

# TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR WELL-BEING!

YOU KNOW IT'S IMPORTANT TO STAY ON TOP OF DOCTOR VISITS. BUT OPTIMUM HEALTH ALSO INVOLVES NURTURING YOUR MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

**MICHELLE COTTLE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HEALTH-CONSCIOUS.** As a professional dancer, she spent much of her young life focusing on being physically fit. But when a car accident left her with a hip injury that ended her career at age 22, she turned to two different holistic therapies (after years of more conventional treatments) to help her heal, and she got more than she bargained for. Cottle found that Pilates, and especially Gyrotonic Exercise (a movement technique that Cottle describes as "Pilates in 3D" because it consists of circular movements as opposed to linear Pilates movements), helped heal not just her body, but also her spirit and mind in a way that dancing hadn't done for her before. "Gyrotonic integrates the body, mind and spirit by incorporating breathing and imagery while strengthening the body, soothing the nervous system, relieving stress and promoting an overall sense of well-being," says Cottle, who now teaches Pilates and Gyrotonic Exercise at her fitness studio, Reflexion, in Bedford Hills. Cottle's life-altering accident has taught her a valuable lesson: Staying on top of your health doesn't just mean keeping your body fit (although it is vital to get regular health screenings); it means taking charge of your whole well-being.

Countless studies confirm that there is an inseparable connection between mind and body. One Harvard study showed that more than 60 percent of doctor visits are due to stress-related issues. In other words, your thoughts and stress can actually make you sick. Specifically, stress has been shown to weaken immune function and create inflammation in your body, which can lead to all kinds of problems, such as colds, gastric reflux, irritable bowel syndrome, migraines and cancer. "To achieve true health, you must go beyond the physical and look at all aspects of your life—your environment, your relationships, your spirituality, your emotional health and how you handle stress," says Michael Finkelstein, M.D., a board-certified internist and reiki practitioner who is the founder and medical director of Sun Raven, a holistic healing center in Bedford. Sound overwhelming? That's why we break it down for you here by highlighting key areas that are integral to overall well-being.



# IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE

Experts agree that exercise is one of the best ways to relieve stress, improve mood and benefit overall health. Not only does it improve cardiovascular health, flexibility, coordination and strength, it also releases endorphins, lowers stress hormones and ups your energy level. "But keep in mind that exercise does not have to be about perfecting your body, and you don't need to work so hard at it," says Dr. Finkelstein. "Instead, try to take care of your body in a way that's good, but not perfect." One way to do that is to focus on the mental aspects of exercise and try a mind-body activity such as yoga or tai chi, which helps you be mindful of your present thoughts and breathing patterns while promoting inner calm. After all, these practices have been shown to lower blood pressure and relieve stress.

Cottle, who felt "there was enormous pressure to look perfect" when she was a professional dancer, has turned to the more holistic Gyrotonic Exercise movement because it brought her focus inward and helped her get out of the depression she experienced after her car accident. "Gyrotonic helped me concentrate more on my spirit and brought me to a lighter, more joyful place—and it even led me to start meditating, which has made me much calmer and less reactive," says Cottle.

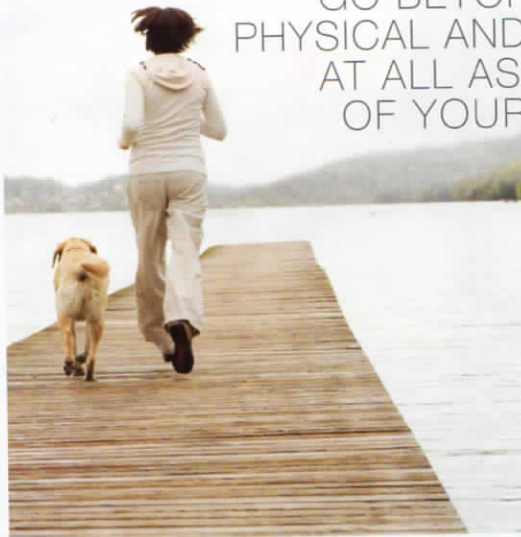
But you don't need to become a Zen master. Most any exercise can have a mind-body component if you simply shift your mental focus while doing it. For instance, "rather than do your physical activity in a gym, go outside and exercise—and feel the rhythms of nature," suggests Dr. Finkelstein. "See the birds, breathe in the stillness and settle your mind." Or invite a friend along with you to walk or jog outside so you can socialize and feel connected with another person—you'll reap even more mind-body benefits. Whatever it is you like to do, whether it's walking, yoga, gardening or kickboxing, do it mindfully—take in the scenery, listen to your breathing or feel the beat of the music in your core as you dance—and you'll give your mind as big a boost as you give your body.

# COME ON, GET HAPPY

Another key way to make yourself healthier and more energetic is to make yourself happier. And as you can imagine, there are many ways to accomplish that if you give yourself the opportunity. For instance, take time—even if it's just a few minutes a day—to do something that relaxes you, such as reading a soothing book or doing a crossword puzzle (as an added bonus, these mental activities will also sharpen your mind and boost your memory). Or simply try to declutter your mind. Meditate, write in a journal or just write down your thoughts on a sheet of paper and unburden your brain of your mental to-dos and problems. "Free your mind of the unnecessary junk that's in it," says Dr. Finkelstein. "Removing those obstacles will help you feel calm, and it is another great way to keep your mind sharp."

One way to get happy is to connect with others. "There is a lot of life out there beyond ourselves, and it's important for our well-being to find meaning in relationships with those around us," says Dr. Finkelstein. Research shows that people who are socially connected actually live longer. So have lunch with a friend, snuggle with your spouse or volunteer in your town. Staying socially connected and giving to others will help you feel good spiritually, lower stress and ultimately make you healthier.

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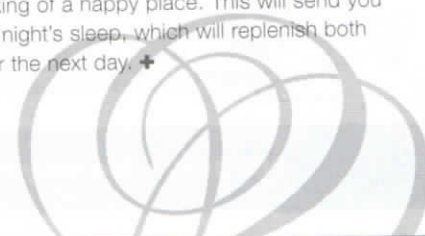


# NUTRITION KNOW-HOW

Anyone who has ever skipped a meal could tell you that when you don't eat regularly (and healthfully), you end up feeling cranky and lethargic. That's because taking in nutritious fuel on a regular basis is key to the proper functioning of your body and mind. "Think about what substances you consume, and shift your diet to include more whole foods and fewer processed foods," says Dr. Finkelstein. So instead of grabbing a fat-filled muffin on your way to work, or a processed bag of chips for lunch, put pure, nutrient-dense, fiber-rich foods (like whole grains and vegetables) into your body throughout the day—and don't forget to stay hydrated by drinking water (aim for eight 8-ounce glasses a day). You'll keep your blood sugar stable (which will reduce mood swings and cravings), your energy up, your waistline in check and your mind clear.

# SLEEP SENSE

Most Americans skimp on sleep because we feel our lives are too busy to fit enough in. But sleep is one of the most critical components of health. "The purpose of sleep is to restore the mind and body," says Dr. Finkelstein. Research shows that if you don't sleep enough, you'll be drained and irritable, your immune system will weaken, and you'll even end up with cognitive problems, such as difficulty concentrating or memory impairment. Fit in adequate sleep, and your whole well-being will benefit. To ease yourself into a calming bedtime routine, don't exercise within two hours of going to bed, turn off the TV or computer in your room, don't eat heavily right before lying down (you don't want your body working on digestion when it's supposed to be resting) and try to still your mind by breathing deeply while thinking of a happy place. This will send you on your way toward a good night's sleep, which will replenish both your body and your mind for the next day. +



# HEALTH SCREENINGS

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR WHOLE WELL-BEING MEANS NURTURING YOUR MIND AND SPIRIT—AND STAYING ON TOP OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH. TO KEEP YOUR BODY IN TIP-TOP SHAPE, CHECK THIS LIST OF THE VITAL HEALTH SCREENINGS ADULTS SHOULD GET REGULARLY.

TEST	WHO	WHAT	WHEN
<b>FASTING LIPOPROTEIN CHECK</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	A blood test that screens for heart disease and stroke by measuring the two types of cholesterol—HDL and LDL—and triglycerides, which are fat-like substances in the body	At least every five years. Have the test done more frequently (per your doctor's recommendation) if you have high cholesterol or other risk factors for cardiovascular disease, or are over age 50 for women or age 45 for men
<b>BLOOD PRESSURE</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	A simple device wrapped around your arm measures the pressure of blood vessels to screen for heart disease and stroke	Ideally, every year along with your annual physical
<b>COLORECTAL SCREENINGS</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	Three tests that screen for colorectal cancer: high-sensitivity fecal occult blood test (FOBT), which checks for hidden blood in stool samples; flexible sigmoidoscopy, in which a flexible, lighted tube is used to inspect the interior walls of the rectum and part of the colon; colonoscopy, in which a flexible, lighted tube is used to inspect the interior walls of the rectum and the entire colon.	FOBT—every year starting at age 50; sigmoidoscopy—every five years starting at 50; colonoscopy—every 10 years starting at 50
<b>SKIN CHECK</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	A visual examination by a dermatologist that screens for skin cancer	Once a year unless your dermatologist suggests otherwise
<b>BONE MINERAL DENSITY TEST</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	An X-ray exam that measures bone density and determines bone strength and risk for osteoporosis	People with no risk factors should get their first test at age 65 (women) or 70 (men). If, however, you are 50 or older and you have risk factors for osteoporosis, or if you are a woman of menopausal or postmenopausal age (yet younger than 65) with risk factors, ask your doctor about getting screened earlier.
<b>DENTAL EXAM</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	An oral exam of the teeth and gums done by a dentist—and a cleaning	Every six months unless your dentist recommends otherwise
<b>EYE EXAM</b>	WOMEN AND MEN	An optometrist or ophthalmologist checks for any eye conditions, such as glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration, and assesses your vision.	There are no universal standards for frequency of exams. Some doctors recommend yearly exams, while others recommend exams every two to four years. If you have an eye condition or you wear glasses, you may need to go more frequently.
<b>PELVIC EXAM, PAP SMEAR AND HPV TEST</b>	WOMEN	A pelvic exam screens for signs of STDs and abnormalities of the cervix or uterus. A Pap smear, in which the cervix is swabbed to obtain a sample of cells, checks for infections and abnormal cervical cells. The Pap smear is a preliminary screen for the human papillomavirus (HPV), which can lead to cervical cancer. If Pap results show abnormalities, the sample will be further tested for HPV.	Recent recommendations from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists state that women age 30 and older should get Pap smears every two years, depending on the results and their doctor's recommendations. If you have had irregular results in the past or you have other risk factors for cervical cancer, you may need more frequent screening.
<b>BREAST EXAMS AND MAMMOGRAM</b>	WOMEN	A breast exam is a physical check of your breasts that helps determine if there are any changes in the tissue that could indicate cancer. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breasts that screens for cancer.	Experts are not in complete agreement as to the recommended screening schedule. The American Cancer Society recommends that women age 40 and older do a breast self-exam monthly and get a clinical (physical) breast exam by a health professional and a mammogram every year. If you are at increased risk for breast cancer, you may need to start screening earlier and get additional tests.
<b>PROSTATE SCREENINGS</b>	MEN	A digital rectal examination (DRE) is a physical exam of the rectum done by a medical professional to assess if there are any bumps on the prostate that may indicate cancer. A prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test is a blood test that screens for prostate cancer.	Many experts recommend DRE and PSA every one to two years for men age 50 and older. Discuss this with your doctor based on your personal and family history because experts disagree as to when testing should start and how frequently it should be done.
<b>GENITAL EXAMS</b>	MEN	Testicular screening is a self-exam of the testes in which you feel for any changes that may indicate a cancerous tumor. STD screening, done by a medical professional, determines whether or not there are any sexually transmitted diseases present.	Discuss this with your doctor based on your age and sexual activity. There are no standard recommendations for everyone.

THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE GENERAL GUIDELINES. IF YOU HAVE A PERSONAL OR FAMILY HISTORY OF THESE ILLNESSES, OR YOU ARE AT INCREASED RISK FOR THESE ILLNESSES FOR ANY OTHER REASON, YOUR DOCTOR MAY SUGGEST SCREENINGS AT AN EARLIER AGE AND/OR ON A MORE FREQUENT BASIS.