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Employees First

To have a successful business, I have learned three important lessons which I would like to share.

First, hiring the right people is paramount and must not be delegated lightly. Choose the person who knows the company, business, culture, opportunities and challenges best to do the interview. This usually means the business founder or owner.

Second, the character, personality (likeability) and attitude of an individual are just as important, if not more important than the paper qualifications. Avoid pursuing the “best people”. Instead, choose the ones who believe in the company’s mission, share its values and are brand-fit. These traits are essential because everyone in the company is (or should be) a brand ambassador.

Third, employees need to know they are appreciated and valued. And the best way to value them is to invest in them and offer career-growth opportunities. At *Healthy Options*, all our store managers are promoted internally and are never hired from outside. Growing talent internally has always been a part of our brand culture.



Many companies proudly express their ‘customers first’ policy. But I say *Employees First*. This means as an employer, if I don’t treat our people well and look after their welfare, I cannot expect them to care and value our customers. If I cannot convince our people of the quality, efficacy and high standards of our natural products, I cannot expect them to offer the products with conviction and honesty. In short, how I treat them will mirror how they treat our customers.

When business conditions get tough, having committed employees who feel appreciated and valued can make all the difference between success and failure.

An example of how we value our people at *Healthy Options* are the on-going motorbike safety training seminars. We have a Honda motorbike safety expert come to our head office to conduct safety seminars for our employees and agency staff, including those riding *Angkas* or *Joyride*. The spouse, boyfriend or relative who drives the motorbike for our employees also attends for free. The objective is to teach them about motorbike driving and riding safety and to instill discipline and courtesy on the road.

As we recognize our employees are a precious resource, expensive to replace and partners in our success, we value them. Hope you do too. Share and email your stories.

Happy New Year!
Romy Sia
romy@healthyoptions.com.ph

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Christian Tan chairman
Romy Sia publisher
Sean Sia editor-in-chief
Ariel De Leon production manager
Ronald Cruz layout & design
Sky Printing printer

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our mission

To educate, enlighten, and empower our customers to take control of their health and make the world a healthier and better place.



12 Ways to be Happy

By Ariel Klein

Sure, you can pledge to eat more greens or log additional hours in the gym, but what about some personal growth goals you're actually really excited to tackle?

Commit to yourself—your happiness and your health—in the new year with these easy life hacks that'll have you eating, moving, and feeling better by February.

1. Set Intentions, Not Resolutions

Why start the New Year with rigid resolutions that will most likely result in stress and guilt? Creating intentions (and actively writing them down) is a much more realistic approach to setting goals for yourself. Draft up daily, weekly, and monthly intentions to help take the pressure off your daily schedule and allow you to focus on the big picture.

2. Practice Gratitude

Regularly expressing gratitude has been shown to shift your perspective for the better. Take stock of what's going right in your life by expressing it out loud or by writing it down. To make the act of gratitude expression even easier, jot down your daily thoughts in a bedside journal.

3. Discover a New Hobby

A hectic work schedule and bustling social calendar can make it difficult to break out of your standard routine. While you're overscheduled, it's essential to carve out time for yourself to try new hobbies and identify new interests. Dying to make pasta from scratch? Test out an irresistible *Cacio e Pepe* recipe. Interested in trying Pilates? Ask a friend to go to a class with you. Commit to your interests, and even a small effort will feel like an accomplishment.

4. Pack Your Bags

Whether you've been wanting to travel to an exotic locale or depart on a brief weekend getaway, look for a way to get out of your routine and hit the road. Some of the best memories are made while traveling, and you'll ultimately feel recharged, whether your vacation includes a journey to the local resort or somewhere exotic abroad.

5. Face Your Fears

We've all been advised to "*do one thing every day that scares you*," but it's a powerful sentiment that isn't exactly realistic for someone with a full-time job, responsibilities, and a comfortable weeknight routine. If your fears include skydiving, feel free to do just that, but know that more bite-sized acts of bravery apply as well, like karaoke nights, meeting new people, or having new hairstyles.

6. Make Sense of Your Space

Cleaning up your physical space does wonders for your head space. If the idea of a thorough deep clean sends you into a clutter-induced panic, break each organizing task down into 20-minute increments (or less, to start!). Simply set a timer on your phone, plug into your favorite podcast, and start organizing. Do this a couple of times over the course of a few days, and you'll create a tidy space even Marie Kondo would approve of.

7. Develop a New Routine

If you're feeling out of sorts, kick off the New Year with a refreshed daily routine. Anything from a daily morning walk to a nightly phone call or FaceTime with a loved one as the perfect excuse to decompress before or after a busy day.

8. Break a Sweat

There's no ideal time to break a sweat, but staying active for about 30 minutes per day is enough to move you toward your 2024 fitness goals—and set you up for a longer, higher-quality life. Not all exercise has to be strenuous either—consider morning stretches, restorative yoga, or a brisk walk during your lunch break. Already have a fitness routine? Consider mixing things up a tiny bit: Try a new type of workout class to keep things interesting (and challenge your brain and body); progress to the next level of whatever workout you're doing; or incorporate some weight training to build strength and stamina.

9. Volunteer Your Time

Our time is limited and the most precious. So, giving back to your community or a cause you're passionate about can make a lasting impact. Research where and when you can volunteer on a local level, whether it means collecting canned food or clothing donations.



10. Put Away Your Phone

Between the onslaught of texts, emails, and news and Instagram notifications we receive hourly, our smartphones are now a permanent fixture in our everyday life. In an effort to be more present, spend less time on your phone with these simple tips that'll help you drastically cut down on your daily screen time. Put away your phone when talking to someone as a sign of respect and focus.

11. Be Kind to Yourself

Daily life can get hectic, which is exactly why intentional self-care is crucial. Make time for a miniature reward with either a weekly manicure, morning meditation, or a new purchase that genuinely brings you joy. Whether you gift yourself with a new book or a few minutes of solitude, prioritizing time to do things for yourself will make you happy and keep you sane.

12. Accentuate the Positive

You don't have to get all Pollyanna, but look for ways to help others feel good (which can also improve your mood, too). Whether you commit to random acts of kindness, opt to spread compliments instead of gossip, or seek out and share happy stories, you'll be doing your part to make the world a tiny bit better. 🌱

7 Ways to Declutter Your Life



Are you feeling overwhelmed by the amount of clutter in your life? Trust me – you aren't alone.

When it comes to clutter, the struggle is real. It slowly accumulates, filling every nook and cranny. You might not notice it at first, but over time, it has a way of totally taking over your life.

And it's not just your physical space. Clutter has a way of creeping

into pretty much everywhere if you let it – your cell phone, your calendar, and even your mind.

The good news? You don't have to let clutter win. You can take back control!

And you don't have to wait – you can start by getting rid of these things to declutter from your life today.

Why is decluttering so important, anyway?

Some people think that clutter is A-OK. After all, if you've lived with it for longer than you can remember, it can almost become a part of who you are and what you do.

But that doesn't make it acceptable.

Clutter can negatively impact your life in a multitude of ways, whether or not you actually feel like it does. It can raise your stress level, consciously or subconsciously.

Clutter can make it more difficult to focus, concentrate, think critically, and be creative. It can leave you feeling overwhelmed and anxious – even if you can't really pinpoint why you're feeling that way.

Decluttering your life might sound like a daunting task, but believe me, it's well worth the effort. Getting rid of stuff that's no longer serving you and only exists to gather dust is rewarding, fulfilling, and has the potential to transform your mental state.

Give it a try. You might just be surprised to see how much better you feel once you've cleared away all that clutter in your home and your life.

7 Things to Declutter From Your Life Today

There's no right or wrong place to start your decluttering journey. And there's no right or wrong way to go about it. Committing to declutter as little as one thing a day can make a big difference over time – as long as you aren't bringing in new clutter during the process.

1. Declutter your closet.

Looking for an easy win? Decluttering your closet will help you check that box and feel a sense of accomplishment.

Most of us hold onto things we're never going to wear again. Shirts that are too big or too small, shoes that don't quite fit, dresses you've never worn but you promise you're going to find a reason to wear one day... despite the fact that it's been hanging in your wardrobe, gathering dust for three years.

Not to mention, the closet is a great place for all kinds of boxes, bins, bags, and stuff to hide.

Decluttering your closet is a win-win. You'll benefit from having a better understanding of what's in there and being able to quickly and easily find what you need without sorting through the clutter.

And since most of the clothes, coats, shoes, and apparel you declutter can be donated, you'll benefit someone in need, too.

Start small tip: Pick just one type of clothing (short-sleeved shirts, jeans, shorts, etc.) and start from there.

“Clutter can negatively impact your life in a multitude of ways, whether or not you actually feel like it does. It can raise your stress level, consciously or subconsciously.”

2. Declutter your cell phone.

When it comes to decluttering, most people think about their physical space – not digital. But there's definitely merit in decluttering your digital devices, including your cell phone.

Think about it. Do you have many apps installed on your mobile device that you never use? How much of your phone's memory is taken up by photos you don't actually want to keep and won't ever look at again?

How many voicemails and downloads are clogging up your device? What about all the phone numbers you've saved to your phone that you'll truly never use again?

By decluttering your cell phone, you'll boost your device's capabilities and your well-being.

Start small tip: Focus on just your apps first. Delete the ones you don't need or use. Move onto the contacts list next if you have time.

3. Declutter your kitchen.

The kitchen is another spot in your house that is easy to clutter up. Maybe you have pots and pans collecting dust in the back of your cabinets.

Maybe you've got an Instapot and a juicer that is taking up a ton of counter space but never gets used. You might have a pantry filled with canned goods and spices that are long expired – yes, they do go bad eventually.

Whatever your kitchen situation currently is, chances are it – and you – can benefit from a decluttering session.

Start small tip: Pick just one shelf, drawer, cabinet, or countertop, and declutter it today.

>> Continued from page 5



4. Declutter your wallet, purse and bag.

It's easy for receipts, pens, lip balms, and who knows what else to vanish into our purses, never to be seen again (this is especially true if you have young children).

And while it isn't going to ruin your life, it is going to make it that much more difficult for you to find what you need – your phone, your wallet, your keys – when you need it.

By decluttering your purse, you'll eliminate a small but meaningful source of stress from your life – and make it exponentially easier to find the things you're looking for.

Start small tip: Begin by decluttering your wallet and then move on to your bag.

5. Declutter your schedule.

Do you feel stressed out at the thought of how busy your day will be? Are you constantly running from one obligation to the next, bouncing between appointments, meetups, dinner dates, and everything else you've got going on?

Try decluttering your calendar.

Many of us are under the impression that being busy is good, but that isn't necessarily the case. We all need a little downtime to decompress, destress, relax and chill out. And if you don't already have that in your schedule, you probably need to step back from some of those obligations.

What meetings and appointments leave you totally exhausted? Are there any commitments you've made that don't help you move toward your goals? Consider saying no and declining those invitations.

By giving yourself more time in your day, you'll find yourself happier and healthier.

Start small tip: Find just one thing in your schedule that you can move or cancel to have more balance or breathing room in your calendar.

6. Declutter your car.

When we think about decluttering our physical space, most of us immediately think about our homes – and nothing further.

But unless you're one of those people who keep their vehicle meticulously clean at all times, chances are there's some clutter lurking that you could get rid of.

Check the glove compartment for expired registration and old receipts. Clear out your trunk and see what's lurking in the corners of your back seat. Bring stuff that doesn't actually belong in your car into your home – and put it in its proper place.

You might be surprised to see just how much more relaxing your daily commute can be when your car is organized and clutter-free.

Start small tip: Begin by removing all trash from the car. If that's all you can do today, that's ok!

7. Declutter your thoughts.

A great thing to declutter from your life today? Let go of your negative thoughts that aren't benefitting you in any way.

Easier said than done, right? It can be especially challenging when you have developed a habit of negative thinking. But, the good news is there are various ways to change your mindset and improve how you're feeling.

Decluttering your thoughts takes intentionality. The world is full of noise and constant distractions. Slowing down and taking time to think and focus takes effort.

Journaling is a great option for this. If you aren't sure where to start use mindful journaling prompts to help you begin.

Taking care of your mental health and processing through your thoughts and potential emotional clutter is an important part of your well-being.

Start small tip: Go for a quick walk or simply sit outside for a bit without your phone. Have a glass of wine or a cup of coffee and do nothing. 🍷

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7 Things You Didn't Know About Chinese New Year

By Amanda Xi



Chinese New Year is celebrated by more than 20% of the world. It's the most important holiday in China and to Chinese people all over. Here are seven interesting facts that you probably didn't know about Chinese New Year.

1. Chinese New Year is also known as the Spring Festival

In China, you'll hear it being called the Spring Festival. It's still very wintry, but the holiday marks the end of the coldest days. People welcome spring and what it brings along: planting and harvests, new beginnings and fresh starts.

You can also call it the Lunar New Year, because countries such as Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, North

and South Korea, and Vietnam celebrate it as well. And because the Spring Festival goes according to the lunar calendar. Which means . . .

2. There's no set date for Chinese New Year

According to the Lunar calendar, the Spring Festival is on January 1st and lasts until the 15th (the full moon). Unlike Western holidays such as Thanksgiving or Christmas, when you try to calculate it with the solar (Gregorian) calendar, the date is all over the place.

Chinese New Year ranges from January 21 to February 20. In 2024, it occurs on February 10. Modern Chinese calendars use the Gregorian calendar but include lunar holidays.



3. It is a day for praying to gods and fighting off monsters

The Spring Festival was originally a ceremonial day to pray to gods for a good planting and harvest season. As an agrarian society, the harvest was everything. People also prayed to their ancestors, as they were treated as gods.

According to one legend, there was a monster named *Nian*. It would come about every New Year's Eve. Most people would hide in their homes. But one boy was brave enough to fight him off using firecrackers. The next day, people celebrated their survival by setting off even more firecrackers. And that practice became a crucial part of the Spring Festival.

4. Children receive lucky money in red envelopes

Gifts are also exchanged during the Spring Festival. But Chinese children receive something else too— money in red envelopes (*angpao*). This money is supposed to help transfer fortune from the elders to the kids. They can also be given between bosses and employees, co-workers, and friends.

5. You eat dumplings to welcome the New Year

Most people will eat dumplings during the New Year's Eve dinner. Others will eat them for the first breakfast. Contrary to popular belief though, dumplings aren't popular everywhere in China. It's more of a northern thing. In the south, people would rather eat spring rolls (egg rolls) and balls of glutinous rice in soup called *tangyuan*.

6. Chinese New Year desserts have special meanings

A lot of cultures have symbolic foods, such as the Yule Log cake. But many Chinese New Year desserts have special meanings behind them too. And it's mostly puns in the name. Take the tangyuan for example. It literally means "soup balls." But it sounds like tuanyuan which means reunion. So it's no surprise it's a popular dessert during Chinese New Year.

Tikoy (in the Philippines) is a type of sweet rice cake. It symbolizes success & prosperity each and every year.

7. The Chinese decorate everything red for Chinese New Year

Every family will deck their homes in this color. Do you remember the story about Nian? Firecrackers aren't the only thing that scared the monster away. Red is also an invaluable weapon, and used in nearly all Chinese New Year decorations.

Red is China's favorite color and it's pretty obvious during Chinese New Year. The Chinese will hang up red lanterns and strings of (real or fake) red grapes or chili peppers, paste red paper onto doors and windows.

New clothes are also believed to bring good luck and start over fresh. People will add new red clothing to their Spring Festival wardrobe too. 🍀

The Carry-On Only Packing List for Women

By Jenn Sutherland-Miller



Women have a reputation for overpacking. For some of us, that's well deserved, but we all know that men overpack too.

Ladies, these packing tips are for you. No matter where you're traveling, use this packing list to make sure you have everything you actually need – without bringing half your closet.

Quick Tips for Packing Light

At first the idea of packing only a carry-on travel backpack can seem daunting, but really it's not. Once you see how much space 45L actually is, you'll realize that you've got plenty of space to bring everything you need for a whole week or even longer.

The basic principles of packing light, for carry-on only, are as follows:

Choose the right (sized) bag

- Add organizers (and use them!)
- Invest in multi-purpose items
- Limit yourself to two pairs of shoes
- Pack only what you need
- Stuff your bag's pockets
- Take advantage of airline personal item allowances
- Wear your bulkiest clothes on the plane

Carry-On Packing List for Women

No matter where you're going, you can use this packing list as a starting point. Once you have an idea of what to put in your bag, we'll go over tips on how to develop a travel wardrobe you love, pack light, and ways to adjust this list for different types of travel.

Clothing, Shoes, and Accessories

Most experienced travelers pack the same basic wardrobe, no matter where they're going. Of course if you're traveling in winter, you'll add warmer things, and in a warm climate you'll swap out pants for a sundress. But the basics of what you pack don't change that much from trip to trip.

Layer up, focus on items you love wearing, and pack the following clothes:

- 4-5 tops
- 1 long sleeved shirt, sweater, or blazer (for business trips)
- 1 jacket
- 2-3 bottoms
- 1 dress (which means fewer pairs of bottoms and tops)
- 2-6 pairs of underwear, depending on your trip length
- 2-6 pairs of socks, depending on your trip length
- 2-3 bras (sports bra and everyday)
- 2 pairs of shoes
- 1-2 swimsuits, depending on your destination
- 1 set of PJs
- 1 set of workout clothes
- 1 scarf, shawl, or sarong — for more conservative destinations

Toiletries and Makeup

Like your travel wardrobe, you'll also want to simplify and shrink your makeup, toiletries, and beauty products when you're on the road. Decant bigger bottles into travel-friendly bottles. Swap liquids for more compact and airport security-friendly bars and powders. And, even if you love makeup and have a seven-step skincare routine, stick to the essentials.

Electronics and Travel Essentials

Even if you made sure not to forget that one red lipstick that makes you feel like a badass babe, you're also going to need to pack the following travel essentials:

- Adaptor (international)
- Laptop (optional)
- Chargers
- Headphones
- Notebook and pen
- Phone
- Travel blanket

Now that you know what to pack, here are some tips on how to pack it all smartly.

Choose Your Travel Day Outfit Strategically

The first rule of travel day, especially when traveling carry on only, is to wear the bulkiest items you're taking. This means your heaviest shoes, jeans and chunkiest sweater. Beyond that, there are some considerations for choosing a travel day outfit that is both stylish and comfortable to wear on the plane and beyond.

What makes a good travel day outfit? Look for a combination that is:

- Stylish
- Comfortable
- Good Quality

Pay Attention to Detail

Layering is a good idea on travel days, because we all know that feeling of freezing in the airport air conditioning and then sweltering while we wait after boarding the plane. If you're flying between climate zones (hello winter escape!) this becomes even more important.

Keep Your Personal Style While Traveling

You don't have to pack a wardrobe full of clothes that don't feel like you. To maintain your travel fashion without a wardrobe revamp:

- Identify your favorites
- Identify items that do double duty or layer well
- Start with neutral color base layers
- Use accessories to make outfits "pop"

Develop a Capsule Wardrobe

Developing a consistent set of clothes that you wear most of the time (at home and while traveling) is called building a *capsule wardrobe*. The basic idea is that you develop a uniform of good quality, reliable pieces that reflect your style and that you love wearing. Then, build on those with a few accents and accessories.

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The “rules” of developing a capsule wardrobe are as follows:

- Buy quality, not quantity
- Choose fabrics carefully
- Harmonize color schemes
- Stick to 10-12 items you can mix and match

Also consider how easily certain fabrics wrinkle. While there are packing strategies for reducing wrinkles, it’s best to pack wrinkle resistant fabrics to begin with. And what about swimsuits? Pack one. Always. Even if you’re headed to Antarctica!

Choose Clothes You Can Layer

The key to packing light is beginning with the right base layers. Choose items that are:

- Mix and match (in the same color family and neutral)
- Quality fabrics (Merino wool is a team Tortuga favorite)
- Layerable
- Comfortable and make you feel great

Consider Travel Specific Underwear

What goes under your base layer... underwear... matters too. Maybe you’ll travel with the same underwear you wear at home, but maybe you’ll make some choices specific to travel. Choose underwear that are comfortable above all, but also wash and dry quickly. Bras are trickier. Wear the one that’s hardest to pack on the plane. Then, consider how you pack the rest.

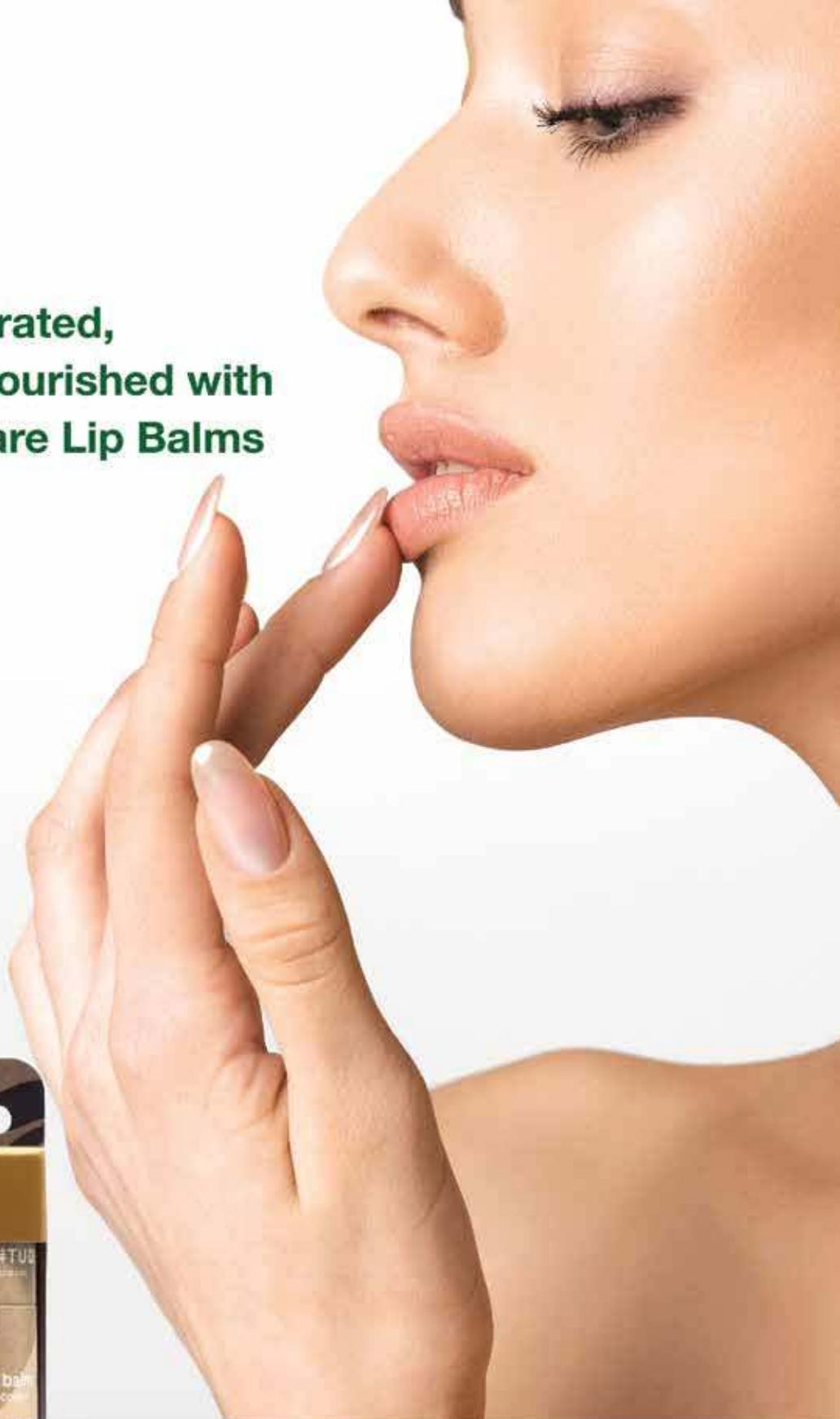
Destination Packing Lists for Women

Let’s face it. There are places in the world that are more complicated for women to travel. The Middle East and India, in particular, get a lot of press as being difficult for women to navigate culturally and in terms of requirements for dress. Can you still travel carry-on? Of course.

When in doubt, pack a shawl to cover your shoulders, and choose shorts and skirts that cover your knees. Save your bikini for the tourist beaches. 🌴

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10 Tips for a Good Night's Sleep

By Lisa Artis



Most of us have suffered a bad night's sleep at some stage or another. A one-off restless night isn't too much of a problem, apart from feeling irritable or below par the next day. But the effect of long-term sleep

deprivation can be far more serious, increasing the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, and Alzheimer's disease.



Here are 10 tips for a good night's sleep:

1. Take time to relax

Relaxing with a good book. Around half of the population suffers from stress-induced sleep problems, so it's vital you take the time to relax before you go to bed, whether it's taking a warm bath, reading a book, or listening to soothing music. For some people, writing a to-do list before bed can help free your mind from worrying about all the things you need to do tomorrow.

2. Get into a routine

We all know that having a routine helps babies and children fall asleep at a certain time. This applies to adults as well, because it allows your body to program itself to naturally fall asleep and wake up at certain times. Try to be strict about going to bed at a certain time, and create your own relaxation routine.

3. Avoid technology

Ban your smart phone, computer and TV from your bedroom, and avoid looking at them for an hour before bed. This kind of device emits a blue light, which suppresses the sleep hormone melatonin.

4. Create a restful environment

Make sure your bed provides the correct support, comfort and space to ensure you wake up and move about less. Ensure that your room is the right temperature – between 16 °C and 18 °C (60°F to 65°F) is optimum. A lack of clutter, along with pale colors and pleasant smells, such as lavender and geranium, can also help create a soothing setting.

5. Don't clock watch

Worrying about getting enough sleep can itself stop us sleeping. The best way to deal with that is to remind yourself that resting in bed and thinking nice thoughts is more productive than tossing and turning and looking at the clock every ten minutes. If you can't stop checking your clock, try turning it around or putting it on the other side of the room so it's not as easy to watch time ticking away.

6. Foods for sleeping

Eating healthily improves sleep generally, but some foods are particularly beneficial, such as milk, eggs, chicken, bananas, and pumpkin seeds. They contain the chemicals tryptophan and serotonin, which are vital for the production of melatonin, the hormone that promotes sleep.

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7. Foods to avoid

Spicy food, alcohol and large meals shouldn't be consumed in the hours before bedtime. For many, drinking coffee or other caffeinated drinks in the afternoon can affect sleep.

Sugary food in general is bad, because the energy spike and ensuing crash you get can play havoc with your body clock. Also, research has shown that, if you don't sleep well, you tend to turn to junk food the next day, creating a cycle of poor sleep and bad diet.

8. Darkness promotes sleep

Before clocks, people would wake up when the sun rose and go to sleep when it got dark. Similarly, a darkened room helps to promote sleep and turning the lights down can make you feel sleepy. If you don't have a dimmer switch, inexpensive lamps with a dimmer are a good option, or you could ask an electrician to quote for the cost of changing your main light switch.

If you're disturbed by street lights outside your window, or bright sunlight, wear an eye mask or you could try heavier curtains, extra lining or investing in blackout blinds.

9. Keep fit and get active

Physical activity is great for sleep, as well as for your health generally. However some people find that if they do vigorous exercise less than two hours before bedtime, it can make it harder to get to sleep. If you don't find this a problem, then there's probably no need to change.

People spend a lot of time and effort exercising and making sure they eat healthily – which is great – but they forget sleeping, which is the third side of the triangle.

10. Focus on sleep quality

We tend to focus on how long we're asleep, but sleep quality is just as important. We go through five stages of sleep, which we experience in a cycle, around five times a night. During the later stages of the cycle our memories are consolidated and information is processed, among other things. This means that getting up in the night, for example to go to the bathroom, can interrupt the cycle and you might not reach the later stages. For this reason, it's also best to avoid having too many liquids before going to bed. 🍷

7 Supplements for Sleeping Better

By Suzy Davenport



Bananas, milk, nuts, cherries, eggs, fish, goji berries, and oats contain melatonin.

Poor sleep quality appears to accelerate ageing at the cellular level: sleep loss is associated with shorter telomeres and possible increased cellular senescence, both of which are key mechanisms underlying the ageing process. There is no doubt that sleep deficits lead to physical and cognitive impairments.

Minimizing your exposure to blue light in the evening, avoiding caffeine, spicy and sugary food before bedtime and maintaining regular sleeping and waking times are all ways in which you can help maximize your sleep quality. There are also many supplements that research suggests can help you to sleep better.

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Here are 7 such supplements for better and longer sleep.

1. Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone secreted by the brain, and is well known for its role in regulating sleep. Light suppresses melatonin production, while in the absence of light, melatonin levels rise and promote sleep.

Melatonin supplementation improves sleep quality, mainly by decreasing the time taken to fall asleep and increasing total sleep time. Melatonin also appears to be highly effective in treating insomnia.

Also, taking 3mg of melatonin was associated with improved memory retention during periods of stress.

2. Magnesium

Magnesium is a mineral present in many foods, and is the 4th most abundant mineral in the body. Studies suggest that almost 50% of the adult population have below ideal magnesium intake. In the central nervous system, magnesium has a calming effect, and low magnesium levels are highly associated with stress.

Magnesium supplementation appears to reduce the time it takes to reach a sleep state, increase total sleep time, and reduce sleep disturbances.

Magnesium also appears to have multiple additional benefits aside from sleep promotion, most notably a reduction in blood pressure and blood sugar.

3. GABA

GABA, or gamma-Aminobutyric acid, is the body's main inhibitory neurotransmitter. GABA reduces the activity of neurons throughout the nervous system to produce a calming effect.

Scientific studies suggest that GABA can have stress-reducing and sleep-enhancing effects. Supplementation with GABA may both help people to fall asleep quickly and increase the duration of slow wave sleep. The benefits of GABA seem to be geared more towards the early stages of sleep.

4. L-Tryptophan

L-tryptophan is an amino acid used in the synthesis of the neurotransmitters melatonin and serotonin. As already discussed, melatonin promotes sleep in response to low light levels. Serotonin, while best known for its role as a 'happiness neurotransmitter', also appears to be necessary for sleep.

Tryptophan is used to treat insomnia and sleep apnea, and its sleep promoting effects are well established.

L-tryptophan appears to accelerate sleep onset and improve sleep duration. As L-tryptophan boosts serotonin levels, it may have the added benefit of improving mood and aiding weight loss (as serotonin suppresses appetite).

5. 5-HTP

5-HTP, or hydroxytryptophan, is a naturally occurring amino acid. Like tryptophan, it is used to synthesize the neurotransmitters: serotonin and melatonin.

Studies in both humans and animals suggest that 5-HTP can reduce the time it takes to fall asleep and improve sleep quality. 5-HTP appears to be particularly effective when combined with GABA.

6. Valerian Root

Valerian is an herb that has been used since ancient times to promote relaxation and sleep. It inhibits the breakdown of GABA, the body's main inhibitory neurotransmitter, and thereby produces a calming effect.

Research suggests that valerian is an effective and safe supplement for improving sleep quality.

One study also suggested that taking valerian allowed adults with insomnia to reach slow-wave sleep 36% faster and to remain in slow-wave sleep for longer. In addition to its effects on sleep, valerian root may also help you relax.

7. Chamomile

Chamomile is an herb that has been consumed for centuries as a remedy for several health conditions. Its tea is a caffeine-free alternative to green or black tea that appears to offer a variety of health benefits, which include improved sleep quality. Chamomile contains apigenin, a compound that binds to GABA receptors and may thereby produce a calming effect.

In one study, individuals who consumed 270mg of chamomile extract twice per day spent 1/3 less time awake at night and fell asleep 15 minutes faster than those who did not consume the extract.

In addition to its effects on sleep, chamomile also appears to have a wide range of additional health benefits due to its high content in anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compounds. Drinking chamomile tea was associated with a significant reduction in blood sugar in patients with type 2 diabetes. The same study also noted reduced total cholesterol, triglycerides and LDL ('bad cholesterol') in those who drank chamomile tea. 🌿

source: growinglife.com

Food as Medicine: All You Need to Know

By Jillian Kubala, MS, RD



What you choose to eat has profound effects on your overall health. Research shows that dietary habits influence disease risk. While certain foods may trigger chronic health conditions, others offer strong medicinal and protective qualities. Thus, many people argue that food is medicine.

Yet, diet alone cannot and should not replace medicine in all circumstances. Although many illnesses can be prevented, treated, or even cured by dietary and lifestyle changes, many others cannot.

How food nourishes and protects your body

Many nutrients in food promote health and protect your body from disease. Eating whole, nutritious foods is important because their unique substances work synergistically to create an effect that can't be replicated by taking a supplement.

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Vitamins and minerals

Although your body only needs small amounts of vitamins and minerals, they're vital for your health. However, Western diets — high in processed foods and low in whole foods like fresh produce — are typically deficient in vitamins and minerals. Such deficiencies can substantially increase your risk of disease.

For example, insufficient intakes of vitamin C, vitamin D, and folate may harm your heart, cause immune dysfunction, and increase your risk of certain cancers, respectively.

Beneficial plant compounds

Nutritious foods, including vegetables, fruits, beans, and grains, boast numerous beneficial compounds, such as antioxidants. Antioxidants protect cells from damage that may otherwise lead to disease.

In fact, studies demonstrate that people whose diets are rich in polyphenol antioxidants have lower rates of depression, diabetes, dementia, and heart disease.

Fiber

Fiber is an essential part of a healthy diet. It not only promotes proper digestion and elimination but also feeds the beneficial bacteria in your gut. Thus, high-fiber foods like vegetables, beans, grains, and fruits help protect against disease, decrease inflammation, and boost your immune system.

On the other hand, low-fiber diets are associated with an increased risk of illnesses, including colon cancer and stroke.

Protein and healthy fats

The protein and fat in whole, nutritious foods play various critical roles in your body.

Amino acids found in meats and eggs — the building blocks of protein — aid immune function, muscle synthesis, metabolism, and growth, while fats provide fuel and help absorb nutrients.

Omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in foods like fatty fish, help regulate inflammation and are linked to improved heart and immune health.

“While certain foods may trigger chronic health conditions, others offer strong medicinal and protective qualities. Thus, many people argue that food is medicine.”

A healthy diet can decrease disease risk

Notably, nutritious foods may decrease your risk of disease — while the opposite is true for highly processed foods.

Unhealthy food choices can increase disease risk

Unhealthy diets high in sugary drinks, fast food, and refined grains are a main contributor to conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. These processed foods harm your gut bacteria and promote insulin resistance, chronic inflammation, and overall disease risk.

A study in over 100,000 people found that every 10% increase in ultra-processed food intake resulted in a 12% increase in cancer risk. Additionally, a study on worldwide mortality and disease showed that in 2017, 11 million deaths and 255 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) were likely due to poor diet.

DALYs measure the burden of disease, with one unit representing the loss of one year of full health.

Nutritious diets protect against disease

On the other hand, research indicates that diets abundant in plant foods and low in processed products strengthen your health.

For instance, the Mediterranean diet, which is rich in healthy fats, whole grains, and vegetables, is linked to a reduced risk of heart disease, neurodegenerative conditions, diabetes, certain cancers, and obesity.

Other eating patterns shown to safeguard against disease include plant-based, whole-food-based, and paleo diets.

In fact, some diets may reverse certain conditions. For example, plant-based diets have been found to reverse coronary artery disease while very-low-carb lifestyles may help eliminate type 2 diabetes in some people.

What’s more, nutritious eating patterns like the Mediterranean diet are tied to better self-reported quality of life and lower rates of depression

than typical Western diets — and may even boost your longevity.

Such findings prove that robust diets indeed function as preventative medicine.

Foods with powerful medicinal properties

Transitioning to a diet based on whole foods can improve your health in countless ways. Foods that offer particularly powerful benefits include:

- **Berries.** Numerous studies have found that nutrients and plant compounds in berries combat disease. In fact, diets rich in berries may protect against chronic conditions, including certain cancers.
- **Cruciferous vegetables.** Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and kale contain a wide array of antioxidants. High intake of these vegetables may decrease your risk of heart disease and promote longevity.
- **Fatty fish.** Salmon, sardines, and other fatty fish fight inflammation due to their high levels of omega-3 fatty acids, which also protect against heart disease.
- **Mushrooms.** Compounds in mushrooms, types of which include maitake and reishi, have been shown to boost your immune system, heart, and brain health.
- **Spices.** Turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, and other spices are packed with beneficial plant compounds. For example, studies note that turmeric helps treat arthritis and metabolic syndrome.
- **Herbs.** Herbs like parsley, oregano, rosemary, and sage not only provide natural flavor to dishes but also boast many health-promoting compounds.
- **Green tea.** Green tea has been thoroughly researched for its impressive benefits, which may include reduced inflammation and lower disease risk.
- **Nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil, honey, seaweed, and fermented foods.** These are just a few of the many other foods studied for their medicinal properties.

Simply transitioning to a diet rich in whole foods like fruits and vegetables is the simplest way to reap the medicinal benefits of food.

The bottom line

Food does much more than simply provide you with fuel. It may promote or worsen health, depending on what you eat.

A nutrient-dense diet of whole foods has been shown to prevent many chronic diseases and may help treat some conditions, such as type 2 diabetes.

Although it’s clear that following a nutritious diet is one of the most important factors in living a long, healthy life, keep in mind that you should not rely on food to replace conventional medicine. 🌱

source: [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)

Neck Pain

Symptoms, Causes and Home Treatment

By Ann Pietrangelo



Neck pain or stiffness is usually from poor posture, overuse, or an awkward sleeping position. But sometimes, it can indicate a serious injury like whiplash or an illness, so a doctor's care may be necessary.

Your neck is made up of vertebrae that extend from the skull to the upper torso. Cervical discs absorb shock between the bones.

The bones, ligaments, and muscles of your neck support your head and allow for motion. Any abnormalities, inflammation, or injury can cause neck pain or stiffness.

If you have neck pain that continues for more than a week, is severe, or is accompanied by other symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.

Neck pain symptoms

Neck pain symptoms can range in severity and duration. Oftentimes, neck pain is acute and lasts for only a couple of days or weeks. Other times, it may become chronic. Your neck pain may be mild and not interfere much with your activities or daily living, or it may be severe and cause disability.

Symptoms of neck pain may include:

- Stiff neck. People with neck pain often describe feeling as though their neck is “stiff” or “stuck.” Neck pain can sometimes cause a decreased range of motion.
- Sharp pain. Neck pain may feel like sharp or “stabbing” pain that is localized to one area.
- Pain when moving. Neck pain is often exacerbated by moving, twisting, or extending your cervical spine, either from side to side or up and down.
- Radiating pain or numbness. Your neck pain may radiate to your head, trunk, shoulder, and arms. If your neck pain involves the compression of a nerve, you may feel numbness, tingling, or weakness in either of your arms or hands. Neck pain that is from a pinched nerve may feel like a burning or sharp pain that starts at the neck and travels down the arm. Talk with a doctor if you experience this symptom.
- Headache. Pain that starts in your neck may also produce a headache called a cervicogenic headache. Neck pain with a headache may also be a symptom of a migraine headache.
- Pain when palpated. Neck pain may increase if your cervical spine is palpated (physically examined).

Causes of neck pain

Neck pain or stiffness can happen for a variety of reasons.

Muscle tension and strain

This is usually from activities and behaviors such as:

- poor posture
- working at a desk for too long without changing position
- sleeping with your neck in a bad position
- jerking your neck during exercise
- injury

The neck is particularly vulnerable to injury, especially in falls, car accidents, and sports, where the muscles and ligaments of the neck are forced to move outside of their normal range.

If the neck bones (cervical vertebrae) are fractured, the spinal cord may also be damaged. Neck injury from sudden jerking of the head is commonly called whiplash.

“Neck pain or stiffness is usually from poor posture, overuse, or an awkward sleeping position. But sometimes, it can indicate a serious injury like whiplash or an illness, so a doctor’s care may be necessary.”

Heart attack

Neck pain can also be a symptom of a heart attack. It often presents with other symptoms of a heart attack, such as shortness of breath, sweating, nausea, vomiting, arm or jaw pain.

If your neck hurts and you have other symptoms of heart attack, call an ambulance or go to the emergency room immediately.

Meningitis

Meningitis is an inflammation of the thin tissue that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. In people who have meningitis, they may experience stiff neck, headache, nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, and fever.

Meningitis can be fatal and is a medical emergency.

Other causes of neck pain include the following:

- Rheumatoid arthritis causes pain, swelling of the joints, and bone spurs. When these occur in the neck area, neck pain can result.
- Osteoporosis weakens bones and can lead to small fractures. This condition often happens in hands or knees, but it can also occur in the neck.
- Fibromyalgia is a condition that causes muscle pain throughout the body, especially in the neck and shoulder region.

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- As you age, the cervical discs can degenerate. This is known as spondylosis, or osteoarthritis of the neck. This can narrow the space between the vertebrae. It also adds stress to your joints.
- When a disc protrudes, as from a trauma or injury, it may add pressure on the spinal cord or nerve roots. This is called a herniated cervical disc, also known as a ruptured or slipped disc.
- Spinal stenosis occurs when the spinal column narrows and causes pressure on the spinal cord or the nerve roots as it exits the vertebrae. This can be from long-term inflammation caused by arthritis or other conditions.
- In rare instances, neck stiffness or pain occurs due to congenital abnormalities, infections, abscesses, tumors, or cancer of the spine.

When to see your doctor

If symptoms persist for more than a week, consult a doctor.

Also see a doctor if you have severe neck pain without apparent cause like a lump in your neck, fever, headache, swollen glands, nausea, vomiting, trouble swallowing or breathing, weakness, numbness, tingling, pain that radiates down your arms or legs, inability to move your arms or hands, inability to touch your chin to your chest, or bladder or bowel dysfunction.

If you've been in an accident or fall and your neck hurts, seek medical care immediately.

How to ease neck pain at home

If you have minor neck pain or stiffness, take these simple steps to relieve it:

1. Apply ice for the first few days. After that, apply heat with a heating pad, hot compress, or by taking a hot shower.
2. Take OTC pain relievers, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.
3. Take a few days off from sports, activities that aggravate your symptoms, and heavy lifting. When you resume normal activity, do so slowly as your symptoms ease.
4. Exercise your neck every day. Slowly stretch your head in side-to-side and up-and-down motions.
5. Practice good posture.
6. Avoid cradling the phone between your neck and shoulder.
7. Change your position often. Don't stand or sit in one position for too long.
8. Get a gentle neck massage.
9. Use a special neck pillow for sleeping.
10. Don't use a neck brace or collar without your doctor's approval. If you don't use them properly, they can make your symptoms worse. 🚫

source: [healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)

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