



# YOUR WELLNESS CALENDAR

Get vaccinated and tested, increase your sunshine intake, start meditating—adopt one task each month to stay fit

BY KAVITA DEVGAN

It is that time of the year when resolutions are made—and broken as the months unfold. While the New Year is still new, we have put together a month-on-month "Get Well" plan. It is easier to stick to resolutions when you don't have to put all of them in action at once. Take one task for every month and get committed to improving your health as 2014 progresses.

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JAN



## Get serious about preventive health

Preventive health measures save life. That's a given. "This January, resolve to find out about your risk factors and make a serious effort to control them. Consciously take precautions against preventable diseases by getting immunized against HPV (it can cause cervical cancer), hepatitis B and C, and get regular screening done for breast and colorectal cancers," says Mukesh Mehra, senior consultant, internal medicine, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Patparganj, Delhi. "If you are above 30 years of age, a yearly full-body check-up (with blood count, cardiac health parameters and liver function tests) is a good preventive programme to follow."

FEB

## Work for a healthy heart

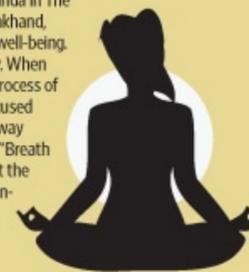
In the month of Valentine's Day, give your heart lots of love by taking care of it. "Switch to healthier cooking oils like corn, soya, safflower, canola, sesame, rice bran and olive oil; eat nuts like walnuts and almonds every day; switch to whole-grain cereals; eat plenty of vegetables and fruits; and include fish like salmon, tuna and sardines twice a week in your diet (vegetarians can have flaxseed)," says Tilak Suvama, senior interventional cardiologist, head of department-cardiology, Asian Heart Institute, Mumbai. "Also, stick to low-fat cooking methods like roasting, grilling, stir-frying, steaming and baking," he adds.



MAR

## Start meditating

Stress can increase your blood pressure to dangerous levels and push the pulse rate above normal. So what's the solution? According to Sushant Pandey, head of yoga at Ananda In The Himalayas—A Destination Spa in Uttarakhand, meditation delivers greater health and well-being. "Meditation is the key to inner harmony. When we meditate our mind goes through a process of transformation and develops clarity, focused awareness and relaxation, thus doing away with the bad effects of stress," he says. "Breath awareness is the best technique to start the meditative process. Meditate for 5-7 minutes every day," he suggests.



APR

## Take a hard look at your fat intake

"Don't completely give up fat, just get smart about it," says nutritionist Neelanjana Singh, Nutri Life Clinic, Delhi. "That's because we need to provide, through our diet, some essential fatty acids (omega-6 and omega-3) as these are not made in the body. Switch to healthy fats: alternate two-three different oils to score these essential fatty acids (choose from soya, mustard, rice bran, olive and canola oils); avoid bakery products and confectionery items that contain trans fats and finally, keep the visible fat (including oils, butter and animal fat) intake to the maximum of 500ml per person per month (3 teaspoons a day)," she adds.



MAY



## Revisit an old hobby

According to Samir Parikh, director, department of mental health and behavioural sciences, Fortis Healthcare, Delhi, creative pursuits have immense healing potential. "Be it visual arts, music, dance or photography or any other creative endeavour, all have the power to help us deal better with stress and difficult emotions. And pursuing a hobby not just delivers better concentration, motivation, it also keeps you positive," he says. "The process of 'creating' is immensely therapeutic and relaxing. It helps you to keep in touch with your inner feelings and emotions and enables psychological and emotional well-being."

JUN



## Get a pet

There is a link between pet ownership and a healthier, longer life, says Dr Suvama. "Having a pet animal as a companion may not only warm your heart but may also help keep you healthy," he says. "Not only is there an obvious increase in physical activity (walking the dog, cleaning the aquarium, etc.), research also shows that pet owners have significantly lower cholesterol, triglyceride and blood pressure levels compared to non pet owners. And their stress levels get greatly reduced too," he adds.

JUL

## Do financial planning

Come July, filing tax returns takes up our mind space. Dr Parikh says: "Don't stop just there. Go on and diligently tackle all the tasks that are essential for your financial health, like planning investments, putting a savings plan in order, reviewing the health insurance... basically focus on managing your money properly." He adds: "Enough money is absolutely essential to be able to build a comfortable and stress-free life. Financial stress is a huge part of the total stress we face, and can lead to health consequences like hypertension, inability to concentrate, sleep disturbances, low motivation and more, so nix it effectively by getting proactive."



AUG

## Give up one vice

In August, when more than half a year has already passed, it's about time you identified and concentrated on giving up one bad habit, be it smoking, drinking, too much junk food or sweets. "The two most important factors to quit an ingrained habit like, say, smoking are will power and defining a reason to quit," says Chandan Kedawat, senior consultant, internal medicine, Pushpawati Singhania Research Institute, Delhi. "So get these in place and get going. And don't shy away from taking professional help if needed; visit a doctor/specialist. He will tell you how to quit and begin the nicotine replacement therapy to help you quit in a prescribed manner. Similarly, for other problem areas (like drinking)," Dr Kedawat adds.



SEP

## Add sunshine to your life

Get out a bit more often. "We need sunshine to trigger the necessary chemical releases in the brain that regulate a healthy mood, restful sleep, and other physical and mental health parameters. Plus, sun exposure at appropriate times is essential to help the body produce vitamin D, which assists in the absorption of calcium, regulating the immune system and preventing diabetes and obesity," says Manish Mohil, consultant, internal medicine, Saket City Hospital, Delhi. "Fortunately India is blessed with abundant sunlight. Ten to 15 minutes of direct sun exposure every day is recommended. So go for walks, do gardening, outdoor yoga, drive with the windows open to soak up the sun," Dr Mohil adds.



OCT

## Begin a strenuous workout

The festive season is round the corner. Now's the time to step up the exercise. Beginning October, till the end of the year, there is an abundance of festivities and food and people tend to put their health on the back-burner. According to Dr Mehra of Max Super Speciality Hospital, this is also the time of changing weather and the arrival of illnesses like pneumonia; the risk of brain strokes and heart attacks also increases in the cold weather. "So it makes absolute sense to begin some exercise during this time. Do brisk walking, jogging, swimming, or aerobic and stretching exercises five-six times a week for approximately 40 minutes every day," he says.



NOV

## Sharpen your brain

The brain's function is dictated by our genes and the environment but one can still work at sharpening it. "Neuroscientists have shown that our brain has the capacity to make new neural connections at any age, so working out puzzles and playing mind games help immensely. Also, it is important to use both sides of the brain—the creative right side and the learning and thinking side in the left, to keep it fighting fit," says Swaroop Gopal, head of department, neurosurgery, Manipal Hospital, Bangalore.



DEC

## Unclutter your life

Life is all about juggling responsibilities. But at the same time it is important to relax and score some me-time. "Quit trying to do everything, ease up a bit, and learn to prioritize. Learn to say 'no' sometimes. So in the last month of the year take a good look at what is actually causing you stress, then slow down a bit. This is essential to keep neuropsychiatrist issues, anxiety disorder and other stress-related disorders at bay," says Meena Gnanasekaran, child, adolescent and adult psychologist, Columbia Asia Hospital, Bangalore. "And while you are at it, add some humour to your life too, as it'll not just improve your mood and control stress, but also accrue you multiple health benefits," she says.

