your body will feel better and life will be sweeter when you walk tall and wear a big smile.

You must be your own source of approval. You don't need to satisfy anyone else. In fact, being compliant to win other people's love and approval can make you sick: when you suppress yourself, you suppress your immunity. So revel in being your unique self!

For more:

Kaz Cooke's book, *Real Gorgeous — The Truth About Body and Beauty* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney 1994). As the cover says, it will make you laugh and help you make friends with your body!

Get inspired

Joy and fulfillment keep us healthy. But how much are we experiencing? It's valuable to take a look at your life and be honest. Is there any area where you've given up and settled for something? Often, things happen in life and we put our own interpretations on them. If we feel hurt, humiliated or frustrated we put up the emotional shutters to protect ourselves.

Maybe we sacrifice our passion and grow cynical, stop having fun and get serious, or give up our openness and withdraw.

Mistakes and rocky patches are a part of living. You mustn't let them mean anything! You can put the past behind you and become innocent again. Read any book by SARK — she has a talent for getting us back in touch with our sense of wonder. Get involved in a project, find something to get passionate and inspired about — just because you can. — You'll feel your energy soar!

For more:

Stephanie Dowrick, author of books such as *The Universal Heart* on relationships, has developed a pack of 100 inspirational cards called *Every Day a New Beginning*. A wonderful way to start each day.

Or try Gael Lindenfield's little book *Shortcuts to Finding Your Get Up and Go* (Thorsons, London 2002).

SARK's books include *The Bodacious Book of Succulence* (Simon & Schuster, New York 1998). Others are *Transformation Soup*; *Eating Mangoes Naked*; *Prosperity Pie*; and *Succulent Wild Women*. The titles say it all!

A brilliant book on the journey to self-realisation is Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now* (Hodder, Sydney 1999).

Want something extra? Do the Landmark Forum. It's a three-day program that will transform your life. Some of it may remind you of Tolle's work. See www.landmarkeducation.com or www.top100.com where the program is rated the number two adventure in the world, behind space travel!

Think young

Our vitality declines with age, not because of our age, but because we expect it to! We 'know' that it's 'normal' to put on weight in middle age. We 'get old' because we have learned that's what we are supposed to do. We look around us and do what's expected.

If ageing is something that happens to us we have no control over it, but what if getting old is just something we've learned? We can unlearn it! Our minds influence every cell in our bodies, and we are the ones who control our thoughts.

So you can think yourself old, avoid new challenges, and accept extra weight, illness or a loss of mobility as inevitable, or you can live every minute with gusto and commit to feeling fit and fabulous no matter how old you are. How exciting!

Having a good belly laugh is another good way to stay young.

For more:

Deepak Chopra's *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* (Harmony Books, New York 1993)

Be grateful

We have what most of the world's people will never have — plenty of food, clean running water, warm beds, and hot showers. Give thanks ... and keep smiling!

Your Living fit and well summary

Keep your blood sugar balanced. Follow the guidelines for balancing your blood sugar: eat every four hours, eat protein at every meal, and include low glycemic carbohydrates (especially vegetables) and some healthy fats. This is an important key to living a long and healthy life.

Understand the 'GI'. The glycemic index indicates how quickly carbohydrates are converted to glucose in your body. Understanding the GI will help you balance your blood sugar.

Eat your veggies. They're full of water, vitamins, minerals and fibre and they help prevent many common degenerative diseases — but we don't eat enough of them.

Watch the sugar and salt. Use stevia to sweeten your food and mineral rich Celtic sea salt instead of table salt.

Build strong bones. Osteoporosis is not caused by a calcium or estrogen deficiency. It's a lifestyle disease.

Know the facts about fat and cholesterol. Fat is not a dirty word, unless you mean the 'trans fats' (as in margarine) which should be avoided. Most of us don't eat enough of the healthy omega 3 fats.

Be wary of 'fat free' foods. They're often packed with sugar or dangerous artificial sweeteners and can be high in kilojoules.

Go organic. Eating organic foods, including organic meats and dairy products, is the best policy for your health.

Be alert to allergies. The big three are grains high in gluten (wheat, oats, barley, rye), cow's milk and sugar.

Kiss dieting goodbye. When you diet your body thinks you are starving so it slows your metabolism and you accumulate more fat — exactly the opposite of what you want!

Eat what's right for you. There is no one-size-fits-all diet, so observe how your body responds to the foods you eat.

Soak foods for better digestion. This 'predigests' foods such as grains and legumes, making their nutrients more available.

Toss the boxed breakfast cereals. They're made with extreme heat and pressure, which alters the chemistry of the grain and makes them an unsuitable food.

Think twice about vegetarianism. Animal products contain nutrients that cannot be replicated by plant foods, so if you are a vegan or a vegetarian, be rigorous about getting a balance of nutrients and seek advice on supplementation.

Take vitamins and minerals naturally. Choose nutrient-rich foods, avoid the foods that are nutrient depleting, and get expert advice on supplementation.

Avoid microwave ovens. Microwaved food is harder to assimilate, and eating it causes our blood profile to become similar to that of people with early stages of cancer.

Sidestep the soy. There are problems with some modern soy products and Westerners eat them in excess.

Say goodbye to cellulite. The right kind of exercise and plenty of pure water is a big part of the solution.

Maximise digestion. Digestion is vital, so use digestive enzymes, hydrochloric acid supplements, probiotics or fermented and cultured food to maximise it.

Pass on the Pill. The Pill depletes our bodies of nutrients and increases our risk of disease. In relying on it we've lost touch with our feminine wisdom.

Replace HRT naturally. Many of us actually have too much estrogen at menopause, rather than too little. A healthy lifestyle is the best preparation for a healthy menopause.

Deal with Depression. Exercise, meditation, keeping your blood sugar balanced, and increasing your intake of omega 3 fats can help avoid or reduce depression.

Love your liver. Your liver is involved in about 400 different functions, so it's important to develop a lifestyle that's kind to it.

Care for your adrenals. In our busy culture, many of us have depleted adrenal glands, and this affects all of our body's functions. Keeping blood sugar balanced, getting enough relaxation, and limiting alcohol, coffee and tobacco will help keep adrenals healthy.

Drink more (filtered) water. Dehydration is ageing, so be sure to drink six to eight big glasses of water each day — but don't drink tap water.

Avoid colds. Get enough sleep, keep active, minimise stress and eat healthily. If you do get a cold, use zinc lozenges.

Seek a second opinion. The medical system doesn't always operate in our interests, so trust your intuition and develop a team of practitioners you can rely on.

Kick the coffee habit. Coffee stresses the body and there are plenty of healthier alternatives, but if you can't imagine life without it, try cutting down, limiting the sugar you have with it, and choosing an organic brand.

Read labels. Avoid cosmetics or beauty products that contain 'phthalates' — they're plasticisers that can increase the risk of birth defects.

Make time to meditate. Stress is a major cause of disease, so learn to let go of it through regular meditation or use of relaxation techniques.

Sweat away toxins. Saunas are a great way to help remove the buildup of chemicals in our bodies.

Get good sleep. Find the ideal amount for you and do everything to ensure you get it most of the time.

Breathe! Observing your breath teaches your body to relax. It's central to practices such as yoga, qigong and tai chi.

Don't smoke. Smoking increases our risk of disease and smokers need to take supplements to compensate for the effect of smoking on their bodies. Smoking plus the Pill is a no-no.

Settle unresolved issues. It's not only good food that nourishes us, good thoughts also keep us well. When we let go negative emotions, our bodies begin healing themselves.

Keep plants at work. They can remove many indoor pollutants. Listen to classical music. It soothes the soul.

Take breaks. We all need them. Get out in nature, have fun, take holidays, feed your spirit.

Ahhh ... aromatherapy. Instead of reaching for a coffee or something sweet to counter the mid-afternoon blahs, try lavender or rosemary.

Cultivate relationships. Connectedness keeps us healthy. It's another good reason for giving your relationships priority.

Nurture yourself. If you spend your life looking after everyone but yourself, sooner or later you suffer. Find ways to keep grounded and nurtured.

Have a regular massage. Massage takes away tension and increases immunity. Even self-massage is great.

Say no (at least sometimes!). You need 'you' time!

Stay away from supermarkets. Head for the farmers' market or the wholefoods shop instead. Shop in a way that soothes your soul.

Move! Every day. Exercise is another key to staying young, and there are lots of ways to fit it into your lifestyle.

Be strong. Muscle is what burns kilojoules, but after age 40 we lose muscle. That means we put on more fat. Strength training is the secret to keeping trim and toned.

Tone up your pelvic floor. Stabilising the muscles around the spine tones up your pelvic floor muscles and prevents lower back injuries.

Have a healthy heart. To keep a healthy heart you need to do at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise (the sort that keeps you moving continuously and gets you puffing) three times a week.

S-t-r-e-t-c-h. It's the aspect of fitness many of us skip, but it's good for our bones, gives us more mobility and prevents injuries.

Ignore weight loss gizmos. Exercise and good nutrition are the only way to lose weight.

Set goals and pick up after setbacks. Set health goals you can achieve in two or three months. When you stray from your goal just get back on track, and when you finally achieve it, celebrate!

Eat outside. Have more picnics!

Think chemical-free. Look for chemical-free options when you choose household cleaners and cosmetic and beauty products.

Be comfortable with uncertainty. All we can be sure of is that one day we'll die, so start living the life of your dreams straight away.

Fall in love with yourself. You have to be your own source of approval. You don't need to satisfy anyone else.

Get inspired. Find something to get passionate and inspired about — just because you can!

Think young. We get old because we expect to get old. What if we don't have to? What if we can feel fit and fabulous no matter how old we are?

Be grateful. We have what most of the world's people will never have. Let's give thanks ... and keep smiling.

Your shopping guide for *Living fit and well*

Food and drink

This list is not exhaustive. Just remember to read labels, keep a balanced approach, buy organic wherever you can, and choose food that suits your digestion and metabolism.

Fresh vegetables: Choose a variety, including the cruciferous family (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts), Asian greens (such as Chinese cabbage and bok choy), and onions and garlic. Other low GI vegetables include mushrooms, zucchini and green beans.

Fresh fruit: Again, choose a variety. Low GI fruit includes apples, pears, pineapple, apricots, strawberries and cherries.

Animal protein foods: Eggs, meat, fish, chicken and dairy products, such as yoghurt.

Meat bones if you want to make broth for soups and stews

Dried sea vegetables: Products such as wakame, hijiki and kombu. Just soak these in water and add to soups, stews and stir fries. They're a great source of iodine.

Miso: Use this for flavouring soups or just add hot water to make a broth that you can drink as is.

Your favourite herbs and spices. They taste great and some are particularly good for you.

Legumes and whole grains (including long cooking porridge grain)

Virgin olive oil, butter, ghee or coconut oil for cooking. Use olive oil or flaxseed oil on salads. Also look for other healthy fat-rich foods such as avocado, coconut milk, olives, raw nuts, nut butters, or fish oil or flaxseed oil. (Another option is to buy flaxseed — it's also called linseed — and grind it in a blender or coffee grinder to add to porridge, yoghurt, fruit salad, soups and so on.) If you are buying flaxseed oil, be aware that some companies use processing that does not guarantee the quality of the oil. Melrose and Stoney Creek are reliable brands.

Apple cider vinegar or lemon for dressing for salad and vegetables. A squeeze of lemon in a glass of warm water also starts the day well for you and your liver.

Stevia. Use this instead of sugar or other sweeteners. It comes in a powder or liquid, so just choose what you prefer.

Celtic sea salt

Organic tea or coffee, or caffeine-free versions, such as dandelion, peppermint, ginger, rosehip or rooibos tea.

Supplements if you need them, but get expert advice first.

Kitchen and cleaning

A water filter. A reverse osmosis filter is considered by many to be the best option, but opinions on this vary, so shop around to find one that suits you.

Grease proof paper. It's a healthier alternative to plastic wrap.

Bicarb soda for when you need an abrasive cleaning agent. Or look for a chlorine-free commercial product.

White vinegar. This acts as a disinfectant and is good for cleaning glass.

Three per cent hydrogen peroxide along with vinegar makes a disinfectant and is great for unclogging drains.

Plain liquid soap for washing dishes or walls. Adding a little white vinegar cuts the grease.

Non-toxic, allergy-free products for all types of cleaning.

Personal and cosmetic

Aluminium-free deodorants

Beauty products without phthalates

Hair colour that minimises the use of phenylenediamines

Epsom salts for a relaxing bath

Nail polish without toluene or formaldehyde (eg Revlon, L'Oreal or Neways)

Unbleached, chlorine-free menstrual products

Scents made from natural ingredients

Lifestyle (or what to ask for next birthday!)

Aromatherapy oils and a burner

Plants that remove indoor pollutants

CDs of your favourite classical music

Well-fitting, supportive exercise shoes and comfortable exercise clothes; a hat or cap; a drink bottle; a fitball; personal training or yoga, meditation, Pilates, qigong or tai chi classes; or your own set of weights or resistance bands to use at home.

A massage voucher (oh, yes please!)

Fresh flowers (don't they always make you feel good?)

Books that inspire you to be happy and healthy

Anything else that makes you smile!

About Dr Rhonda Anderson

The founder of *Fit and Well*, Dr Rhonda Anderson, has spent over 30 years developing her expertise in the area of health and wellbeing.



Rhonda has a PhD in midlife women's health and an honours degree in human movement studies. She is a former Australian representative marathon runner and a qualified personal trainer with an extensive background in nutrition, stress management, women's health and education. She has been a guest speaker at a number of national conferences on women's sport, health and wellbeing.

Rhonda is a former senior manager in sport and recreation with the Queensland Government, and for several years represented Queensland on a national panel responsible for developing strategies to encourage women and girls to be physically active. She has also worked for the ABC, *The Australian*, the Australian Institute of Sport and the Tasmanian Health Department.

It was as an athlete that Rhonda first became interested in the relationship between body, mind and spirit, and she has explored this holistic relationship in many ways. She developed *Fit and Well* to support busy midlife women in living balanced, healthy lives.

For more information about *Fit and Well*, go to www.fitandwell.com.au