

# MEN'S JOURNAL

JAN/FEB 2015 Vol. 24, No. 1

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WINTER**

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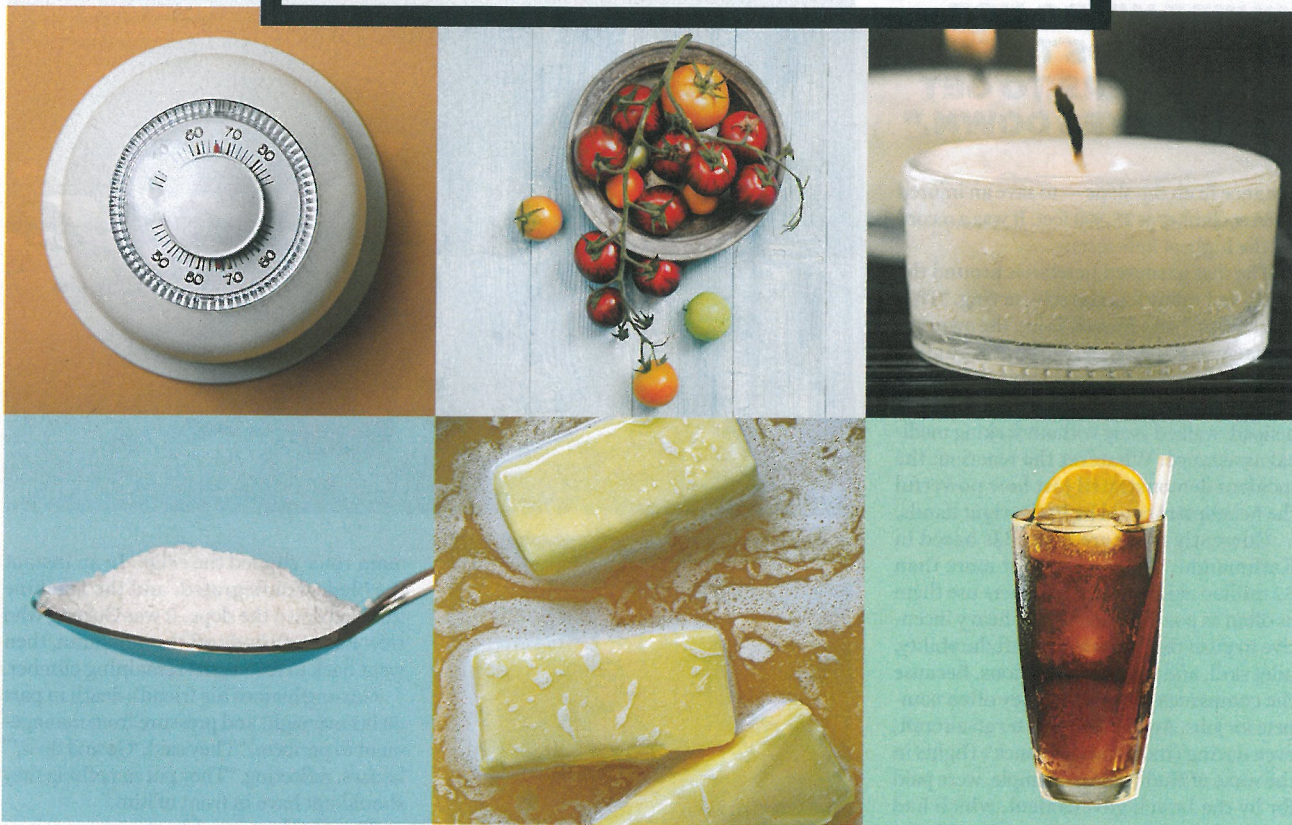


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# HEALTH & FITNESS

by MELAINA JUNTTI



## The Year in Health: What We Learned

We cut through the overload of medical, nutrition, and fitness advice to tell you what you really need to know, from 2014's biggest research breakthroughs to its most useful tools.

### **SUGAR: WORSE THAN WE THOUGHT**

More than 35 percent of Americans are obese, and more people than ever are dying from heart disease. One big reason why: sugar. A new study found that 71 percent of adults get more than 10 percent of their daily calories from sweeteners alone. "Added sugars increase risk factors for heart disease, including high blood pressure, chronic inflammation, and unhealthy blood lipids," says Rachel Johnson, a professor of nutrition at the University of Vermont and American Heart Association spokesperson. Avoiding sweetened foods is tough, too. "Added sugars are pervasive in foods you might not expect, such as salad dressings, soups, granola, and barbecue and spaghetti sauces."

**WHAT TO DO** The AHA says only 150 calories per day should come from sugar. To manage that, pass on sodas, sports and energy drinks, and limit packaged foods. When you do eat from a wrapper, check that the sugar content per serving is 10 grams or less and that the first ingredients are foods, not added sugars in disguise, like brown-rice syrup.

### **WORK OUT HARD OR TAKE IT EASY**

One of the year's biggest fitness discoveries: You probably need to push harder during speed work and interval training, and ease up more during longer sessions. "Most people, whether endurance athletes or regular exercisers, unconsciously do a majority of their cardio at moderate intensity," says running coach

Matt Fitzgerald, author of *80/20 Running*. "This middle gear stresses the body almost as much as high intensity but isn't nearly as beneficial for getting better speed or endurance."

**WHAT TO DO** Make roughly 80 percent of training low intensity and 20 percent high intensity. Aim for 70 percent of maximum heart rate during low intensity, recommends Fitzgerald, or a pace at which it's easy to talk. High intensity means hitting at least 92 percent max heart rate. "You'd rank your effort an 8 or higher on a scale of 10. Think 5K race pace or faster."

### **HAZARDS OF SCENTED PRODUCTS**

Whether it's your car air freshener, laundry detergent, cologne, or "pine fresh" aftershave,



if it's scented, it's likely laden with phthalates. These hormone-disrupting chemicals can cause a host of health issues. "Studies have linked chronic phthalate exposure to allergies, sperm damage, and decreased testosterone levels," says Caroline Cox, research director at the Center for Environmental Health. More disturbing, companies aren't required to list phthalates on labels. "You'll usually just see the generic term 'fragrance' to describe a proprietary mixture of chemicals," says Heather Patisaul, a phthalate researcher at North Carolina State University. **WHAT TO DO** Use unscented household cleaners and choose natural products (whose fragrance comes from plant-based oils).

### A FINAL VERDICT ON FAT

New research confirmed that not only are dietary fats not responsible for the obesity and heart disease epidemics but their absence may be causing them. "We've made people fat with nonfat foods," says Dr. Richard Stein of New York University's Langone Medical Center. "The high amount of carbohydrates used to substitute for fat in foods means we're getting much more sugar, triggering a variety of metabolic issues."

**WHAT TO DO** Look for good sources of fat in foods. "Healthy fats supply nutrients often not found elsewhere in the diet, and they are readily used by the body for energy," says Dr. Dennis Goodman, professor of medicine at NYU. "You need a balance of all kinds of healthy fats — even saturated — from whole-food sources." The best sources of saturated fat include eggs from pasture-raised chickens and grass-fed beef and dairy, including butter, Goodman adds. Limit highly processed meats like bacon and sausage, which have sky-high amounts of sodium and nitrates and have been linked to heart problems and cancer. Final rule: "Don't misinterpret this as *carte blanche* to eat high-fat foods all the time," says Chazal. "There are still twice as many calories in a gram of fat as in a gram of protein."

### KEEP IT CHILL

Allow yourself to feel just a little cold, and your body converts unhealthy white fat into calorie-burning brown fat. "Data suggest

## Books to Live Healthier



**THE NEW HEALTH RULES**  
A manual for living well that's clear and easy to put into practice. Integrative health expert Dr. Frank Lipman unmask the real causes of disease and explains how to make daily tweaks to outrun them. His 175 doable strategies will help you sleep better, avoid toxic household products, get your digestion on track, and eat healthfully.



**THE BIG FAT SURPRISE**  
Health journalist Nina Teicholz spent more than nine years collecting this data, which dismantles the myths we've been fed about dietary fat. She argues that decades of low-fat-diet advice and low-fat foods have destroyed our health, and to shed pounds and stave off heart disease, it's time we welcomed back T-bones and butter.



**THE ART OF STILLNESS**  
Travel writer Pico Iyer explores how our hyper-connected society has led some men to unplug, stay put, and turn to yoga and meditation. He highlights rock stars, artists, and thinkers who've found solace — and success — in solitude, and suggests that slowing down and sitting still can spark creativity and even adventure.



**UNBREAKABLE RUNNER**  
CrossFit Endurance founder Brian MacKenzie and Ironman triathlete T.J. Murphy shoot down distance-running doctrines and explain how upping intensity, slashing mileage, and incorporating specific strength and conditioning work will make you a stronger, faster, more injury-resistant runner — whether in a 10K or an ultramarathon.

that activation of brown fat by exposure to mild cold may prove to be a significant aid in regulating body weight and preventing type 2 diabetes," adds Labros Sidossis, director of metabolic research at the Shriners Hospitals for Children, Galveston.

**WHAT TO DO** Find a sweet-spot temperature that's high enough so it doesn't make you shiver or want to put on a sweater, but low enough so that it forces the mitochondria in brown fat to crank through calories to keep you warm. For most of us, that's in the 60- to 65-degree range.

### DITCH DIET SODAS

Synthetic sweeteners like sucralose, saccharin, and aspartame are under fire again. A recent study concluded, "Artificial sweeteners may contribute to the obesity and diabetes epidemics by altering bacteria in the gut," says Lisa Lefferts, senior scientist at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. This disruption is believed to harm glucose metabolism, leading to glucose intolerance, an early marker of diabetes. "Cancer is also a concern," Lefferts says.

**WHAT TO DO** Drink water or seltzer instead. Tea and coffee are also smart choices, Lefferts adds. Several 2014 studies furthered coffee's health perks, including protecting your memory, liver, and teeth, while tea's antioxidants provide proven disease-fighting benefits.

### ORGANIC IS WORTH IT

It's well established that organic foods are better for the environment, but whether they're healthier than conventional food has been a fierce debate. Last year, evidence backed that organic produce has more disease-fighting antioxidants, and no toxic chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides. Studies also showed that organic milk has more heart-healthy omega-3s than conventional milk.

**WHAT TO DO** The biggest knock against organic is still the price tag, but shop smart and you can cut costs. "Buy fruits and veggies from farm stands or markets in season or on special: They're far more affordable, and you can freeze them for later," says Charles Benbrook, of Washington State University's Center for Sustaining Agriculture. ■

## Our Go-To Apps



### D-MINDER

Type in the time of year, plus your location, skin type, weight, and age, and this app will craft a customized plan for you to get the right amount of sun safely to meet your vitamin D targets — without frying your skin.



### FOODUCATE

Scan bar codes on products and enter specific chain-restaurant meals, and you'll get instant calorie counts and nutrition grades, plus healthier swaps for low-ranking foods. You can also track your daily calorie intake.



### SECONDS PRO

A timer allows you to create interval training routines, and cues you with a clear display and vibration alerts. You can incorporate music, programming songs for specific intervals (helpful during particularly tough bouts).



### TIMEFUL

This app is like having a full-time assistant coordinate your life — for free. Input meetings, to-dos, and habits to make (say, going for a run), and see all on a daily calendar. You'll receive reminders, and you can track what you get done.