

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. Once 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 you 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.

10 Tricks that Speed Weight Loss

When you're trying to drop pounds, these healthy tips may help you shed them faster. Try one or two! All you've got to lose is weight.

9 Ways to Get Organized for Fall

Early fall is the perfect time to get organized. With the end of lazy summer days and the beginning of a new school year, my family, possibly like yours, needs to get its act together. As I prepare to send one daughter off to college and another to a new grade in middle school, I like to gain control of my

home before we all get very busy and life gets less manageable.

Let's start with the kitchen. Try these 9 fast tips for prepping your refrigerator, freezer and pantry for autumn:

1. **Multitask shopping trips.** While shopping with your kids for school supplies, grab a few extra items, like folders, organizers and office supplies, that will make shopping, menu planning and meal prep a snap this season.
2. **Create a recipe file folder.** Buy an extra accordion folder and label the tabs with Poultry, Fish, Beef, Vegetarian, Smoothies, Breakfast, Vegetarian, Dessert and Snacks. Whenever you come across a recipe in a magazine that you want to try, print or tear out the page and slip it into the folder. Check out your options before you go grocery shopping for new ideas and shopping lists.
3. **Protect your favorites from wear and tear.** Use a few extra sheet protectors to keep your go-to recipes safe from liquids or foods. I keep my signature salad dressing recipes in these easy-to-clean sheets in the same cabinet where I keep my spices, oils and vinegars. No more hunting for my recipes, and no more destroying the pages when I cook!
4. **Become a smart labeler.** It starts with extra colorful masking tape (you know, the kind you never knew what to do with). My favorite trick is to use it to label mason jars stored in the freezer with extra smoothies. Include the date it was stored and the contents on the tape. If you've got a big family, you can even mark whose smoothie it is. The same masking tape is also useful for party guests to tag their wine glasses.
5. **Purge your fridge and freezer.** During the summer months, when the days are longer and schedules are more flexible, I find that dinner plans often change last

minute – we travel, go out for the day and never make it home until late, or get last minute invitations – and I end up throwing things in my freezer. Now is the perfect time to toss anything from pre-summer months that you never got around to using, or anything that’s been frozen and forgotten. This includes all those opened jars or packages with no clear purchase or expiration date.

6. **Hunt for suspicious freezer items.** Examine frozen foods for freezer burn or packed ice crystals and check expiration dates. Use all the items that are about to expire the earliest and toss out expired items. Any mystery items? They get tossed, too.
7. **Be a pantry sleuth.** Dig through the shelves (yes all the way in the back) and check expiration dates on all canned or jar foods and spices. Trash the ones too old to use and move the items about-to-expire to the front. Bonus points if you add recipes to your weekly menu plan that use these ingredients.
8. **Recycle your food containers.** Instead of throwing out used glass food jars, wash and reuse them. These can become great containers for smoothies, nuts and seeds. They can also be used to carry a healthy snack to work or school. Trim celery or carrots into sticks that fit right within the jar. Place with almond or pumpkin seed butter on the bottom as “glue” to keep the veggie sticks in place.
9. **Stay inspired.** Don’t let all this de-cluttering go to waste. Buy a clear picture frame with magnets. Print motivating quotes and insert in the frame. Place on your fridge or your office bulletin board. Keep changing the quote to keep yourself on track and making smart choices, especially when you’re reaching into the fridge. I can always get myself going by looking at the logo of my health coaching company which reads, “I live the Smart Life!”.

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.

8 Fast, Easy Snacks for On-the-Go

When your schedule gets hectic, it's tempting to reach for the vending machine or whatever's nearby to satisfy your hunger, but that's often the worst thing you can do. My rule for snacks is combine protein with carbs to help manage blood sugar levels, and to avoid dairy.

Here is a round up of portable healthy snacks that feed your hunger, not your waistline:

1. Raw nuts mix. Whether store-bought or homemade, a nut mix that includes raw varieties is better than roasted ones, which lowers the nutrients. Make a batch on Sunday and store them in the refrigerator for the week. If you have a sweet tooth, add dried, unsweetened fruit. If your palate leans to savory, sprinkle with spices like rosemary or cayenne.

2. Mason jar dips. You know those glass containers you're saving when you clean out your kitchen (see "9 Ways to Get Organized for Fall")? Fill the bottom with two tablespoons of nut or seed butters or all-natural hummus, then add vegetable sticks, like carrots, celery, zucchini, jicama or peppers. Pop on the top and you're ready to go.

3. Smoothies to go. On Sunday night, make twice your normal amount of breakfast smoothie. Pour the drink into 8-ounce glass jars and freeze. Store them in the fridge at the office and by the time you're ready to drink, it's thawed.

4. Seasoned kale chips. If you're the domestic type, making these at home is a cinch, or if you haven't used your oven in years, don't worry, store-bought varieties can be just as healthy. To make, trim kale stems, make sure they're completely dry and sprinkle with your favorite seasoning. Personally, sea salt does the trick for our family. Bake at 275 degrees for 20 minutes, or until crisp and dry.

5. Homemade granola bars. Often I'll read snack bar recipes that sound a lot like candy bars, but when made with the right ingredients, you'll have a energy powerhouse that will get you through an afternoon. Most granola bar recipes, especially the raw ones, take less than a half an hour to make and can last your family a week. Even better, they're highly portable and don't require refrigeration. I love this one from Food 52. The biggest challenge you'll have making these is keeping up with the demand.

6. two-ingredient bites. I love pairing two ingredients – sweet and savory or sweet and salty – for an easy quick fix that satisfies hunger and sugar cravings. My favorite combinations:

- organic dates stuffed with almond butter
- sliced green apple with nut butter
- organic brown rice cakes drizzled with brown rice syrup.

7. Salty crunches. On afternoons when stress is high and time is short, the only thing that does the trick are snacks with crunch. I love:

- *roasted chickpeas*. Drizzle in olive oil and toss with your favorite ground spices, then bake 30 to

40 minutes at 400 degrees. If you buy them pre-made, read the nutrition label to know what you're getting.

- a handful (5 to 8) of *whole-grain or sprouted chips*, such as Garden of Eatin' brand, with freshly made salsa, pico de gallo or guacamole.
- *hummus and baby carrots or celery sticks*. Note: read the nutrition label on hummus to be sure the brand contains no preservatives or additives.
- *nori chips*. Cut these seaweed sheets into strips, drizzle with olive oil and top with seasonings. Bake for 20 minutes or until crispy. If you've got more time, create mini "sushi" bites with leftover brown rice or quinoa and vegetable sticks, no refrigeration required.

8. Healthy pudding. Chia seeds aren't just for smoothies anymore. Make them into a creamy and sweet (or savory, depending on your add-ins) treat in minutes with this delicious and highly addictive pudding recipe:

Chia Pudding:

- 3 tablespoons chia seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsweetened almond milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- Liquid stevia to taste (optional)
- Add cocoa powder or pumpkin pie spice for flavor

Combine all ingredients and let sit for 10 minutes stirring occasionally.

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!