

10 Tricks for Tackling Health in 2014

It's easy to slip off track with our health goals during the holiday season, but the New Year is the perfect time for a fresh start. Whatever your fitness level or weight-loss goals, try incorporating one or two of these smart tricks to help you speed your results.

1. **Become "breathless".** Regardless of what types of activities you normally do, make sure to fit in cardio at least twice a week. While less aerobic activities, like yoga or weight lifting, have countless benefits, workouts that leave you breathless help jumpstart your metabolism and drop weight more quickly.
2. **Mix it up.** Some people think we're more likely to stick to a program if we create a weekly schedule and stick to it. Not me. Our lives are too hectic. Instead of committing to a specific routine – Monday night spinning, Tuesday night yoga, Wednesday night kickboxing, and so on – commit to exercising a certain number of times per week. One week you might take three morning Pilates classes, while the next week, you can only fit in lunchtime Spinning classes. This way, just because you miss your favorite workout, you don't skip the gym altogether.
3. **Add movement, whenever, wherever.** Movement is more about a lifestyle, rather than an hour-a-day commitment in a class or at the gym. It's about squeezing in health every chance you get. Here are a few tricks I love: Take a walk when you're bored. Walk home after work, the gym or dinner out instead of taking a cab or train. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk up the escalator in stores. Use bathrooms on different floors at work. Get lunch from a place further away and opt for take-out,

not delivery.

4. **Book one "Surprise Myself" exercise class each week.** After I reach my workout goal for the week, I add one more class I didn't plan on taking. I think about it as 'treat" to my health! It varies. Some weeks, I'll take a new instructor; other weeks, I'll try something completely different. I burn more calories and always find new activities I love. If surprising myself doesn't happen, I don't get discouraged because I've already hit my targets.
5. **Upgrade your salads.** Take your health up a notch by not wasting your time on romaine or mixed greens. The smarter choice? Kale, spinach, arugula and watercress, which are higher in vitamins and minerals. One you've got your base, load it with nutrient- and fiber-dense vegetables. You'll get fuller faster and cut down your calories without feeling deprived. I top mine with flax seed or extra virgin olive oil, lemon juice and herbs, rather than dressings especially when I don't know what's in them!
6. **Make veggies your main plate.** Most people follow the formula: choose your protein then build side dishes around it. I say flip the model and pick your produce first. Start with roasted veggies, salad or veggie soup, then top them with grilled chicken, poached salmon or a cup of whole grain like quinoa. Finally, use spices and herbs to jazz up flavor, rather than butter and salt. It's a great way to try new vegetables or taste combinations, rather than stick with the traditional, boring and tasteless romaine with tomatoes combo (I couldn't stick with that menu either!). Nearly all my clients start with this easy strategy to jumpstart weight loss.
7. **Keep it simple in the kitchen.** It doesn't take a culinary degree, a library of cookbooks or a pantry filled with high-tech gadgets to make a fantastic and healthy meal. Look for simple recipes that call for what

you already have in the kitchen or require 5 or fewer ingredients. If you need inspiration, try this trick: Next time you buy fish, ask the salesperson for their fastest, easiest, most flavorful preparation. Same strategy goes with dining out and delivery. Choose entrees with the fewest ingredients and simplest preparation, like grilled fish or chicken with no sauce. Cutting down on just two restaurant meals a week will dramatically change how you look and feel.

8. **Don't listen to your mother (when it comes to eating!).** Sorry, mom, but we don't have to finish what's on our plate. That's the fast track to weight gain. After a meal, you should leave feeling energized from your food, rather than lethargic and stuffed. My favorite trick? I stop eating when I feel that if I had to get up and take an easy exercise class, I could handle it. That's pretty easy to do when you eat slowly, sitting down (versus on your commute) and with the TV off.
9. **Keep healthy snacks ready to go.** Stash them everywhere you might need to nosh – your gym bag, your office, your handbag, your apartment. Snacking between meals keeps your metabolism revved and blood sugar levels balanced. Plus, when you get to meals feeling like you can eat like a horse, you usually do! Opt for raw vegetables and fresh fruit instead of processed bodega snacks. Or, make your own trail mix and divide it into small storage bags. I mix cocoa nibs, dried fruit, raw almonds and raw cashews. Sometimes I don't feel hungry, but if it's there, it's much better than grabbing a bag of chips or a high-calorie, processed bar.
10. **Remember your motivation.** Why do want to lose weight? To look better in your clothes? To feel more energetic? Or to simply improve your overall health? First, get clear about what you want, and then use that desire to inspire you throughout your journey. Train your brain to think positively and don't let negativity mess with your health (or your head!). Next, eliminate the phrase "I

can't" and replace it with a phrase that says, "I can and I will." Use this mantra to stay on track. Mine is "I can do this – I am living the Smart Life." Whenever I start making excuses to skip a workout or cheat on my diet, I say my mantra aloud and instantly feel energized.

4 Healthy Lunch Box Suggestions

It's hard enough to get kids to eat healthy, especially at school when junk food or sugary snacks seem to magically sneak their way into the cafeteria. Try these easy, nutritious lunch box ideas that your kids will actually enjoy instead of toss in the trash.

1. Switch out the traditional unhealthy white bread sandwich for something a little more interesting. One of my favorites is a vegetarian bagel sandwich, which you can re-create each week with new toppings.

Bagel Sandwich

- 1 whole grain seeded bagel
- $\frac{1}{4}$ large ripe avocado, sliced
- Pinch of sea salt
- 1 tablespoon sprouted sunflower seeds
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sprouts
- 4 thin slices cucumber

- Slice the bagel in thirds horizontally and save the middle slice for another use – smear with nut butter for your own mid-day snack. Bagels have ballooned in size over the years so the top and bottom part are plenty for a sandwich.
- Mash avocado into the bottom part of the bagel and sprinkle with sea salt, sunflower seeds and sprouts. Arrange the cucumber over the sprouts and cap with the bagel top.
- Cut in half. Wrap well or store in a snug container.
- *This is best made in the morning before school to keep the bagel fresh and soft, not soggy.*

2. Innovate classics, like PB&J, with ingredients that are so yummy, your kids won't know they're good for them. My Nut-Butter Pinwheels, for example, get their sweetness from apples and honey, not sugar-laden jelly, and the nuttiness from natural nut butters. The roll-up lavash makes them a fun finger food.

Nut-Butter Pinwheels

1 whole wheat lavash

2 tablespoons unsweetened almond, peanut or pumpkin seed butter

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup apple, chopped and unpeeled

1 teaspoon honey

2 teaspoons unsweetened granola (optional)

- Cut the lavash in half crosswise and spread both halves with the nut butter. Drizzle with honey and top with apple and granola.
- With the shorter edge of the lavash toward you roll up into a wrap. Do the same with the second half and cut each roll into four pinwheels.
- Store in snug container or reassemble each half and wrap in parchment paper.
- *This can be made a day ahead, but it's really best*

made in morning before school.

3. Add a side of veggie sticks. Adding one cup of veggies to meals will help prevent the blood-sugar swings that may make them feel tired and cloud their thinking mid-day. By adding zucchini, celery, carrots and cucumbers to their snack bags, your child can benefit from more energy and better focus. If they can't bear to eat "plain" veggie sticks, add a tablespoon of hummus for dipping.

4. Surprise them with blueberries for dessert. These berries soothe their sweet tooth while boosting their brain power at the same time. The bold color of this fruit comes from anthocyanins, antioxidants that studies have shown activate brain neurons. A recent report from Tufts University suggests that 1 cup of blueberries can increase brain energy by approximately 45 percent. Your kids can enjoy them fresh, dried or frozen all school year long.

Super Healthy Kale Salad

This makes for a super healthy salad that you can prepare in advance and enjoy for a couple of days. I adapted it from Crazy Sexy Kitchen by Kris Carr & Chef Chad Sarno. You can serve it solo, with your favorite cooked grain, or wrapped in nori. When I have guests, I like to serve it wrapped in a cucumber slice and topped with sprouted sunflower seeds. Its a fancy and super healthy start to your meal!

- 1 bunch kale, any variety, chopped (you can all mix varieties)
- 2 cups diced bell peppers, red, yellow, and orange
- 1/2 cup chopped parsely

- 1 1/2 avocados, pit removed and chopped
- 2 tablespoons flax oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- sea salt, to taste
- pinch of cayenne, to taste
- sprouted sunflower seeds

In a bowl, combine all the ingredients. Massage and mix with your hands to “wilt” the kale and cream the avocado. Serve and enjoy!

Cauliflower Hummus

This hummus is easy to make and tastes delicious. Enjoy with fresh cut veggies and toasted whole wheat pita bread.

- 1 cauliflower
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 1/4 cup of extra virgin olive oil
- juice of 1 lemon
- handful parsley
- pinch cumin
- pinch sea salt
- Freshly ground pepper

Steam the cauliflower for approximately 10 minutes. Add the cauliflower to the food processor with all other ingredients and mix.

Ronit's Twist on Dos Caminos Traditional Guacamole

Many New Yorkers love the guacamole served at Dos Caminos. The best tip I got from their traditional recipe is to mash the seasonings with the lime together and let the juices develop before I add in the avocados. My family and friends love my guacamole with more of a kick, so I add a bit more jalapeños and I leave the membranes and seeds. To keep your waistline trim, serve with platter of raw vegetables instead of the traditional tortilla chips.

- 3 tablespoons cilantro leaves, finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons jalapeño chilies, minced (remove seeds and membranes for less kick)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Himalayan or sea salt
- 2 large ripe avocados, preferably Haas, peeled and seeded
- 1 small plum tomato, cored, seeded and finely chopped
- 2 teaspoons freshly squeezed lime juice

In a medium-size bowl, use a masher to mash together the cilantro, jalapeño, salt and lime juice. Let stand for a few minutes.

Add avocados and gently mash them with a fork. Stir in the chopped tomato.

Taste to adjust seasonings (typically I add more salt, more lime, more cilantro).

Serve with a platter of fresh cut veggies.

Ronit's Berry Energy Smoothie

I love to drink a cup of this smoothie in the morning before my workout. I save another 1/2 cup for refueling afterward. Store the extra in your refrigerator for a snack later that day.

- 2 cups unsweetened almond milk or water
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- $\frac{1}{2}$ packet of frozen Sambazon Acai Berry + Guarana Smoothie Pack
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Vegan Protein Factors powder in Vanilla Bean flavor
- Fresh strawberries
- Fresh blueberries

Blend all ingredients and enjoy a boost of energy!

Ronit's Fruity Green Juice for Kids

This juice is great for kids or anyone new to green juices. I adapted this recipe from Reboot With Joe and it's a hit!

- 15 strawberries
- 1 apple
- 1 pear
- 12 kale leaves
- 4 celery stalks

Wash all ingredients well and put through a juicer.

Enjoy!