

health
meets
green
guide

25 Secrets for Healthy Living on a Healthy Planet

1. “Natural” means... not much.

Sure, eating “natural” food sounds like a good idea. Who would want to eat “unnatural” food? But on a package of food, the word rarely means what you think it means:

For meat and poultry, products labeled “natural” must be free of artificial ingredients, colorings, preservatives, and “unnecessary” processing. But the term allows the use of hormones and antibiotics. **Better**

choice: Meat labeled “USDA Certified Organic” is produced without antibiotics or hormones, and the animals aren’t fed animal by-products or chemically grown grain.

On anything else, the “natural” label is just a marketing term that anyone can use. **Strategy:** Check the nutrition labels and ingredients list to see what you’re actually getting.

Best bet: Look for the USDA-certified organic label.



2. Organic trumps local.

Here’s the surprising truth about food mileage: It’s only a small part of your food’s carbon footprint. More of the emissions that contribute to global warming come from the chemical pesticides and fertilizers used to grow food, than from manufacturing and delivering it to your store. Organic growing methods avoid carbon emissions created by chemical use, and they actually *put carbon back into the soil*, rather than releasing it into the atmosphere and heating up the planet.

Even if you are just buying produce from a local farmer, make sure it’s really organic.

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3. You could be exercising right now!

You don't need a gym membership or expensive equipment to give your body the exercise it needs. Build some automatic exercise into your workday by trying tactics like:

- ▶ **Standing up** while talking on the phone.
- ▶ **Using the stairs** instead of the elevator.
- ▶ **Walking** down the hall instead of e-mailing someone.



4. Fat's not all bad.

Fat in your diet doesn't necessarily mean fat on your body, and filling up on low-fat foods can end up making you fatter. Here's the deal with fat:

- ▶ **Saturated fats** raise your risk of heart disease if you eat too much of them. Try to avoid food that has more than 1 gram of saturated fat per 100 calories.
- ▶ **Unsaturated fats** come from fish and plants; you'll find them in olive, canola, and sunflower oils (but not palm and coconut oils—they contain saturated fats). The unsaturated kinds are a healthier choice; use them in place of saturated fats when you can.
- ▶ **Omega-3 fats** are a type of unsaturated fats found in fatty fish; they seem to do good things for your brain, heart, and mood. You can get them by eating a few servings of salmon or certain other fish every week, or in supplement form (look for DHA and EPA, the omegas that have the best-documented benefits.).
- ▶ **Trans-fatty acids**, or trans fats, are a kind of artificial fat used in processed foods. They're falling out of favor, since they've turned out to be bad for your heart. Check food labels and avoid them. The word "hydrogenated" in the ingredient list is a trans fat tip-off.



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5. Not all salmon is healthy.

While it's full of omega-3 fatty acids that work wonders for your body in all sorts of ways, some kinds of salmon are produced in an environmentally unfriendly fashion, and may be contaminated with toxins.

Choose wild-caught Alaska salmon, which is high in omegas and low in toxins. Avoid farmed or Atlantic salmon.



6. Here's what they say about high-fructose corn syrup.

Seen those corn industry commercials that suggest you're a complete idiot if you question the value of this food additive? Well, here's why HFCS producers are so defensive: The sweetener and preservative is so ubiquitous that it adds countless unneeded calories to our diets and is a likely contributor to rising obesity levels, especially in kids. Plus the monumental amount of corn grown to make it requires dumping huge amounts of chemicals into our environment. And a recent study suggests HFCS can be contaminated with mercury, a dangerous toxin.

7. Surprising but true: Meat isn't the enemy.

Caring about your health and the environment doesn't mean you have to become a vegetarian. If you buy meat that comes from grass-fed animals raised on smaller farms, you'll mitigate a lot of the environmental and health downsides of factory-farm meat production. And if you think of meat as a pleasure that doesn't have to be enjoyed in mass quantities at every single meal, you'll avoid the health problems that come with an overly meat-centric diet.



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8. The real truth about vaccines: They're safe.

Really! Don't believe the urban legends—vaccinate your kids. "There is no evidence whatsoever that vaccines cause autism, despite much misinformation to the contrary," says pediatrician Phil Landrigan, MD, chair of the department of community and preventive medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City and an advisor to Rodale.com.

Giving up on vaccines could lead to a resurgence of diseases like measles or polio that could threaten the lives of tens of thousands of children.



9. Precycling beats recycling.

We should all recycle whenever we can. But if you reduce and reuse first, you avoid needing to spend time and energy on recycling. Bonus: It usually also saves you money. Check Rodale.com for all sorts of ways to keep useful items out of the waste stream.

10. If you can't pronounce it, don't clean with it.

Labeling laws for soaps, detergents, and cleaning products are inconsistent at best.

The one trick that will keep you safe: Turn the bottle around and read the back. If it reads like a chemistry textbook, find something else.

Especially avoid products with "fragrance" or "parfum" on the ingredients list, which are code words for phthalates and other nasty chemicals.



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11. Soap and water are the best antibacterials.

“Antibiotic” soap, detergent, and hand cleanser sound great. Until you realize that a standard soap-and-water combo is just as effective at wiping out germs, doesn’t contribute to the rise of MRSA and other medicine-resistant superbugs, and doesn’t dump environment-wrecking chemicals into our waterways.

Using antibacterial soap is like washing your hands in a vat of pesticides.



12. Happiness spreads farther than sadness.



Researchers from the University of California have found that your happiness can spread not only to your circle of friends and family, but beyond. Here are the three habits that all happy people have:

- ▶ **They favor people over things.** Research consistently shows that material wealth doesn’t make people as happy as spending time with friends and family.
- ▶ **They treat themselves.** Take note of the simple, stupid things that make you smile, then make sure you do them every day.
- ▶ **They fake it on occasion.** Acting happy when you’re feeling “meh” can actually induce real happiness.

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13. The shocking truth about cellphones:

Some researchers think it's too soon to be sure about how cellphones affect cancer risk. While experts keep sifting through data, stay safe with this calling plan:

- ▶ **If you're a PERK, hang up.** Don't use a cellphone if you're **P**regnant, **E**arpiece-less, **R**iding in a car, or a **K**id. (Car riders should avoid them because the phone emits more radiation as it tries to connect to different towers.)
- ▶ **Use an earpiece or hands-free device** so you don't have to keep the phone against your body. Keep the phone at arm's length when you're not using it (or turn it off).
- ▶ **Check the SAR** (Specific Absorption Rate) of your phone. Shop for the lowest SAR you can get.



14. Sometimes bottled water is OK...



like when a bottle of sugary soda is the only alternative.

If it's bottled or nothing, choose the brand bottled closest to home, and avoid spring water (why remove water from someone else's ecosystem?). Recycle the bottle when done. Many bottled-water brands are just municipal water with a fancy label.

Get your home water tested, filter it if necessary, and you've got bottle-quality water for pennies a glass whenever you need it. (Make fancy labels for your glasses if you miss them.)

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15. The sun is good for you.

New research shows that most of us are deficient in vitamin D, even as other studies show the vitamin is more important for us than we knew. Sunlight is the easiest, most potent source of vitamin D—but overexposure to sunlight can result in skin cancer. Here some strategies for balancing those concerns:

- ▶ Fifteen to 30 minutes of sun exposure to your bare arms and legs produces as much vitamin D as 40 glasses of milk. A few minutes of sun exposure, a few times a week, between 10 am and 3 pm in summer and fall, could give you enough D to last through the winter (when the sun may be at too low an angle to stimulate vitamin D production).
- ▶ A daily 1,000-IU vitamin D supplement, plus a multivitamin with 400 IU of D, will keep your D levels where they probably should be.

- ▶ When you're not looking to raise your D levels, use a sunscreen of SPF 30 or more to protect yourself. Spread it generously—it takes a shot glass's worth to cover the average person in a bathing suit—and reapply every 2 hours (or after 40 minutes if you swim).



16. Nature is good for you.

Lots of studies show that observing and being in nature can reduce stress and boost your mood. Hospital patients have an easier recovery if there's a potted plant in the room. Even looking at trees and grass outside a window produces a measurable drop in stress levels.

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17. Mindfulness is a free, easy, powerful stress buster.

Mindfulness, aka mindfulness meditation, can snap your mind out of an anxious, stressful spiral and into a calmer state of being. The basics are as easy as breathing:

- ▶ Sit still in a quiet place.
- ▶ Breathe in and out, paying attention to the sensation of air moving in and out of your lungs.
- ▶ Become aware of what's going on around you: the temperature of the room, the quality of the light, the sounds and smells.
- ▶ As your mind becomes focused on the present moment, your anxiety and stress begin to fade.
- ▶ Practice daily for 5 minutes, and you'll be able to call on mindfulness whenever you need it.



18. Your doctor doesn't have time for all your problems.

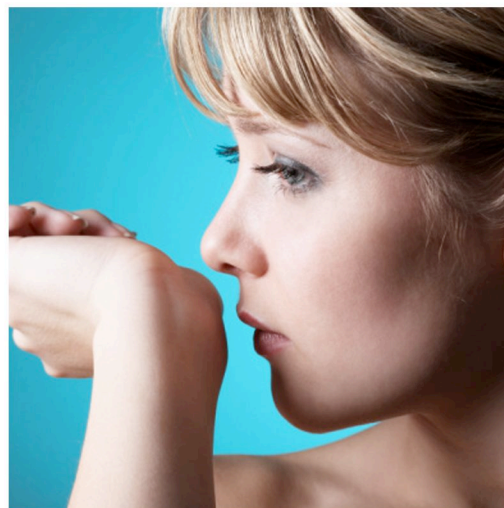
It's not that she doesn't care—she's just insanely busy with paperwork. Here are four strategies to get maximum results when you visit your doctor's office:

- ▶ **Come prepared.** Gather all the records and documents you need the day before your visit. Include a list of your symptoms, medications, and questions (with the most important ones first).
- ▶ **Make a suggestion.** When the doc arrives, tell her you don't mind if she reviews your chart before you begin.
- ▶ **Bring a friend.** Choose a family member or friend who can come in with you, stay calm, and take notes.
- ▶ **Ask about a follow-up.** Prepared or not, you may have further questions after the appointment's up. Ask for a specific way to get your Q's to the physician.



19. Your face is not a test tube.

It's just as important to avoid putting harmful chemicals on your skin as in your mouth. Choose cosmetics and personal-care products that don't have suspicious chemical ingredients, such as fragrance, parabens, "PEG," triclosan, or nanoparticles (indicted by the terms nano-, micronized, microscale, or fullerene). Until new labeling certifications help identify safer products, choose USDA-certified organic products whenever possible.



20. Cloth or disposable diapers?

The definitive answer: It's up to you. Decide which you prefer, then make smart choices to keep things earth-friendly:

- ▶ **If you go with cloth**, try to find hand-me-downs from family and friends to save money and avoid the environmental impact of their production. Diapers made from organic cotton will also take a lesser toll on the environment. Clean them with ecofriendly detergents, and don't use a diaper service, which will use more water and energy than needed.
- ▶ **If you prefer disposable**, choose a brand that's made from responsibly managed sources and doesn't contain synthetic fragrances or chemicals.



21. Some plastic is safer than others,



but avoiding plastic is the safest strategy for food and beverage containers. Check the little triangle on the bottom of the bottle or tub:

- ▶ Numbers 2, 4, 5 seem the least dangerous (at the moment).
- ▶ Unlucky # 7 is voted most likely to leach toxins into your edibles.
- ▶ Any plastic can dump chemicals into your food if heated or scratched.
- ▶ Glass, ceramic, or stainless steel containers bypass these problems altogether.

22. Coffee should grow in the shade.

Here's the single easiest thing you can do to help the environment every single day: Switch to shade-grown coffee. The world's most popular beverage is actually a shade plant, but coffee makers cut down huge swaths of rainforest so they can grow more coffee by dousing it in chemicals. Buy certified shade-grown coffee and you'll get chemical-free beans grown without habitat destruction. Look for "Bird Friendly," "Rainforest Alliance," "Fair Trade" or "Equal Exchange" certification on the label.

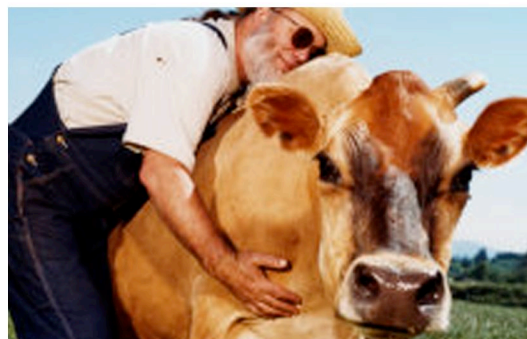


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23. Save money: Meet a farmer.

You can get great, fresh, local, organic produce—and perhaps meat and dairy, too—by going to a farmer's market and/or joining a CSA (community-supported agriculture) program.

Check www.localharvest.org to find them near you.



24. Alien genes are invading our food supply.



GM (genetically modified) foods contain genetic material from other species that's inserted into plants like corn, cotton, and soybean. What are the effects? An experiment on that is being conducted right now—on you, if you buy food containing GM ingredients. Look for organic products, or products labeled “GM-free” or “GMO-free”.

25. Talk to your government, it does make a difference.

You should communicate your concerns about health and the environment to your elected officials, whether it's the local city council or your senators. For maximum effect, here are the three strategies that always get results:

► **Create a narrative.** Drama and storytelling can win the day. Who's the good guy? Who's the bad guy? Who will suffer if things don't change?

► **Know the audience.** Whether it's the mayor, your senator, or the block captain, find out how much she already knows about the issue, what her stand is, what misinformation she's already seen. Target your argument accordingly.

► **Talk fast.** Create an ultrabrief version of your case. Know how to make your point in one minute, or in one sentence, so you can deal with any time constraint.



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