

# small steps, big gains

## take five small steps to a healthier you!

According to the National Women's Health Resource Center's third annual survey, "Women Talk," 98 percent of us believe that living a healthy lifestyle is important for our own health, as well as the health of our families. Unfortunately, our lives are so pressured with responsibilities – work, personal life, community activities – that we often get tied up in physical and mental knots just trying to get through the day. Take a deep breath. Help is here.

Incorporating healthy habits into your daily life has never been easier – or more affordable. You don't have to spend hours at the gym or an entire paycheck at the organic grocery store to improve your health and well-being. In fact, one small change to your every day routine can make for a much happier, healthier you.

To get you started, here are five small steps to a healthier you:

**1. Laugh away stress.** Research has shown that laughter is a great stress reliever, but the benefits don't end there. Laughter can also strengthen the immune system, lessen food cravings and help you heal more quickly. So, hang out with the kids tonight and enjoy a silly sitcom, get together with your girlfriends to have fun while helping someone, or curl up with your honey and enjoy the latest romantic comedy.

**2. Get moving.** The beauty of physical activity is that little bits add up to big benefits. Try adding activity into each day little by little. Unsure where to start? Keep it simple. Park your car at the far end of the parking lot when you go shopping and carry your groceries into the house one bag at a time. If you're a city girl, take the stairs instead of the elevator, or get off the bus or subway a couple of stops early and walk the rest of the way.

**3. Don't pass the salt.** Did you know that too much sodium can raise your blood pressure and contribute to developing or worsening hypertension, the leading risk factor for cardiovascular disease? And, every time you shake, you're adding about 40 milligrams of sodium. So, put away the salt shaker and try seasoning your food with flavorful herbs and spices instead.

**4. Skip the sunscreen...sometimes.** It may sound

sacrilegious but skipping sunscreen for brief periods of time can be good for you. How? Sunshine stimulates your skin to synthesize vitamin D, which may help ward off osteoporosis and other diseases, including certain common cancers. In fact, people under age 65 can get a year's supply of vitamin D in most parts of the United States by going outdoors without sunscreen for several minutes between midmorning and midafternoon a few times a week during the spring, summer and fall. If you're older or overweight, have darker skin, or live far north, you may need somewhat more exposure. Don't overdo it, though. Too much sun exposure can cause certain cancers.

**5. Throw your own tea party.** Instead of drinking your morning caffe latte or other coffee concoction, indulge in an aromatic cup of tea. Tea, particularly green tea, is an excellent source of antioxidants called polyphenol which may be why one Arizona study found that the more hot tea people drank (particularly tea with lemon), the less likely they were to develop squamous cell skin cancer.

*Reprinted with permission. National Women's Health Resource Center.*

