



KICK-START ORGAN VITALITY

New Energy for the New Year

by Ronica A. O'Hara

With the merry-making furor of the holidays behind us, it's that time of year when our bodies are crying out for some detox and rejuvenation. Aside from getting back to the basics—a healthy diet and daily exercise—we can take a page from traditional Chinese and Indian medical practices and holistic approaches and use natural, organ-by-organ procedures to renew our bodies and restore inherent vitality.

“Strengthening our organs is critical because the organs create the vital essences of life, and our emotional and mental health depends to a great extent on how healthy our organs are,” notes T. Caylor Wadlington, a doctor of Oriental medicine and acupuncture teacher in Denver. “In

working to revitalize and re-energize the organs, we renew not just our physical body, but also our sense of well-being.”

Here's a guide to a gentle fix-up campaign for the five organs considered vital for life in both Western and Eastern medicine:

Boost the Brain

“Stress can lead to imbalance of the brain's neurotransmitters, making it more difficult to focus, concentrate, relax and sleep—but it's reversible, and the brain can absolutely heal from these effects under the right circumstances,” says integrative neurologist Ilene S.



Ruhoy, M.D., Ph.D., of the Center for Healing Neurology, in Seattle.

Assess it: If you find it hard concentrating, sleeping, getting things done, remembering where things are and not being grouchy, the brain could be on stress-related overload. See a doctor if teeth grinding, high blood pressure, shortness of breath, fainting or dizziness develop.

Eat this: The top brain boosters are easy to swallow—dark chocolate, berries, nuts and avocados, along with oily fish, reports WebMD. Also, a five-year study of 950 seniors at Chicago's Rush University found that eating leafy greens once or twice a day slowed mental deterioration.

Drink this: Green tea is proven to reduce anxiety and depression, protect

against mental decline and even correct stroke damage. In a Swiss study using MRI, people drinking green tea immediately had heightened activity in the working-memory part of their brain.

Supplement with this: Ruhoy recommends boswellia, long used in Asian and African medicine. It targets cerebral inflammation, stimulates the growth of neurons, enhances cognition, lowers depression and alleviates learning and memory problems.

Try this movement: Shake it. Alternating slow movements, or even rest with one-to-two-minute bursts of intense, all-out, heart-pounding moves like Zumba dancing, jogging or lunges increases important proteins called the neurotrophic factor that help brain cells grow, work and live longer, reports a new study from Canada's McMaster University.

Rejuvenate the Heart

Stress also increases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which drive up blood pressure, blood sugar and inflammation, says holistic cardiologist Joel Kahn, M.D., of Detroit, author of *The Whole Heart Solution: Halt Heart Disease Now*

with the *Best Alternative and Traditional Medicine*.

Assess it: Shortness of breath, irregular heartbeat, anxiety, panic and swollen feet or ankles are signs the heart may be overloaded. Get medical help immediately if there is unusual deep exhaustion, unexplained weakness, nausea, dizziness, chest pain or pain that spreads to the arms.

Eat this: "The best foods for a stressed heart are those rich in magnesium. I like a giant green, leafy salad, often organic arugula, with blueberries, pumpkin seeds and walnuts," says Kahn.

Drink this: hot, golden turmeric milk, made with organic soy or nut milks, a heaping tablespoon of turmeric (a potent anti-inflammatory also shown to reverse Alzheimer's "brain tangles"), a pinch of black pepper and maybe an organic pumpkin spice mix.

Supplement with this: Hawthorn strengthens and tones heart muscles, suppresses deadly blood-clotting signals, fights inflammation and lowers heart attack risk, studies show. European doctors routinely prescribe it for managing mild heart failure, either alone or with drugs.



Try this movement: Hop on a bike: Cycling 20 miles a week slashes heart disease risk by half, reports the *British Medical Journal*. Also, do slow stretches every day: A Japanese study found a correlation between flexibility of the body and of the arteries.

Cleanse the Lungs

Family holidays may not always be unconditionally loving, which can induce stress, anger and sadness—emotions linked in laboratory studies to decreases in lung function. "You can actually give yourself a stress asthma attack," says Maui naturopath Carolyn Dean, M.D., ND, author of *The Complete Natural Medicine Guide to Women's Health*.

Assess it: Trouble breathing, shortness of breath and a cough that won't go away are signs of stressed-out lungs. If there's coughing up of blood or mucus, or discomfort or pain when breathing, see a doctor.

Eat this: A 10-year study of 650 European adults found that eating apples and



An Ounce of Prevention

By taking a few forward-thinking steps, we can protect ourselves proactively from dangers to our vital organs:

Brain

Just say Om! Meditation enlarges parts of the brain concerned with memory, body awareness and emotional control, concluded a review of 21 neuroimaging studies from 300 meditators. *Insight-Timer.com*, a meditation app, makes it easy to meditate for even five minutes a day.

Heart

Every night, write down two or three things to be grateful for. Heart patients at the University of California, San Diego,

that did this for two months had reduced heart inflammation and improved cardiac biomarkers. "Appreciating even the littlest things builds a heart-protective habit of gratitude," says study author Paul J. Mills, Ph.D., a professor of family medicine and public health.

Lungs

Many popular cleaning products contain dangerous chemicals, including volatile organic compounds (VOC) that several studies link to breathing problems, asthma and allergies. Check out the Environmental Working Group's toxicity information on 2,500 products at ewg.org/guides/cleaners.

Kidneys

To energize sluggish kidneys, try a quarter teaspoon of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) in water. In a British study of 134 people with advanced chronic kidney disease, this easy strategy reduced the rate of kidney decline to normal levels. Check with a doctor if under nephrology care.

Liver

Examine the ingredients in prescriptions and over-the-counter meds to make sure daily intake of acetaminophen doesn't exceed 3,000 milligrams; accidental overuse is the biggest cause of liver failure in the U.S.

tomatoes two or three times a day, along with other fruit, speeds the healing of smoke-damaged lungs and seems to slow down the lungs' natural aging process.

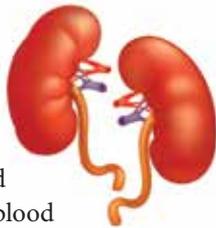
Drink this: a juice combining cilantro, carrot, celery and ginger. According to the Lung Institute, cilantro helps remove heavy metals, carrots provide vitamin A to repair lung tissue, celery helps flush out carbon dioxide and ginger removes irritants from the lungs.

Supplement with this: vitamin D. Low levels seem to be linked to a higher risk of respiratory infections and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, according to a review of clinical studies in *Advances in Nutrition*.

Try this movement: To loosen the airways when tense, the American Lung Association recommends slowly breathing in through the nose for two counts with the mouth closed. Purse the lips as if to whistle, and then breathe out slowly and gently through the lips to a count of four.

Detox the Kidneys

The kidneys are hard-working, fist-sized organs just below the back rib cage that filter waste and toxins out of 200 quarts of blood a day.



Assess it: Fatigue, feeling cold, shortness of breath, itchiness, swollen hands or feet, a puffy face, metallic-tasting food and ammonia-smelling breath are signs of growing kidney stress. See a doctor if experiencing kidney pain, weakness, lightheadedness, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, extreme thirst or decreased urination.

Eat this: Bone broth, wheat, millet, black sesame seeds, chestnuts, mulberries, raspberries, strawberries and walnuts are recommended by herbalist and acupuncturist Irina Logman of the Advanced Holistic Center, in New York City, to restore the kidneys.

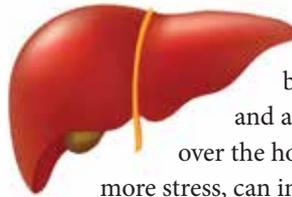
Drink this: Water with squirts of lemon or lime. "The citrate makes water, as metabolized, more alkaline, which helps to remove acid from the blood, bring pH into balance and prevents bone, heart and further kidney damage," says Phoenix nephrologist Mandip S. Kang, M.D., author of *The Doctor's Kidney Diet: A Nutritional Guide to Managing and Slowing the*

Progression of Chronic Kidney Disease.

Supplement with this: Dandelion tea helps to cleanse and strengthen the kidneys and a new study in *Renal Failure* reports that it also protects the kidneys from damage by certain toxins.

Try this qigong movement: Rub the palms together to warm them, and then place them on the kidney areas. Slowly massage in circular motions 12 times, and then reverse direction.

Shore up the Liver



"The liver is critical for detoxifying the body, but higher sugar and alcohol consumption over the holidays, as well as more stress, can increase toxin buildup that can damage the liver, which is why it's important to take steps to help it recover," says functional chiropractor Jennifer R. Welch, DC, of Iowa Functional Health, in Clive, Iowa.

Assess it: Itchy skin, easy bruising, musky-smelling breath, itchy red palms and mental sluggishness are early problem signs. Advanced symptoms that require medical care are yellowish skin, abdominal pain, swollen legs and ankles, ongoing fatigue, dark urine and pale stool.

Eat these: A Chinese study linked liver disease with low potassium levels, so consume sweet potatoes, tomato sauce, beet greens, beans, blackstrap molasses and bananas.

Drink this: Sip probiotic drinks like kombucha, kefir and yogurt-based smoothies. The probiotic *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* significantly lowered liver damage linked to excess acetaminophen in a recent Emory University laboratory study.

Supplement with this: Milk thistle has been shown in Italian animal studies to decrease and even reverse damage to the liver caused by medications, alcohol, antibiotics, pollution and heavy metals.

Try this yoga movement: With feet shoulder-width apart, make circles with the hips, pushing the torso farther and farther outward with each circle. Reverse direction.

Ronica A. O'Hara is a Denver-based freelance health writer. Connect at OHaraRonica@gmail.com.



Full-Body Boosters

A few daily to-dos that benefit the whole body:

Walking. A mere 20 minutes a day extends sleep up to an hour and lowers early mortality risk by 20 percent.

Adaptogens. Taking super-herbs such as astragalus, ashwagandha and rhodiola in tinctures, capsules or tea helps us adapt to stress.

Turmeric. An antioxidant and anti-inflammatory powerhouse proven to ward off cancer, heart disease and dementia.

Nature. A dose of greenery a day keeps the blues away—and also guards against heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and early mortality from all causes, a review of 140 studies shows.

Sources: Harvard University School of Medicine, Dr. Andrew Weil (DrWeil.com), American Journal of Preventive Medicine, ScienceDaily.com.