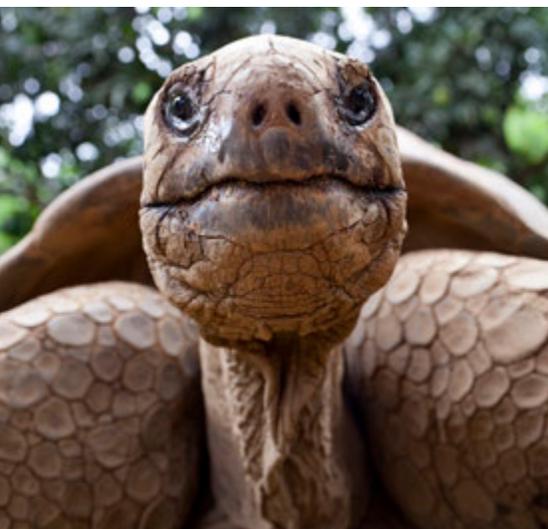


# FROM THE HEART

Newsletter from  
 **Saint Luke's**  
 CARDIOVASCULAR CONSULTANTS

## Make Your Heartbeats Count

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.



**E**veryone who knew Harriet described her as gentle and good-natured, and she loved it when people visited her, especially when they spoke kindly and rubbed her back. Sure, she spent a lot of time napping, but Harriet also enjoyed swimming nearly every day of her life. Oh, a couple more interesting things about this unique soul: her favorite food was hibiscus flowers, and she lived to be 177 years old.

Harriet was a giant turtle—a Galapagos tortoise to be specific. Charles Darwin captured her as a young turtle and brought her on board his ship, the *Beagle*, during his round-the-world scientific expedition in 1835. Harriet lived most of her life in an idyllic bo-

tanical garden in Brisbane, Australia, where she finally passed away in 2006.

The heart rate of a Galapagos tortoise is 6 to 10 beats per minute (BPM), and these remarkable creatures have a maximum lifespan of 170 to 190 years. In contrast, a hummingbird in flight has a heartbeat of about 1,260 BPM, and has a life expectancy of about three to five years. We humans typically have a resting heart rate of 65 to 85 BPM, and usually live for 75 to 85 years. Statisticians call this an inverse relationship: as the resting heart rate goes up, the life expectancy tends to go down, and vice versa.

### Does Your Heart Have a Limited Number of Beats?

Cardiologist Jamil Tajik, M.D., one of my mentors during my cardiology training at the Mayo Clinic in the 1980s, used to warn me and my best friend, Chip Lavie, that our routine of going for a four-mile run was an exercise in wasting heartbeats.

He believes in the “limited number of heartbeats theory,” so he does his best to avoid strenuous exercise. According to this hypothesis, each heart is capable of a predestined number of heartbeats, and once they are used up—the lights go out and the party’s over.

This would explain how Harriet the turtle could live to the ripe old age of 177, while mice, another species with very rapid heart rates, die of old age after just five years. When you do the math—trust me I have—you will discover that the magic number of heartbeats is about 3 billion. It takes a durable heart to break the 3-billion beats barrier before it gives up the ghost. In fact, for humans and animals fending for themselves out in the wild, 1 billion heartbeats is an average lifespan, and 2 billion is good longevity.

### How to Keep Your Heart in Mint Condition

If you were a car, your heart would be your motor. Indeed, the heart, like an engine, has many moving parts—valves, muscles, arteries and chambers, which do eventually wear out. Strenuous physical activity makes the heart beat faster, so is Dr. Tajik right to assume that by avoiding exercise, he won’t wear his heart out as quickly? Will we break down sooner if we spend a lot of time exercising, kind of like when we exceed the 100,000-mile powertrain warranty on a car?

*continued on page 2*

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In Memoriam: Robert D. Conn, M.D., Geoffrey O. Hartzler, M.D., and Ben McCallister, M.D.*

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*continued from page 1*

If your pulse rate averages about 80 BPM, your heart will beat over 42 million times in one year. With an average pulse of 80 BPM, by age 72 you will have about 3 billion heartbeats on your ticker.

Now let's play with the math a bit. Say you begin a regimen that involves strenuous exercise, such as jogging for 25 minutes three days per week; which by the way meets the recommendations of the CDC Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. During that 75 minutes you spend jogging each week, your heart rate would rise to about 150 BPM, burning through an extra 5,250 heartbeats per week, which calculates to a less than one percent increase in heartbeats.

However, within a month or two as you become physically fit, your resting heart rate will fall from 80 to 60 BPM—a 25 percent savings in total heartbeats per day. With a pulse of 60 BPM, it takes over 95 years to use up 3 billion heartbeats.

At a heart rate of 50, it will be 105 years before you hit 3 billion heartbeats. By investing as little as 15 minutes two to five times per week doing an aerobic exercise like jogging, or swimming, or biking or gardening, you will likely be able to extend your warranty and get many more trouble-free years from your heart and body.

Thus, over a lifetime, staying fit with a moderate exercise regimen reduces the wear and tear on your heart. In contrast, if you are perpetually training for ultra-marathons and doing strenuous exercise for over two hours per day, you will have a nice low resting heart rate, but you will be putting a lot of hard miles on your engine.

Dr. Tajik had a valid point when he was warning us against overdoing it with running. An accumulating body of evidence shows that the amazing longevity boost from exercise is largely eliminated by excessive physical activity. Thus, the key is getting your exercise dose into the "Goldilocks" range: not too little, but not too much either.

As usual, moderation is the sweet spot. Training for and doing marathons is not the best lifelong exercise pattern; whereas jogging for 20 to 30 minutes two or four times a week is perfect, or if you prefer, brisk walking or gardening for at least 150 minutes per week is also an ideal activity pattern for bestowing longevity and cardiac durability.

My heart will soon beat for its 2 billionth time; I'm shooting for 3 billion heartbeats. I've decided that I am going to spend more of my remaining heartbeats playing, laughing and enjoying life with my family and friends.

# Make Your Heartbeats Count

## Keeping Your Heart Rate on the Down Low

Studies show that in general, people with lower resting heart rates tend to have longer life expectancies. Particularly for males it does not bode well to have a resting heart rate above about 85 or 90 BPM.

Even so, women tend to have higher heart rates than men, but often outlive them anyway. For example, my mother-in-law, Kathleen, had a heart rate of about 90 BPM and lived to be 99 years old. On the other hand, her husband, Leonard, had a heart rate so low that eventually he needed a pacemaker, but he lived “only” 94 years.

We do have medications that will lower your heart rate; including beta blockers (our favorites are carvedilol, metoprolol and nebivolol) or calcium blockers (the one we use most is diltiazem). These are among our most effective drugs for treating common cardiac problems, including high blood pressure, coronary disease, heart failure and rhythm abnormalities such as atrial fibrillation and ventricular tachycardia. Fish oil (omega-3) will also lower your resting pulse by about five beats per minute, and may provide other benefits as well.

Sometimes a higher resting pulse rate may be a symptom, rather than a cause of illness. In other words, an unhealthy diet/lifestyle, obesity, toxic stress, tobacco, excess alcohol and inadequate sleep can all shorten one’s lifespan by causing ailments such as heart disease, cancer, stroke and dementia. As people become sicker, their resting heart rates tend to rise, but it’s disease that triggers the higher pulse, rather than the higher pulse that is causing the disease.

## Try This at Home to Lower Your Resting Heart Rate

If someone came up to you and said, “I will give you one million dollars if you can reduce your heart rate to less than 50 BPM in the 10 minutes,” I bet you couldn’t do it.

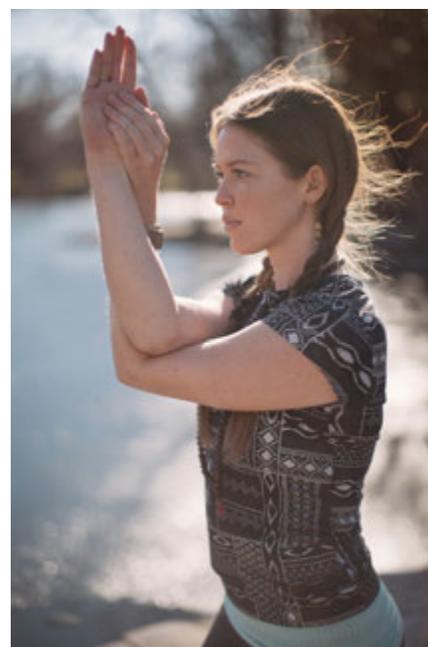
Your heart rate is controlled by your autonomic nervous system, operating in an involuntary subconscious fashion. Your pulse rate rises automatically when you are nervous about being in the doctor’s office, or mad because someone cut you off in traffic.

On the other hand, your heart rate instinctively falls when you pet your dog, or relax with your partner, or hold your sleeping baby. Importantly, you can learn to lower your own pulse rate, which can reduce stress, improve your sense of well-being and make you feel less anxious and harried.

If you follow these steps, you will lower your resting pulse, and also soothe and rejuvenate your heart, and maybe even enhance your longevity; though I wouldn’t hold your breath waiting for someone to give you a million dollars.

## Practice Yoga

Using the ancient Indian practice of yoga can help you can gain conscious mastery over your cardiovascular system. In scientific studies, people who have never done yoga before learned to lower their resting heart rate by seven to 20 BPM while doing yoga. The traditional techniques of yoga involve breathing, stretching and mindfulness, and when done regularly can reduce the resting heart rate, melt away emotional stress, and calm the mind. A routine of yoga has also been



shown to lower blood pressure and reduce occurrences of atrial fibrillation (A-fib).

- Meditate. Honestly, sometimes I just need a break from my own thoughts. That is why I meditate—it shifts the thinking brain into neutral. You can do this quickly and easily by occupying your conscious mind with this simple task: breathe slowly and deeply to the rhythm of your heart. Even a couple minutes of this can noticeably calm your heart and mind.

Close your eyes, sit up straight, breathe in through your nose for the count of 4 and fill up your lungs completely, hold the breath for the count of 7, and breathe out slowly for the count of 8.

Try to do this while counting to the rhythm of your heartbeat (by feeling your pulse at your wrist, or sensing your heart beating in your chest, or looking at a pulse monitor). Do this relaxation breathing for four to eight cycles once or twice a day, and you will be officially meditating. This will lower blood pressure and anxiety, and may even prevent depression and improve long-term brain health.

# How to Thrive While Living in Captivity

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

I have had the pleasure and honor of co-authoring 13 scientific papers with Dr. Loren Cordain, the founder of the Paleo movement and the world’s foremost authority on the evolutionary basis of diet and disease. Dr. Cordain teaches that humans who were living actively in the wild, eating only natural foods that they gathered and hunted themselves, did not develop the ubiquitous chronic diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, osteoporosis, depression and Alzheimer’s that afflict our modern cultures.



*Dr. O’Keefe enjoying a wilderness hike.*

In other words, wild humans, like other animals living in the wilderness, generally do not suffer from diseases of aging and seldom show signs of senility or extreme old age. On the other hand, they also generally failed to achieve their maximum lifespan because of early death due to problems like infant mortality, infectious

diseases, parasites, predators, extreme weather, accidents, violence, starvation and exposure. Without question, living in the wild as a hunter-forager was not for sissies.

The truth is that most animals live much longer in zoos than in the wild, especially when they are fed a wholesome diet of fresh, natural foods, get plenty of socialization and exercise, and receive good medical care. Weaker animals who would probably perish in the wild can live lengthy and healthy lifespans in captivity, as long as it’s a nurturing and stimulating environment and they are fed their natural diet.

For example, a tiger who is lucky to live 10 years in the wild can survive twice that long in a modern zoo that is giving the creature the best of both worlds: simulating its natural diet, surroundings and lifestyle, while providing it with the best of 21st century science to make sure it stays safe and healthy.

## The Best of Both Worlds

The same is true for us humans; those vigorous and hardy stone-age foragers had average life expectancies of about 30 years. While their heart was lucky to beat 1 billion times, a health-conscious 21st century American ought to get at least 3 billion heartbeats from their ticker. But to accomplish that, you too must take the best from both worlds.

Today it’s possible to consistently eat a wholesome diet based almost exclusively on fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts, berries, eggs, fish and seafood, and modest amounts of lean

meat. Drink only natural beverages like water, coffee, tea and sparkling mineral water. Get to bed by 10 p.m., and rise before 7 a.m.

Be like Harriet. Take a nap when you can, and spend some time outdoors getting at least a little sunshine and/or fresh air each day. Surround yourself with family, friends, plants and pets. Like Harriet and the other zoo animals who achieve their maximum lifespans, it’s important to get good, state-of-the-art medical attention, preferably from a qualified health professional who truly cares about you and is someone you feel you can trust to do what’s best for you. Life in captivity, though not as “wild” as it was in prior millennia, can be fun, interesting and a lot longer.

## The Toxic Speed Trap of Time Urgency

While I am reading by the fireplace in the evening, our cat Lola often hops onto the chair and curls up in my lap. I gently pet her soft sleek coat as she purrs affectionately and shuts her eyes. I love basking in her tranquil presence, and watch the obvious pleasure she takes in relaxing and just being there with me. Lola exudes the opposite of time urgency—she indulges herself in the luxury of leisure time, and knows how to enjoy living in the moment.

My brother-in-law, Joe, as part of his work for an international telecom corporation, studied what the average customer considered an acceptable computer response time—that is the total amount of time it takes for the computer or smart phone to respond

to a user request such as a memory fetch, database query, or loading a web page.

What he found shocked and amused him: the fastest response time the person had ever experienced in their life was what they considered an acceptable computer speed. In other words, speed fuels the need for even more speed—it's a vicious cycle.

Modern life has been ramped up to warp speed, instilling a feeling of time pressure in our day-to-day existence. This time urgency locks us into a perpetual rush hour, even when there is no need to hurry.

Rushing around and being driven by a vague sense about the scarcity of time leads to a harried and anxious mental state. Chronic impatience also leads to irritability. What's more, frequent clock checking with a zero tolerance for waiting more than a millisecond promotes hostility toward others around you.



### **Chronic Time Pressure = Cardiac Danger**

Time urgency when combined with anger is a recipe for heart disease. Individuals, even young people, who report feeling chronic time pressure, are two times more likely to develop hypertension (high blood pressure). Worse still, recent research out of Harvard Medical School found that people with a persistent sense of time urgency and impatience are at height-

ened risk of coronary artery disease and heart attack.

Time urgency can come to control your life: You stress over being delayed by a red light, or a slow-moving elevator, or a slow Internet connection. You work yourself into a dither hurrying to the FedEx office before it closes so that your package will be there overnight. Rushing around generates an altered mental state akin to intoxication. You might do things while in your rushing mind that you would never do in your rational mind, like run a red light, or being nasty to the elderly lady in the express checkout lane because she has too many items in her basket.

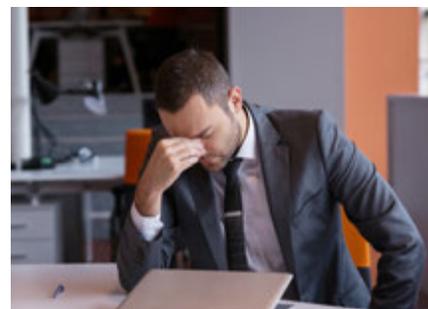
The stress caused by chronic time pressure can poison your system and provoke anger and hostility. This constricts blood vessels and predisposes to clotting in the arteries. Researchers at the University College in London, in a review of 43 studies on the topic, reported that anger and hostility significantly worsened the risk of heart attack and stroke. In fact, some studies suggest that hostility might be as cardio-toxic as high cholesterol, smoking or excessive alcohol consumption.

Studies show that people with high levels of hostility or depression have two- to three-fold higher levels of inflammation compared to more friendly and happy folks.

### **The Rushing Mentality**

Time urgency revs up the amygdala—the brain's command center for the stress response. A frenetic pace can spawn emotions of fright and fear, hijacking the rational brain and making you over-react to perceived threats.

Watch for signs that you are getting sucked into life in the fast lane—hurrying from one task to another, speak-



ing fast, gulping down food, always checking your watch, interrupting people to complete their sentences, generally feeling impatient and irritable. You shouldn't feel like you need to be in high gear 24/7. Ask yourself, "Is this really an emergency or perhaps just a speed trap?"

I must admit, my kids think I need to be medicated for hyperactivity disorder, and truthfully the song, I'm in a Hurry by Alabama, has always resonated with me. When I feel like I'm racing around, I try to remind myself that life moves pretty fast, and if I don't stop and look around now and then, I might miss some of the joy and beauty of being alive.

The remedy for time urgency is focusing our full attention on the moment; being fully present here and now. Step outside and go for a stroll, breathe in the fresh air and appreciate the beauty of nature. This is our moment in the sun. Time we enjoy wasting, is time well spent!

***"I'm in a hurry to get things done. I rush and rush until life's no fun. All I really gotta do is live and die. I'm in a hurry and don't know why."***  
***Alabama***



## Olive Oil: Nectar of the Gods

By James H. O'Keefe, M.D.

**O**live oil has been the cornerstone of the Mediterranean diet for over 4,000 years, where it has been a nutritional staple for some of the healthiest and longest-living cultures in the world. The health benefits of olive oil are unrivaled, and research reveals more benefits nearly every day.

Definitive new studies show that olive oil cuts the risk of developing diabetes in half, and also reduces the risk of cardiovascular death. Numerous studies also show that the oleocanthal and other powerful anti-oxidants in extra-virgin olive oil (EVOO) may help to shield against the cognitive decline that comes with the aging process, and reduces the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Other studies show that a diet rich in EVOO actually slows down aging of the heart.

So, your mission is to find and use an EVOO that is high in antioxidants. However, the label won't tell you the antioxidant level; you have to figure that out for yourself.

Take a half-teaspoon of olive oil and swallow it without any other food or liquid. A few seconds after swallowing

it you should sense a peppery burning or stinging at the far back of your throat. The level of antioxidants is directly proportional to the intensity of throat burning. No burn means no antioxidants. An intense black pepper-like sting signals very high antioxidant levels.

Sometimes olive oils with very high levels might even make you cough once or twice; similar to how an aspirin chewed and swallowed can temporarily irritate the back of your throat and make you cough a couple of times.

These are potent antioxidants called polyphenols that are uniquely beneficial because they are dissolved in fat. This means they more easily seep through the membranes of the cells, keeping the vital organs soft and supple, and rejuvenating the brain, skin, blood vessels and heart.

To train your palate, you can go to an olive oil store such as the Tasteful Olive in old Overland Park, or Heavenly Olive Oils in North Kansas City and Lee's Summit, or the Olive Tree in Olathe.

Ask to taste the olive oil highest in antioxidants and a few others across

the spectrum of antioxidant content. You won't find it difficult to appreciate the difference. Once you learn to recognize a high-antioxidant EVOO, you might be able to find one at a reasonable price even in your supermarket.

My friend Dr. Emilio Ros and his colleagues from Barcelona Spain have performed breakthrough studies indicating that a Mediterranean diet high in vegetables and fish, when supplemented with EVOO or nuts, is effective at reducing the risk of heart disease and stroke.

High-antioxidant EVOO is also great for lowering blood pressure and cholesterol. Studies also show that EVOO may be helpful for preventing or improving arthritis, osteoporosis and obesity.

In our household we use up about one liter of EVOO each week. We make a salad of leafy greens for dinner every evening, and dress it liberally with EVOO and vinegar. We also pour EVOO on steamed vegetables, fish and use it for dipping sourdough bread. I make a point of giving every bottle the taste test to be sure it is high in antioxidants.



## Heartfelt Quotes

“Change is difficult; not to change is fatal.”

“You cannot change what you refuse to confront.”

“My idea of living dangerously is going grocery shopping without a list.”

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.”

*John Whitehead*

“They say we should be eating more raw foods. So, I decided to whip up another batch of cookie dough.”

“The great challenge of adulthood is holding on to your idealism after losing your innocence.”

*Bruce Springsteen*

“When I die, I want to pass away peacefully in my sleep, like my grandfather; not screaming in terror like the passengers in his car.”

“If you can’t fly, run. If you can’t run, walk. If you can’t walk, shuffle. But by all means, keep moving.”

“I’ve lived through many terrible things in my life, a few of which actually happened.”

*Mark Twain*

“The practice of medicine is an art, not a trade; a calling, not a business; a calling in which your heart will be exercised equally with your head.”

*William Osler, M.D.*

### Quotes from Warren Buffett

“In looking for people to hire, you look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don’t have the first, the other two will kill you. Think about it; if you hire somebody without integrity, you really want them to be dumb and lazy.”

“The most important thing to do if you find yourself in a hole is to stop digging.”

“You know ... you keep doing the same things and you keep getting the same result over and over again.”

“Never ask a barber if you need a haircut.”

### Quotes from H. Jackson Brown

“Never forget the nine most important words of any marriage:

I love you. You are beautiful. Please forgive me.”

“Life is slippery. We all need a loving hand to hold onto.”

“Every person that you meet knows something you don’t; learn from them.”

“Be tough-minded, but tender-hearted.”

“Children, marriages and flower gardens reflect the kind of care they get.”

# Friends Are the Family We Choose

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

**R**ob is a friend and classmate of mine who helped care for children at an orphanage in Uganda during the summer between our freshman and sophomore years of medical school.

One of his favorite kids was a boy named Isaac who was born with spina bifida, which left him paralyzed from the waist down. Isaac’s mother abandoned him as an infant, so he never knew anything other than life in a wheelchair in the orphanage. As Rob cared for him, it was clear that the 11-year-old boy had been neglected and emotionally abused. Isaac sensed the kindness and genuine concern shown by the young medical student, and he would light up when Rob spent time with him.

One day Isaac said, “I don’t have a family.” Rob replied, “Sure you do; the orphanage is your family.” Isaac answered, “They don’t care about me ... but you do. From now on I am going to call you Uncle Rob.” A few months later, due to complications of his condition, Isaac passed away. I saw Rob at a medical school class reunion, where he reminisced about his summer at that orphanage. He told me that he’s never forgotten that he once had a special nephew named Isaac.

***“We must take care of our families wherever we find them.”***  
**Elizabeth Gilbert**

Friends who become family are among life’s most precious gifts. The people who we care deeply about and those who genuinely care about us are our kin. Family is not just those to whom we are connected biologically

through shared DNA—it’s also about mutual respect and love.

Today more than ever, families are blended across different locations, and generations and marriages. Those people around us with whom we emotionally connect will become our family. And sometimes we are honored to become part of someone else’s family because we care for them. Caring, compassion and concern for one another bonds us together.

*“The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other’s life. Rarely do members of the same family grow up under the same roof.”*  
*Richard Bach*

It’s a gift to be able to be there for our family when they need us. Each one of us will struggle at different times in our lives. It’s much harder, and sometimes impossible, to get through these tough patches alone. The people who are there for us when we need them become our family.

Indeed, sometimes we have to go through tough times to find out who our real friends and family are. When all hell breaks loose, take note of the people who stand by you—they are your family. And it’s often someone that you would not have expected who comes through for you. It’s a two-way street: when you see someone around you struggling and down on their luck, by extending a helping hand you forge a lasting bond.

## **Mother Earth’s Family**

We live on a small, watery, blue and green planet orbiting just exactly the right distance from a medium-sized star. This is our little paradise in an otherwise cold, dark and lifeless corner of



Joan with Lola.

the universe. Life on Earth is all tightly connected in an interdependent network. We need each other like one big family stranded on this oasis in space.

Joan and I have four children, but only our youngest, 17-year-old Caroline, is still living at home; and she’s hoping to move 1,000 miles away from us next year. Even so, Joan doesn’t seem to be losing any sleep about the prospect of an empty nest. For one thing, she still has six animals (three dogs and three cats) in our home, and she treats them like adopted kids.

Indeed, cats and dogs can be family—though admittedly having a pet, like having a husband, entails added burdens and responsibilities, like cleaning up their messes and tolerating their bad habits.

But dogs (and sometimes even a cat) are generally very good at lavishing us with affection and admiration. Get your own dog or cat; in no time those loving eyes and affectionate licks will tell your heart loud and clear that you’ve adopted a new family member.

# You'll Never Walk Alone if You Have a Dog

**T**here's something special about the relationship between dogs and humans. Homo sapiens and canines seem connected by some strange and powerful unseen force. One can sense that they need us like we need them. It's like we were designed by nature to be together.

## Dogs and Humans—Designed by Nature to be Best Friends

In fact, scientists have discovered that an ancient intertwined bond between humankind and canines goes back to when dogs first split from the wolf pack over 40,000 years ago; ever since then we have co-evolved.

Wolves who were tame enough to approach humans and beg for scraps were the first step in this evolutionary process. Domesticated dogs allowed us to hunt more efficiently and protected us from predators and intruders. The dogs benefitted because we shared our food and provided shelter for them.

The ancient humans who naturally trusted and bonded with dogs were the people who were more likely to survive in the harsh and wild environment. The dogs that were the best companions were the ones we kept and bred. So, down through the eons, we have been hard-wired by natural selection to be dog-lovers. In turn, they have evolved to be our best friends, both by emotionally supporting us and by physically protecting us.

Two years ago, our younger son, Evan, found a sickly little 7-week-old puppy in rural Georgia. She was scrawny, flea-bitten, worm-infested and homeless. Evan named her Lady and nursed her back to health. A few



*Lady at 7 weeks old.*

months later, he went off to medical school and left us with a “grand-dog” to raise. Now Lady is like my shadow and she follows me everywhere. Evan trained her to love road trips, so when I have to drive somewhere, she often hops into the passenger seat. While I'm driving, from time to time Lady leans over and licks my right ear as if to say, “I just love hanging out with you.”

I take her and our other big dog Brady walking at least once a day. I have learned from Joan that to fully reap the benefits of having an animal family, you have to invest a little time and energy into building a relationship with them. Joan is constantly chatting with, or getting kisses from our four-legged kids.

These days, I too find myself frequently talking to and sharing hugs with the animals. Lady in particular is my biggest fan. Your mother is generally your best bet if you're looking for

unconditional love; but second best would be your dog. Spouses are great too, but for example, if I locked Lady and Joan in the trunk of my car, and then opened the trunk an hour later, only one of them would still be happy to see me.

## Health Blessings Bestowed by Pets

Numerous studies show that owning a dog and/or cat confers many health benefits. Our furry friends reduce anxiety and depression, lower blood pressure, and improve fitness.

They can also improve our cholesterol and blood glucose levels, and help us lose unwanted pounds. Researchers report that petting a dog or cat changes your hormone levels—raising oxytocin (the love hormone) and lowering cortisol (the stress hormone). Bringing pets in to airports, nursing homes or schools has been consistently shown to lower stress and reduce tension among the people with whom they interact.

Like the postman, neither snow nor rain nor sleet nor gloom of night discourages your dog from wanting out for a walk. I know Lady and Brady are forever whining at me to take them outside for a walk in the fresh air regardless of the weather.

And when I'm out with the dogs, we tend to interact with other people, especially other dog walkers. This is just one more reason why dog owners generally feel less lonely. Studies also consistently report that children who are raised with a dog and/or cat are much less likely to have allergies and asthma.



# Switzerland

## Health Secrets from the Heart of Europe

By James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

*“Switzerland is a place where they don’t like to fight, so they get people to do their fighting for them while they ski and eat chocolate.” Larry David*

My wife Joan, daughter Kathleen and I recently visited Switzerland—where clock towers chimed in the town squares and echoed through quaint villages. The cobblestone streets, so clean you could eat off them, were bustling with fit-looking folks walking, visiting and shopping.

In the cool and comfortable weather of the Alps—we hiked up into the mountains. We also took a ferry ride around a brilliant blue alpine lake with crystal clear waters from glacier runoff. The Swiss are very conscientious about keeping their country pristine and their homes orderly. They recycle almost everything and have strict anti-littering laws.

Instead of traipsing into the garage and getting into the car, the Swiss usually walk out the front door and stride through the city streets, often to the train station. The world’s best rail network crisscrosses Switzerland, and the trains are as precisely on time as a Swiss watch. The people of Switzerland are the keenest train users in the world, and they also have one of the lowest rates of car crash deaths. In general, the Swiss people seem to be very safety minded. They also appear to be creatures of habit who focus on work and family; and they love being active outdoors.

Health care in Switzerland is superb, and 99.5 percent of Swiss citizens have commercial (private) health insurance. The Swiss are free to pick their doctor, and waiting times for appointments or surgery are almost as short as those in America—here in the United States we have the world’s shortest waiting times for medical appointments and procedures.

### The Swiss Paradox

The life expectancy in Switzerland is second only to Japan, though the eating habits of the Swiss would raise the blood pressures of some of the nutritional experts who think saturated fat is a toxic substance created by Satan to poison mankind.

I must say, the Swiss seem happier and healthier than some of the vegan fat-phobic extremists who helped write prior national dietary guidelines in the United States. In my opinion, a vegan diet won’t make you live longer, though it may just seem longer because you’ll tend to feel weak and depressed, and look anemic and frail.

Indeed, the Swiss diet is high in fat, but mostly in the form of natural foods like cheese, chocolate, nuts and olive oil. The smooth and delicious chocolate that we know and love was invented in Switzerland. Today the Swiss are widely considered as the best chocolatiers on the planet and they are also the world’s largest consumers of chocolate, which might partly

explain why the Swiss experience an exceptionally high quality of life.

Kathleen and I went into one of the many splendid chocolate shops in Lugano, Switzerland and ordered some dark chocolate with almonds, which we savored together over a cup of espresso.

### The Culture of Swiss Cheese

The Swiss are also famous for their cheeses: both for their skill in making more than 100 varieties of cheese, and their fondness for eating them. Cheese has been an integral feature of Swiss culture dating back to a time when they were part of the ancient Roman Empire.

The Swiss do not mass-produce cheese in giant factories, but instead make it by hand in hundreds of smaller dairies that are strictly regulated to ensure they use the traditional artisanal methods. The Brown Swiss cow is the preferred breed. Their smaller, sturdier bodies are ideal for thriving in the valleys and meadows of the Swiss Alps.

Natural cheese is teeming with healthy probiotics. Indeed, scientists have recently discovered that the healthiest forms of dairy are the fermented products like cheese and yogurt, in which the lactose (a sugar that tends to cause inflammation when consumed by adults) has largely been consumed by the beneficial microbes. We sampled some of the endless

varieties of cheese while we were in Switzerland, which despite raising our cholesterol a tad, seemed worth it.

**Happiness is a place between too little and too much.**  
~Swiss proverb

Wine is the most popular alcoholic drink in Switzerland, and the Swiss are particularly good at producing and enjoying the Pinot Noir and Merlot varieties. The Swiss seem to be disciplined about consuming their wine, cheese and chocolate in moderation.

**Switzerland—The Best Place on Earth to be Born**

The Swiss have the best quality of life of any nation in the world, according to the esteemed Economist Magazine. Their Where-to-be-born Index measures which country will provide the best opportunities for a healthy, safe, long and prosperous life. This quality-of-life index factors in how happy people say they are and integrates that with more objective measures, including life expectancy, environmental quality, economic security, crime levels, government corruption and family well-being.

Switzerland easily wins the gold medal in this international competition; Australia gets the silver. Norway, Sweden and Denmark are tied for the bronze. At the bottom of the Where-to-be-born Index are Syria, Nigeria and Russia. By the way, the U.S. ranks 16th out of 80 countries on the Where-to-be-born Index.

Dr. Ken Huber has been our president at Saint Luke's Cardiovascular Consultants (SLCC) since 2005. He and I have been close friends and colleagues since we trained together in cardiology at the Mayo Clinic in the 1980s. I was a year ahead of Ken in

training, and I like to think that I was the one who convinced him to come to Kansas City to join SLCC.

Ken is my go-to guy when I'm looking for an intriguing international destination that is off the beaten path. He suggested we visit Lugano, Switzerland—as usual his advice was spot on. Our time with the Swiss was not just a pleasure, but also an enlightening adventure. So, even if we weren't born in Switzerland, it's still fun to appreciate the Swiss culture and bring some clues about well-being and longevity back with us stateside.



*Dr. Huber skiing in Davos, Switzerland.*

**Take-home Messages from Switzerland**

- Walk every chance you get. Even if it's just for a few minutes, and try to get outside when you can, preferably in a green space or around a natural body of water.
- Get into a healthy daily rhythm. In bed by 10 p.m. and up before 7 a.m.
- It's fine to occasionally enjoy a bit of chocolate—the darker the better, ideally with some nuts.
- Cheese is okay in moderation. Yogurt is downright good for you—unsweetened plain is best. Add berries and nuts for flavor and nutritional goodness.
- A neat and tidy home is comforting. Try to make your bed each morning, and keep your kitchen and bathrooms clean.
- Be safe and cautious in your day-to-day routine, especially out on the roads.
- Drink mostly water; along with coffee in the morning (if it doesn't bother you) and tea up till about 7 p.m.
- Use extra-virgin olive oil and vinegar for dressing your salads and vegetables.
- If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one drink per day, never more than two. If you prefer wine, choose one of the antioxidant-rich red wines such as Pinot Noir, Syrah, Malbec, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot.
- Invest your time and energy in family, friends and work.



*Joan and Kathleen in Lugano.*

# Make Bugs Your New Best Friends

## How to Nurture Your Microbiome

By Lindsay Nelson, R.D., Joan O’Keefe, R.D., and James H. O’Keefe, M.D.

It takes a village to keep you healthy—a community of 40 trillion bacteria to be precise. Scientists refer to the unique collection of microorganisms that live in our gastrointestinal (GI) tract as our gut microbiota, or microbiome.

In coming years, Nobel Prizes will be awarded for discoveries about how those gut inhabitants are critically important to our health and well-being. So, start nurturing your intestinal garden; it can revolutionize your health and well-being in no time.

Researchers are calling our gut microbiota our “second brain” since it influences so many functions in the body. Much of your body’s immune defense system arises from interactions between your microbiota and the nodules of lymphoid tissue in the walls of your small intestine (similar to the tonsils at the back of your throat).

About 1,000 different bacterial species make up your unique microbiome; interactions between those microorganisms and your own immune cells play a big role in fighting off infections, preventing constipation, avoiding diabetes and cancer, and may even help determine your weight and mood. The right intestinal microbiota might also help to prevent depression and cardiovascular disease.

Probiotics is the term for the friendly bacteria that exist in our intestines. The best way to get these health-promoting bugs is to consume them as part of your daily diet. Lindsay diversifies her probiotic sources to ensure she has multiple strains of beneficial bacteria in her gut.

If you look in Lindsay’s refrigerator right now, you will find Greek yogurt, kefir (her 10-month-old’s favorite snack), sauerkraut, dill pickles and kombucha (a fermented tea). Lindsay eats yogurt for a snack, puts sauerkraut on top of her egg omelets, eats dill pickles with dinner, and sips on kombucha with a mid-afternoon snack.

On her windowsill, Lindsay always has a batch of kombucha brewing. Kombucha can be pricey at the store so it’s much more economical and fun to brew your own! Just pick up a starter kit and you’ll never have to buy kombucha again. There is something special about growing and making your own food that makes it more enjoyable to eat or drink.

To give your gut flora (the bacteria in your intestines), the kind of food they need to thrive, you should try to eat prebiotic foods high in soluble fiber at almost every meal. Some of our favorites are: eating half of a banana with a handful of nuts, using garlic and onion in at least one meal a day, and lightly steaming prebiotic veggies like asparagus for dinner.

Cooking prebiotic foods at high heat destroys some of the beneficial nutrients, so be sure to lightly heat or eat them raw. If you notice digestive issues after consuming prebiotic foods, you may have small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or other intestinal issues, and adding prebiotics may actually make symptoms worse. If this is the case, consult with your doctor to get to the root cause of your issue.



*Lindsay helping Otto with his kefir.*

Joan starts her day by drinking two cups of black coffee and eating seven or eight baby dill pickles. Joan is convinced that by starting her day off with her pickle and coffee breakfast, she is nurturing the multitudes within her gut, so that they in turn will take care of her. Coffee and tea help to stimulate normal gut motility, which also contributes to ideal GI health.

Kimchi is a fermented food that is just teaming with healthy (and stinky) bacteria. It has a taste that you might euphemistically call “acquired.” Jin is a friend of ours who, like many Koreans, grew up eating kimchi—it’s one of his favorite foods still today.

Jin’s grandmother made kimchi the old-fashioned way: by cutting up Napa cabbage, adding red pepper flakes, garlic, ginger and salt, and then burying the concoction in a ceramic pot in the back yard for six months. His wife, who is an Irish-Swedish American, refers to kimchi as “diaper food.”

James has learned to enjoy kimchi several times per week, but Joan makes him go on the back porch to open the container and eat a few forksfuls. Our three dogs just love the taste and smell of kimchi, and they usually follow James out to the back porch where he shares a few bites with them.

Joan and James' daughters, Kathleen and Caroline, enjoy kombucha, which is rich in probiotics. They also notice kombucha helps to keep their complexions clear. Fermented dairy products, including unsweetened, plain nonfat yogurt, low-fat kefir, and small amounts of natural cheese, are also daily staples for Lindsay, Joan and James.

Even small daily servings, like a few spoonfuls or forkfuls of fermented food, can help you avoid dysbiosis—a name for what happens when bad bacteria overgrows the good. Dysbiosis may cause digestive distress, inflammatory bowel diseases, constipation, diarrhea, allergies, obesity and diabetes.

Frequent and prolonged antibiotic use may cause dysbiosis; so will a diet full of sugar, white flour and junk food.

Over the past two or three years as we have personally become progressively more conscientious about nurturing our intestinal gardens, we have noticed that we are getting fewer colds and other infections, and nearly all our health numbers have improved.

Try it—you too will probably notice dramatic improvements in your health and well-being. Your resistance to infections will be better, and if you suffer from constipation or irritable bowel syndrome, you will see those problems disappear.



Bailey sharing probiotics with Dr. Becky Captain.

## Cultivating a Healthy Intestinal Garden

**1** Eat probiotic-rich foods. Try to consume some fermented dairy and fermented vegetables each day. Probiotics are found naturally in fermented foods such as dill pickles, sauerkraut, yogurt, kefir, cheese, kimchi, buttermilk, tempeh, miso soup and kombucha.

Try to choose refrigerated unpasteurized fermented foods since heat during the pasteurizing process may kill some of the bacteria. Probiotics can also be found in a supplement form, but it's generally better and cheaper to get these good bacteria naturally by consuming foods and beverages containing live cultures. For people with severe inflammatory bowel disorders, sometimes a high-dose therapeutic supplement is needed in addition to fermented foods.

**2** Eat plenty of prebiotic fiber—this is the type of food that is best for growing a wholesome garden of friendly bacteria in your gut. Prebiotic soluble fiber is found in plant-based foods.

The best sources of prebiotic fiber include cucumbers (or pickles), artichokes, asparagus, oats, leeks, berries, apples, bananas, oranges, grapefruit, beans, lentils and other legumes, carrots, beets, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, garlic and onions. Psyllium husk, such as that found in Metamucil, is also rich in soluble fiber. Just add a heaping tablespoon of psyllium powder to 12 to 16 ounces of water and drink it down quickly (before it gets too thick).

**3** Water your garden generously every day. To stay well-hydrated, we suggest you drink at least eight, 8-ounce glasses of water daily. Dehydration can lead to constipation and discomfort. Aim for 60 to 100 ounces of water daily. The more fiber you eat, the more water you need to drink.

**4** Reduce or eliminate sugar and refined carbs like white flour, and also avoid artificial sweeteners. The bad bacteria and yeast feed off sugar and processed carbohydrates.

**5** Take two, 1-gram capsules of omega-3 daily. This helps to reduce inflammation and supports healthy gut bacteria.

**6** Tend a garden and adopt a pet. When you get outside and play in the dirt, and let your cat and/or dog give you kisses on your face and hands, you inoculate yourself with healthy bacteria. Our animal and plant friends lower blood pressure, as well as stress hormones, while at the same time bringing a smile to our faces—good luck on getting those perks from a probiotic pill.

***For more nutrition tips, check out our cooking classes offered on the first Thursday evening every month. We will be focusing on preparing delicious and nutritious probiotic meals in the coming classes!***

***Call (816) 751-8327 for more information.***

## Meet the Four Newest Cardiologists at SLCC

Four cardiologists have recently joined Saint Luke's Cardiovascular Consultants. They include:



*Dr. Graham*

**Garth Graham, M.D., M.P.H.**—A board-certified cardiologist, Dr. Graham specializes in general cardiology. His clinical interests include management of cardiovascular disease and cardiac imaging. Before joining SLCC, Dr. Graham served in the Obama administration as Assistant Deputy Secretary for Minority Health.

**Nicholas Orme, M.D.**—A board-certified cardiologist, Dr. Orme specializes in cardiac MRI and CT. His clinical interests include echocardiography, nuclear cardiology, valvular heart disease, hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, and general cardiology.



*Dr. Orme*



*Dr. Vodnala*

**Deepthi Vodnala, M.D.**—A board-certified cardiologist, Dr. Vodnala

specializes in treating advanced heart failure. Her clinical interests include transplant cardiology, mechanical assist devices, echocardiography, and clinical cardiology.

**Omar K. Yousuf, M.D.**—A board-certified cardiologist, Dr. Yousuf specializes in electrophysiology. His clinical interests include atrial fibrillation, supraventricular tachycardia, ventricular tachycardia, pacemakers, implantable cardioverter defibrillators, and heart failure.



*Dr. Yousuf*



*Charles Duboc  
Feb. 16, 1923 to  
April 19, 2016*

### Charles Duboc: Humble Genius with a Heart of Gold

Charles Duboc was a great friend and a personal hero to me. He was a remarkable example of a person from the Greatest Generation.

He was a Kansas City native son, who earned a PhD in nuclear physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). During his education some of his professors and mentors at MIT were on the Manhattan Project: the nuclear physics team that spearheaded research and development of the atomic bomb, which was eventually used to end World War II. He was a kind and decent man who never spoke ill of anyone. In turn, Charles was respected and admired by virtually everyone

who knew him.

Charles was married to his wife Barbara for 58 years. He loved life and the natural world and he inspired curiosity and passion for learning among his family and friends. Ultimately he became CEO and Chairman of the Board of a large insurance company. He also served on many boards over the years, including Saint Luke's Foundation, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Baker University, Nelson Atkins Museum, and the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation.

Charles would get up and go for a pre-dawn 2 or 3-mile walk through Mission Hills. He ate a cup of blueberries with some nuts every morning, and he told me, "Berries are expensive, but cheaper than the medications I would have to take if I didn't eat this way."

Throughout his life, Charles main-

tained an interest in physics and mathematics, as well as finance. In his 90s he was still reading the latest textbooks used for teaching nuclear physics and theoretical mathematics at universities. He also pursued interests in medical science, history, the arts and genealogy.

A lifelong learner, he valued education and his philanthropy benefitted many schools and organizations in Kansas City and beyond. He donated funds to support the founding of the Charles and Barbara Duboc Cardio-wellness Center. He taught by example, and had a calm and gentlemanly manner, always radiating a spirit of generosity and humility. When I asked him near the end of his life if he had any regrets, he said:

"Today is the most interesting time ever to be alive—I wish I had more time."

## The Trouble with Alcohol...

*Dear alcohol: We had a deal that you would make me prettier, funnier and a better dancer. I saw the video; we need to talk.*

*From the scientific perspective, the limitations of willpower are: 1. It has a half-life of two weeks, and 2. It is soluble in alcohol.*

*A French blessing: Lord give me coffee to change the things I can, and wine to accept the things I cannot change.*

*I only drink a little; but when I do, I turn into another person, and that person drinks a lot.*

*People who wonder if the glass is half-full or half-empty are missing the point: the glass is refillable.*

*The latest study shows that drinking one to two glasses of wine per day will reduce the likelihood that you will give a damn.*

*Two old friends reminisced over a couple of pints of Guinness in their neighborhood pub in Dublin, Ireland. Liam said, "We're no spring chickens anymore Mick, and lately I've been thinking about me funeral. So when they're lowering me down under the sod, would you drizzle a bottle of fine Irish whiskey over the casket?" Mick replied, "I'd be honored to do that for you." Then Mick added, "Since we're lifelong pals, I'm sure you won't mind if I filter the whiskey through me kidneys before I sprinkle it over your coffin."*



## Heart Failure: What You Need to Know

Heart failure is a condition in which the heart is unable to adequately pump blood out to the rest of the body or to fill efficiently with blood. As a result, less blood and oxygen reach the other organs in the body. This is a common condition. About 5.7 million people in the United States have this diagnosis. Many people are at risk for this condition without being aware of it.

Recognition of risk factors and aggressive management of blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease can help prevent heart failure. Early detection enhances the chance for successful treatment. Saint Luke's Hospital provides expert care for heart failure from early detection to the most advanced heart failure treatments, including heart transplants. Saint Luke's Hospital is planning an event to raise awareness about heart failure in the community.

Please join Bethany Austin, M.D., Saint Luke's Cardiovascular Consultants, Advanced Heart Failure and Transplant Cardiologist, and Caylee Johnson, R.D., as they present information about heart failure and a heart-healthy diet and exercise.

Written information will be provided on self-management of heart failure, diet, medications and cardiac rehab. Nurses will be available to answer additional questions and provide free blood pressure screenings. This may be an opportunity for you to assess your risk and to be aware of symptoms that you or someone in your family might be experiencing.



*Dr. Bethany Austin*

**When: Wednesday, April 12, 2017, 6 to 7:30 p.m.**

**Presentation from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.**

**Blood pressure screening and information booths will open at 6 p.m. and will remain open after the lecture.**

**Where : Saint Luke's System Office –  
First Floor Conference Room**

**901 E. 104th St., Kansas City, MO 64131**

**Cost: Free**

**Registration: Call Saint Luke's Concierge  
to register at 816-932-5100**



## Get Off the Sugar Roller Coaster!

By Richard Laliberte (reprinted by permission from SHAPE Magazine)

**O**f all the health related things you worry about, blood sugar probably isn't one of them. But ground-breaking studies are providing evidence that it should be. "Blood sugar is a primary determinant of your health," says James O'Keefe, M.D., a professor of medicine at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. It affects the strength of your immune system, the quality of your sleep, and even the rate at which your body ages. But what's most surprising is that fit women are especially vulnerable to its dips.

Let's back up: What is blood sugar exactly? Also known as glucose, it's your body's fuel, providing the main source of energy for your muscles, metabolism, and brain. After you eat, glucose enters your bloodstream quickly, which causes a bump in your blood sugar level. Your pancreas then revs its production of insulin, a hormone that helps your cells absorb glucose and use it to function.

When you consume meals consisting of healthy whole foods such as produce and lean meat, the rise in your blood sugar and insulin levels is small, steady, and long lasting, which

is the effect you want. But certain types of foods—especially highly processed ones like white bread, pasta, and cookies—can cause a huge spike. In addition, scientists have discovered that certain habitual factors, including when you eat your meals and how much you exercise, can also make your blood sugar level skyrocket. When that happens, "it's like flooding an engine," Dr. O'Keefe explains. "The amount of glucose in your system exceeds your body's capability to deal with it." His research has found that an elevated blood sugar level triggers a surge in free radicals, dangerous compounds that can cause inflammation throughout the body, damage the lining of blood vessels, and cause blood clots. Even more, a steep rise in blood sugar prompts your pancreas to release large amounts of insulin, which sends your blood sugar and energy levels crashing and makes your body store fat.

### Your Body on a Sugar Rush

Blood sugar's effects are so wide ranging that scientists are only beginning to fully understand their scope. One recent study from Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands

found that people with healthy blood sugar levels look younger than others. According to the study authors, regularly being exposed to high blood sugar may speed up the aging process. "Glucose causes collagen molecules to start cross-linking, making skin stiffer and more leathery," explains Courtney Peterson, Ph.D., an assistant professor at Pennington Biomedical Research Center at Louisiana State University. If glucose levels remain elevated, the excess sugar can trigger the production of harmful compounds that have been shown to damage cells throughout the body, Peterson adds.

Blood sugar also affects brainpower. In a study in the journal *Neurology*, people with healthy levels performed better on a word-recall exercise than those with higher levels and even had more gray matter in areas of the brain associated with memory. "There's evidence that blood sugar spikes lead to blood sugar lows that limit the amount of glucose your brain receives, resulting in symptoms like brain fog and fatigue," says James Gangwisch, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. In response, your body

may produce higher levels of stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, which make it harder for you to sleep at night. That creates a vicious circle: The lack of zzz's boosts your blood sugar, increases your appetite and prompts your body to produce more cortisol or adrenaline. Over time, these influences can cause damaging inflammation, weaken your immune system, and encourage weight gain.

How fit you are is also partly determined by blood sugar. Keeping your level stable gives you the energy you need to put in a solid sweat session. "Even mildly low blood sugar can cause some fatigue, which is detrimental to exercise," says Barry Braun, Ph.D., the executive director of the Human Performance Clinical Research Lab at Colorado State University.

### Doing a Balancing Act

The good news is, it doesn't take a lot of work to stabilize your blood sugar and improve your well-being. The 11-study-backed strategies that follow are easy to do but make a huge impact, giving you more energy and better health.

### Sprinkle Cinnamon on Your Breakfast

People who added about a teaspoon of cinnamon to hot cereal had significantly lower, healthier blood sugar for two hours after eating than those who didn't eat the spice. There's evidence that cinnamon prompts cells to absorb more glucose from blood and use it for energy. Stir one to two teaspoons a day into your smoothie, protein shake, or oatmeal and a half teaspoon into yogurt or coffee.



### Drink at Least 4 ¼ Cups of Water a Day

Dehydration can drive up blood sugar by increasing vasopressin, a hormone that boosts glucose levels, research shows. Just 34 ounces of water a day is all it takes to keep your levels steady.

### Don't Snack Before Your Workout

When you exercise, your muscles take glucose out of your bloodstream for fuel. When you've used up available blood sugar, your body burns belly fat for fuel. But if you eat too much before your sweat session, your body never needs to burn that fat. Go ahead and skip a snack as long as you've eaten within the four hours before your workout, Dr. O'Keefe says. You'll reap better results: Your blood sugar level will be low when you start to sweat, and your body will use fat for fuel instead of glucose. "Most people have enough energy stored as fat to fuel a 30- to 50-minute workout without any trouble," Dr. O'Keefe says. But if it's been more than four hours since your last meal and you plan to exercise for more than 50 minutes, Dr. O'Keefe recommends having a 200-calorie bite a half hour to an hour beforehand. Try a pear or a banana with some nuts for slow-burning energy.



### Combine Cardio and Strength

Instead of sticking to weights one day and to cardio the next, do a half hour of each at every gym session. Aerobic exercise boosts your cells' energy-burning ability and torches fat, and resistance training builds glucose-utilizing muscle. Engaging in weight training for 30 minutes on most days reduces your risk of developing diabetes by 34 percent over 18 years, but combining it with aerobics lowers the odds by almost 60 percent, according to research in the Archives of Internal Medicine.

### Get Moving after Lunch

If you eat and then sit for hours—which basically describes anyone with a desk job—the sugar from your meal builds up, Braun says. "But if you do something active, your cells will use that glucose for fuel, so your blood sugar level stays steadier," he explains. Wait 30 minutes after finishing your last bite to give the food enough time to break down into sugar, then take a walk or do some lunges and squats, DiPietro suggests. Her research shows that spending 15 minutes on activities like these can reduce postmeal blood sugar spikes and keep levels lower for 24 hours.

*continued on page 18*

# Get Off the Sugar Roller Coaster!

continued from page 17

## Feed Your Gut Bugs

“Some of the good microbes that live in your gut may help stabilize blood sugar,” Peterson says. To keep your intestinal flora healthy—especially when you’re taking antibiotics, which can wipe out gut bugs—Dr. O’Keefe recommends eating fermented foods like Greek yogurt, kimchi, sauerkraut, and dill pickles daily.

## Skip Artificial Sweeteners

Just like the real thing, fake sugars cause your blood sugar to rise. In an Israeli study, participants’ levels soared after just one week of eating foods containing them. The study authors believe that artificial sweeteners affect gut bacteria in a way that makes the body more intolerant to glucose, which boosts blood sugar.

## Follow the 50-36-14 Plan

Blood sugar control is markedly worse at 7:00 p.m. than at 7:00 a.m., according to a recent study from the Pennington Biomedical Research Center. “Different parts of our physiology peak at different times,” explains Peterson, one of the study’s authors. “The pancreas produces insulin faster first thing in the morning to help lower blood sugar, and it slows down as early as 3:00 p.m.” That’s a problem, because most people eat 40 percent of their daily calories at night, when their bodies can’t keep their blood sugar as stable, Peterson says. To prevent this effect, eat a big breakfast that’s about 50 percent of your daily calories, a lunch that’s about 36 percent of your calories, and a small

dinner that’s just 14 percent of your calories. In an Israeli study, women who did that saw reduction in their levels of glucose, insulin, and appetite-triggering hormones, and they also lost weight. Peterson suggests eating dinner at least three hours before bedtime to give yourself plenty of time to digest your food.

## Have a Cocktail with Dinner

Sipping a drink with your evening meal reduces blood sugar spikes by up to 37 percent, research in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found. “Like exercise, a modest amount of alcohol improves your body’s ability to utilize glucose,” Dr. O’Keefe says. The benefit disappears with a second drink, though.

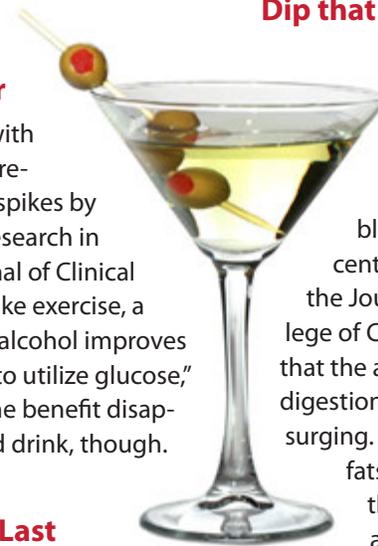
## Save Bread for Last

Your blood sugar will be more stable if you eat vegetables and protein-rich foods first and carbohydrates last, a new study reports. “The

difference is tremendous,” says Dr. Aronne, the lead researcher. Vegetables and protein slow the release of carbohydrates from the stomach, which keeps glucose from spiking, and they may also trigger the release of a blood sugar-controlling hormone in the gut.

## Dip that Bread in Olive Oil and Vinegar

Adding one or two tablespoons of vinegar to a meal containing white bread or rice lowers blood sugar by 25 to 35 percent, according to research in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology. Experts believe that the acidity of vinegar slows digestion, preventing glucose from surging. And the monounsaturated fats in olive oil help regulate the body’s insulin response and blood sugar control. “Use extra-virgin olive oil,” Dr. Aronne says. “It has more of the chemical components found in whole olives, which are the most beneficial.”



## Berries: Nature’s Candy

Children instinctively love candy, whose natural sweetness is a marker of a high-calorie treat. Instead of candy, choose berries. Among the nutritional superfoods, it’s hard to beat berries. Their intense deep red, blue and purple pigments that temporarily stain your fingers and lips are also potent anti-oxidants that cool the damaging fires of inflammation and will keep your heart, blood vessels, and brain vigorous and youthful. Berries are also loaded with fiber, potassium and vitamin C, besides being relatively low in sugar compared to processed treats like candy, cookies, cakes and soft drinks. Choose from blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, and cranberries. Wild blueberries may be the best of the berries, due to their very high levels of brain-protecting anti-oxidants.

# Harry Truman's Secrets to Well-Being

**H**arry Truman, our own hometown hero, was the last U.S. president to occupy the Oval Office of the White House with nothing but a high school diploma—which he earned from Independence High School in 1901.

Truman was president from 1945 to 1953. At the end of his eight years in office his approval rating was a dismal 22 percent (lower even than Nixon's 24 percent rating when he was impeached in 1974).

But time has been kind to Harry. Today he is considered by presidential scholars to be among the greatest American presidents of all time, behind only (in descending order) Lincoln, Washington, Franklin Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt, and Jefferson—darned impressive cronies for a farm boy from the Kansas City area.

**“If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog.”**

**Harry Truman**

Harry was famously plainspoken, down-to-earth and uncomplicated. Winston Churchill characterized Truman as the, "Living and kicking symbol of everything that everybody likes best about the United States." He was also one of the healthiest and longest-lived U.S. presidents, and his time in office didn't seem to age him much.

Truman had an irrepressibly optimistic attitude, and was unwaveringly devoted to his wife Bess and daughter Margaret. Like Ben Franklin, he was early to bed—early



*President Truman loved to bowl! Here, he's bowling with the winners in the 10-pin bowling competition held within the Veterans Administration Paraplegic Centers in 1947. Copyright International News Service. Courtesy Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.*

to rise, and most every morning he took a 2-mile walk at a brisk pace, "as if I were late for an important meeting."

Harry really knew how to relax: he enjoyed a cocktail with Bess before dinner, loved to play the piano, took time to get massages regularly, and liked to go bowling or play poker with buddies.

Truman ate a healthy diet very low in sugar and very high in fruits and vegetables. When asked the secret behind his robust health he replied:

"I eat no bread but one piece of toast for breakfast, no butter, no sugar, no sweets. Usually have fruit, one egg, a strip of bacon and half a glass of skimmed milk for breakfast; fish with spinach and another nonfattening vegetable for lunch with fruit for dessert. For dinner, I have a fruit cup, steak and a couple of nonfattening vegetables." Harry was eating a Paleo-

style diet about 70 years before it was made popular!

Some of my favorite quotes from Harry:

"When Franklin Roosevelt died, I felt there must be a million men better qualified than I, to take up the presidential task. But the work was mine to do, and I had to do it. And I have tried to give it everything that was in me."

**“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”**

"I never did give anybody hell. I just told the truth and they thought it was hell."

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  - **Heartfelt Quotes**

