

Better skin while you sleep * 8 good-for-you fats * A simple way to find calm

NATURAL HEALTH

feel good / look good / do good

Heal the planet, heal yourself

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hug

*a
tree*





yourself

Good news! The planet-friendly changes you embrace can pay off big when it comes to your health. Here, four smart ways to transform how you look and feel while you save the Earth.

by
Jodi Helmer

no. 1



Bike to work

Good reason to put down your car keys: Every gallon of gas you use produces more than 19 pounds of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Join the 1.6 million Americans who use a bike as their primary mode of transportation—a figure that increased 43 percent between 2000 and 2008, according to the League of American Bicyclists.

➤ **HEALTH BENEFITS** Aside from the obvious calorie burn that comes from riding a bike (it torches almost 600 calories per hour!), a study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found another reason to steer clear of your car: Commuters who spent 30 minutes or more per day behind the wheel were more likely to be obese than their peers who drove less.

Bicycle commuting may also make you feel better. Physical activity leads to decreased levels of anxiety, stress and depression—and cardiovascular workouts release endorphins, hormones that regulate mood. “Commuting on your bike builds a little meditation and

SHARE THE ROAD

Riding your bike to work might not be a viable option if your commute requires navigating a series of freeway on-ramps and zig-zagging through traffic for upward of 25 miles. There is another eco-friendly option for getting to work: carpool. Less than 11 percent of Americans share a ride, despite the fact that carpooling just one day per week eliminates about 400 pounds of CO₂ per person annually. Organize a carpool among your co-workers or go online to search for a ride-share in your area.

motion into your day,” says Kate Hanley, author of *The Anywhere, Anytime Chill Guide: 77 Simple Strategies for Serenity* (skirt!). “When you get home, you’re mentally refreshed, physically invigorated, less stressed and better able to enjoy your family and your free time.”

All of that CO₂ you’re saving the atmosphere by not driving can further safeguard your health—and the health of everyone around you. When you breathe in carbon monoxide it enters your bloodstream and inhibits the transfer of oxygen to your internal organs and tissues, which in turn can impair vision, dexterity, brain function and exercise capacity.

➤ **ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS** The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that transportation accounts for two-thirds of CO₂ emissions in the U.S. (the number can exceed 90 percent in urban areas and contributes to global warming).

If helping trim that statistic by biking to work *isn't* an option for you, fear not: You'll have an even bigger impact on the environment if you leave your car at home when you're running errands, since multiple short trips in your car can create more emissions than one longer trip. According to the Center for Urban Transportation Research (CUTR) in Tampa, Fla., 84 percent of the pollution-causing volatile organic compounds released during a one-mile car trip come from starting a cold engine. “Emission controls in cars work better after they are warmed up, which generally takes about two minutes,” explains CUTR project manager Julie Bond. So start riding your bike to the farmers market, yoga studio and coffee shop. “Decreased car emissions and added daily exercise benefit everyone,” she adds.

“A lot of our habits that are bad for the environment are also bad for our health.”

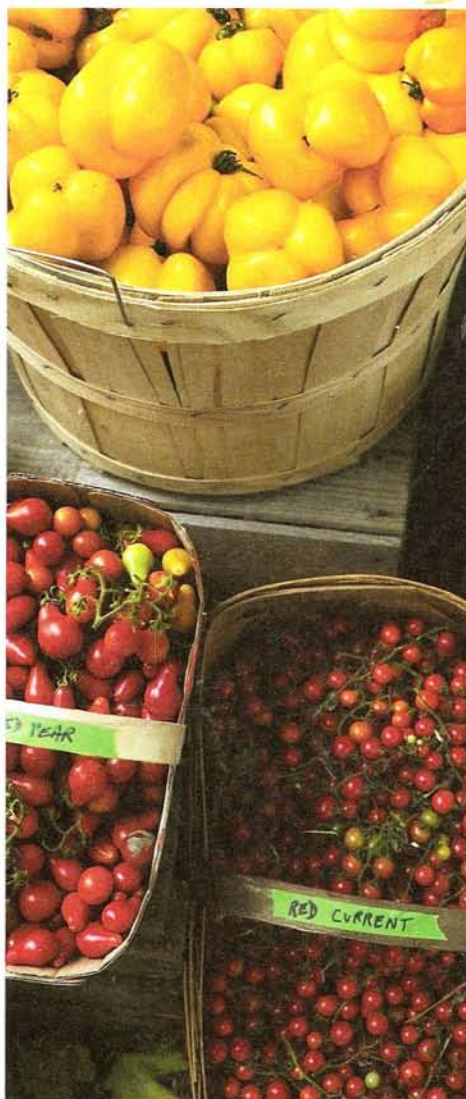
no. 2

Eat organic & local

Your mom was right: You are what you eat. And that's not always good news, considering the number of chemicals used to grow crops, raise livestock and preserve your favorite foods. "It's likely that we are ingesting traces of these chemicals," says Honor Schauland, campaign assistant for the Minnesota-based Organic Consumers Association. That's why we need to be mindful when it comes to our choices, says Beth Reardon, M.S., R.D., director of integrative nutrition at Duke Integrative Medicine in Durham, N.C. "Mindfulness also involves knowing where food comes from and how it's grown."

◆ **HEALTH BENEFITS** Buying organic and local is the safest choice considering the long list of downsides to conventionally produced foods. The same chemicals used to keep conventionally grown apples, peppers and other fruits and vegetables pest- and disease-free can cause a host of health problems, including birth defects, nerve damage and cancer. According to a report published by the Environmental Working Group, noshing on the most contaminated crops—which include peaches, strawberries, lettuce and carrots—means you'll ingest an average of 10 pesticides per day. Organic produce is a great alternative because it's chemical-free. Studies also show that organic produce has more antioxidant micronutrients and fewer nitrates than their conventionally grown counterparts.

But it's not just produce that's cause for concern. According to CSPI, beef from grain-fed cattle is a major source of saturated fat and cholesterol, which increases your risk of heart disease. Seek out grass-fed beef and bison, which are leaner and may contain up to five times the number of omega-3 fatty acids as grain-fed beef. When it comes to poultry and pork, look for products that are labeled "free-range" and "organic" to be sure you're getting the healthiest cuts. Because these cost more, opt for meatless meals a few times a week.



YOU GROW!

Spring is the perfect time to plant a little patch of vegetables—even if it's just a tomato plant in a pot on your patio. Working in the dirt has been shown to boost your health and help you connect with the source of your food, says Bunny Guinness, co-author of *Garden Your Way to Health and Fitness* (Timber Press). "You're also more likely to try different fruits and vegetables if they're growing outside your door." Go organic and grow your food without any pesticides. You'll have healthy picks all summer long.

◆ **ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS** Given that the average meal travels 1,500 miles before it reaches your plate, choosing foods that are grown organically on local farms is a great way to make a smaller carbon footprint. But the environmental impact of your meal starts long before the food reaches your table. Just 15 percent of the pesticides that are sprayed on crops actually hit their target; the rest of the chemicals are released into the soil, water and air, resulting in contamination of waterways, illnesses and death in birds and aquatic life, erosion and air pollution.

Raising livestock is also a significant source of environmental stress. A nonvegetarian diet uses almost three times more water, two and a half times more energy and 13 times more fertilizer than a vegetarian diet, according to a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Not surprisingly, you can make a big difference by eating more vegetarian meals a week.

no. 3



**Extreme
makeover:
green edition**

Reduce your toxin exposure

You might be surprised to learn that the products you use to keep your hair shiny, your skin soft and your home sparkling are often chemical cocktails masquerading in pretty packaging. "The latest science shows that the chemicals in the products we use are getting into our bodies and disturbing our environment," says Rebecca Sutton, Ph.D., senior scientist for the Environmental Working Group. Fortunately, it's easier than ever to find healthier and eco-friendlier favorites.

♦ **HEALTH BENEFITS** Swapping out chemical-laden conventional products with natural alternatives can really pay off when it comes to your health—now and down the road. Studies have linked the chemicals found in these conventional products (including triclosan, 2-butoxyethanol, antibacterial QUATs and alkylphenol ethoxylates) to allergies, asthma, anemia and even certain cancers. A British study found that women who used aerosol sprays were likely to experience headaches

and depression, and research published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* found that 1 in 7 adult asthma cases could be attributed to the use of furniture and glass cleaner sprays.

Two of the biggest toxic offenders are phthalates and parabens. Both are endocrine disruptors, which means they may interfere with reproductive processes, potentially contributing to infertility, endometriosis, breast cancer and fetal abnormalities. Endocrine disruptors have also been linked to early puberty in girls and deformities of the male reproductive system.

"Many of the products we use on our bodies are absorbed through our skin and can go directly into our bloodstream," says Lisa Petty, ROHP, a registered holistic nutrition consultant and author of *Living Beauty: Feel Great, Look Fabulous and Live Well* (Fitzhenry and Whiteside). "And when we use chemical-laden products to clean our homes, we inhale those chemicals because they linger in the air."

When it comes to minimizing your chemical exposure, reading labels is a good start. U.S. regulations require all beauty products to list ingredients on the packaging, so a

no. 4

Give back to the environment

In 2008, 61.3 million Americans participated in volunteer activities, giving 8.1 billion hours of service, according to the Washington, D.C.-based Corporation for National & Community Service. But you don't have to wait for Earth Day to plant a tree with the local Sierra Club chapter or round up your friends for an impromptu beach or street cleanup. The more time you spend engaged in volunteer activities—however big or small—the healthier and happier you'll be (not to mention the big impact you'll have).



HEALTH BENEFITS The hours you've spent removing invasive plants from local watersheds or requesting signatures on petitions for pro-environment causes aren't just earning you karma points. Volunteerism provides a significant health boost. A study published in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* found that giving a little of your time for a good cause boosts life satisfaction, self-esteem and happiness.

"Volunteering actually creates changes in our nervous system that makes us healthier and happier," explains Dacher Keltner, Ph.D., professor of psychology at University of California at Berkeley and author of *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life* (Norton). "You derive pleasure from giving your time to a cause, and it lifts your sense of well-being."

That pleasure doesn't just have an impact on those you're helping; it can make everyone around you—from your kids to your co-workers—happier, too. "Research shows that when a person is happy, it spreads outward from them, influencing the happiness of their friends, their friends' friends, and their friends' friends' friends," explains Nicholas Christakis, author of *Connected: The Surprising Power of Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives* (Little, Brown and Company). Christakis, who published his research in the *British Medical Journal*, notes that people who have the most social connections, including bonds formed through volunteer projects, are the happiest. You don't have to sacrifice countless hours to service projects. Pitch in where you can, whether it's serving on the board of directors for a local environmental organization or lacing up your sneakers to run in a charity 5K like the Run for the Rainforest. Get creative when it comes to finding time to volunteer.

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS Remember the '80s shampoo commercial where a friend told a friend who told another friend—and so on? Volunteering has a similar impact on the environment. You set aside a few hours to oversee the recycling program at a local school or lobby for more bike lanes in your neighborhood and it inspires a friend, who inspires another friend. It doesn't take long for legions of volunteers to start helping out.

Pick a cause you're passionate about and get involved. The simple act of giving helps to soothe the spirit, says Hanley. "When you are enjoying the good feelings that your volunteering promotes, you also become less reactive to the things that would otherwise push your buttons—the aggressive driver, nosy co-workers, an overbearing in-law. When you change the way you react to other people, they will also change the way they react to you. The result is more peace all around." ✖

Jodi Helmer is a writer in Charlotte, N.C., and the author of *The Green Year: 365 Small Things You Can Do to Make a Big Difference* (Alpha).

“Giving to a good cause boosts self-esteem, happiness and life satisfaction.”



Read labels before you buy; look for products with simple ingredients.

quick read can help you identify toxins. Unfortunately, even products that seem safe can contain powerful chemicals, thanks to a loophole in the federal guidelines that doesn't require manufacturers to list the chemicals used in fragrances on the label. "The word 'fragrance' on the label is a red flag," says Petty, and often means you're getting a product that contains phthalates. "It's OK to buy products that have a scent, just be sure that the scent is from a natural source: Vanilla essential oil is fine, for example, but vanilla fragrance should be avoided."

It's slightly more difficult to assess the risks associated with your favorite cleaning products. Because manufacturers aren't required to list ingredients, consumers have no way of knowing exactly what chemicals are lurking inside. The solution? Look for cleaning products that have been certified by nonprofits Green Seal or Ecologo, which have more rigorous safety, health and environmental standards than the federal government requires. When it comes to beauty products, look for similar regulatory labels, like the USDA Organic seal, which certifies that products have undergone a stringent approval process and do not contain several key ingredients of concern.

◆ **ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS** Chemicals that are powerful enough to impact your health also do their share of damage to the environment. After each use, the chemicals in your shampoo, soap and cleaning products are washed straight down the drain—and could end up in your drinking water.

A joint study by the EPA and Baylor University in Waco, Texas, found chemicals like galaxolide and tonalide, commonly used as fragrances in beauty and cleaning agents, were polluting waterways and present in the tissues of fish as a result of chemical runoff in rivers and streams. Researchers believe the chemical exposure could impact aggression and mating, threatening fish populations and causing imbalances in the ecosystem. Phthalates and other chemicals also cause indoor air pollution. There's another reason to make the switch to natural products: Your purchases send a message to companies that chemical-free alternatives to traditional products are essential. Fewer companies will continue manufacturing toxic products if more consumers demand green beauty and cleaning choices.



The products we use are absorbed through our skin and can go directly into our bloodstream.

