

# Smart & Simple



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# I Feel Good!

Simple morning-noon-and-night tips for a calmer, saner, happier life—starting today. By Denise Schipani

We'd all like to feel better—better moods, better sleep, more energy, and less discomfort and stress. What's ironic is that it's our busy lives that often keep us from focusing on, well, our lives. You can't stop life from tossing you zingers, but you can take small steps to improve your health, your energy, and your outlook.

## Morning

You don't have to be a morning person to take advantage of the start of the day. First step: Open the curtains and let the light in. Assuming it's even a little bit sunny, the light will lift your mood. Then get moving, with these start-the-day tips:

**Just say "om..."** A mere 5 to 15 minutes of quiet meditation in the morning will give you increased well-being and energy all day, says Ellen Adelman, PhD, director of the Sage Healing Institute in Elkins Park, Pa. Sit comfortably in a quiet place,

and focus on your breath. Feel your belly expand as you breathe in, and relax as you breathe out.

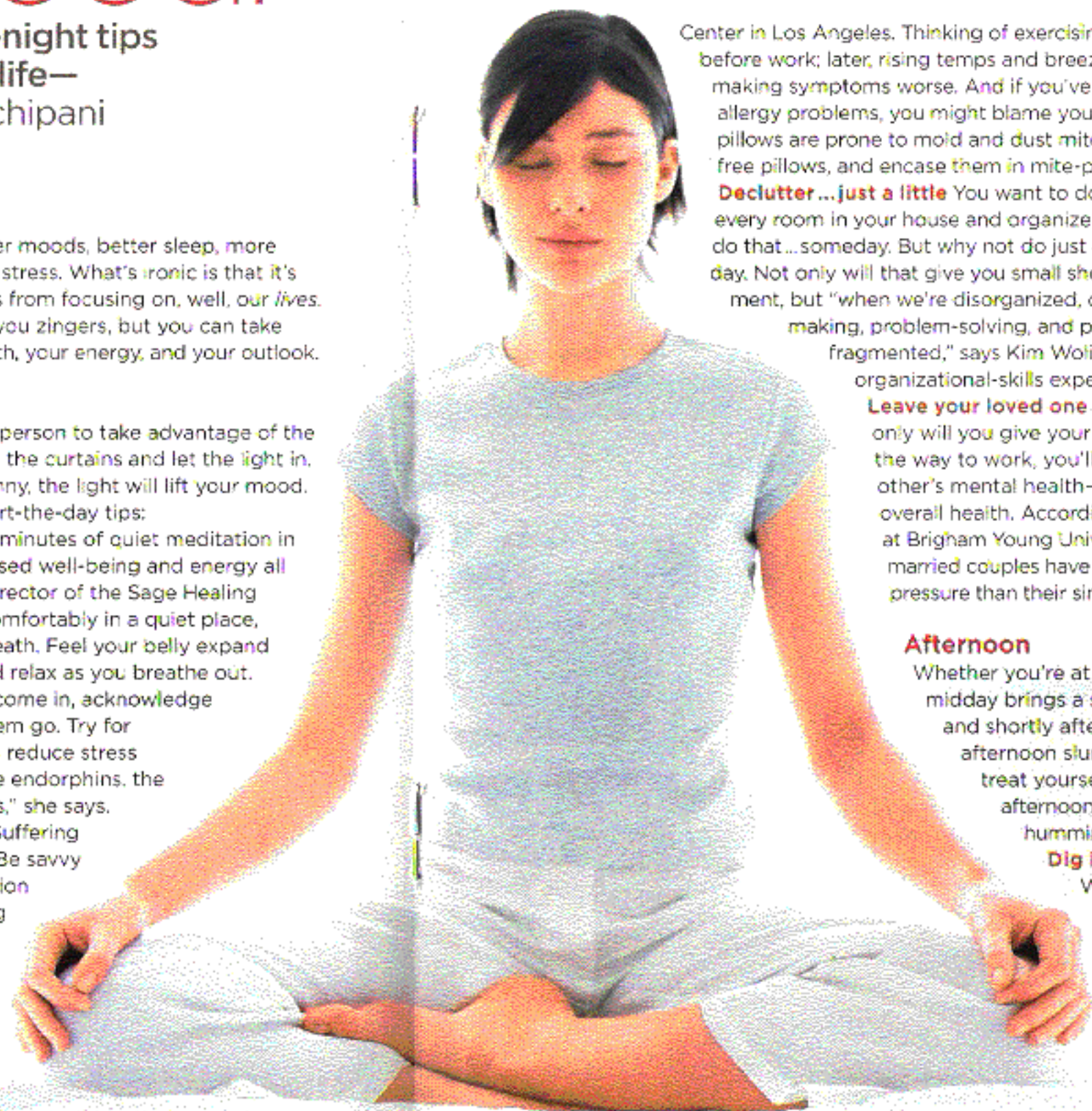
As outside thoughts come in, acknowledge them, and then let them go. Try for 100 breaths. "This will reduce stress hormones and release endorphins, the body's natural opiates," she says.

**Ease allergy agony** Suffering through the season? Be savvy about allergy prevention so you're not snuffling all day, says Zab Mosenifar, MD, medical director of the Women's Guild Lung Institute at Cedars-Sinai Medical

## 5 Minutes... To Unwind

"The best way I've found to unwind is to simply do nothing—no watching TV, no reading at the dinner table or while waiting at the doctor's office. I just sit and relax my mind."

—Tina Verna, 37,  
Center Valley, Pa



Center in Los Angeles. Thinking of exercising today? Do it before work; later, rising temps and breezes stir up pollen, making symptoms worse. And if you've woken up with allergy problems, you might blame your pillow. Down pillows are prone to mold and dust mites, so get allergen-free pillows, and encase them in mite-proof covers.

**Declutter...just a little** You want to do a major sweep of every room in your house and organize it, right? And you'll do that...someday. But why not do just a little bit every day. Not only will that give you small shots of accomplishment, but "when we're disorganized, our decision-making, problem-solving, and productivity are fragmented," says Kim Wolinski, MSW, an organizational-skills expert.

**Leave your loved one a love note** Not only will you give your partner a smile on the way to work, you'll be boosting each other's mental health—and possibly overall health. According to a 2008 study at Brigham Young University, happily married couples have lower blood pressure than their single counterparts.

## Afternoon

Whether you're at work or at home, midday brings a surge of energy—and shortly after, that dreaded afternoon slump. Here, ways to treat yourself gently all afternoon—and keep yourself humming until dinner:

### Dig in the dirt

Whether you have a full-fledged garden or a few pots on the porch, gardening has been shown to reduce stress and

increase well-being. A British study (done on mice) even found that contact with a certain microorganism found in soil activates brain neurons that produce serotonin, a feel-good hormone.

**Go nuts for pistachios** Prowling for a midafternoon snack? Reach for a handful (about 30) of pistachio nuts. Recent research from Penn State University found that these nuts may reduce blood pressure and ease the body's stress response.

**Perk up your mind** Feeling fuzzy by 3 PM? Try the brain-reenergizing trick "cross crawling," says Maryam Webster, MEd, author of *Everyday Bliss for Busy Women*. Here's how: Stand and march, lifting your right knee to your left hand. Repeat with the left leg and right hand. Continue until you're moving quickly. This gets your brain's right and left hemispheres synchronized, so you'll feel more focused and energized (even if you look slightly silly!).



## Night

A lot is going on here: You're getting home, making dinner, dealing with your kids and their needs, wondering if there's anything good on TV—or if you'll be battling sleep issues again. Some ideas to make your evenings more relaxed:

**Sail into "balance"** If you have trouble switching gears between work and home, and wonder if you'll ever find that elusive work-life balance, forget it. You're better off acknowledging that aspects of your life intersect, overlap—even crash from time to time. "Balance is baloney!" says Eileen McDargh, author of *Gifts from the Mountain: Simple Truths for Life's Complexities*. "A sailboat is a better metaphor for understanding work-life integration. Think of yourself as a sailor in a 1-person boat. You have to stay connected to the tiller, the sail, and the gunwale where your feet are planted. As you go forward, you'll look out of balance—think of the way a sailboat leans to one side or the other. But you're still moving forward."

**Snooze for 7** Forget dynamos who crow that they get by on 4 hours of sleep a night; slumbering for at least 7 hours is ideal not just for optimal energy the next day, but for long-term health. A 2006 study in the journal *Sleep* found that adults who got less than 7 hours had high blood pressure (the worst was the under-6-hour group). Practice good sleep hygiene by regulating your lights-out time, winding down well before bed, limiting TV and computer use (the light and images stimulate your brain), and cutting off caffeine early in the day. If you have sleep problems, check with your doctor; pain often inhibits sleep, as do conditions like sleep apnea. Seek treatments for these or other conditions, and have a good night. ●

For more feel-great ideas, go to [prevention.com/Tylenol](http://prevention.com/Tylenol).

## Surprising Headache Triggers

**Stress isn't alone in causing pain:**

**Your allergies** Allergens increase pressure throughout the skull, setting off a headache sinusitis. Treating the allergy should provide relief.

**Your lights** The glare of direct lighting can set off pain. Opt for the natural light of broad-spectrum bulbs.

**Your home** New paint emits volatile organic compounds, which can spark headaches. Look for the Green Seal, guaranteeing fewer emissions.

Visit [prevention.com/Tylenol](http://prevention.com/Tylenol) for other triggers.

