



# Live Healthy *for* Way Le\$\$

Smart ways to get the most health bang for your buck—from your gym membership to organic produce.

BY KATE ASHFORD

You work out, you try to eat right, and you want to buy the healthiest stuff, but, boy, this healthy-living thing can really hit you in the pocketbook. The money flies like it's got actual wings—to your gym membership, running shoes, that fancy juicer, the organic meat at dinner—and that's just on Monday. The question is: What “healthy” stuff do you really need? “We’re willing to spend a lot of money on being healthy, but we’ve got to keep our wits about us,” says Mary Hunt, author of *Live Your Life for Half the Price*. “People think that if something says it’s healthy, it must be. But that’s not always so.” Truth is, while some good-for-you investments are worth their weight in carrot sticks, others are more hype than wholesome. Here’s how to splurge on things that really make a difference. >>>

97%

say paying more  
for a healthy life is  
definitely worth it.  
—Health.com poll

**Live Healthy  
for Way Less**

## ORGANIC FOOD

**Be choosy: You don't have to fork out your paycheck for every organic in the market.**

If you're tossing organic produce into your grocery cart with wild abandon, the final bill might be wince-worthy—you'll typically spend 30 to 50 percent more than you would on the conventional type. But there's a real difference: About three-quarters of



traditionally grown produce show traces of pesticides, while only one in four organic fruits and veggies do, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Splurge on organic produce with soft skin or that you eat skin and all (like apples), but save on foods that are fairly pesticide-free thanks to their tougher outer layers (like bananas). Wash all items well with soap, water, and a brush, but skip the fancy veggie and fruit washes; the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) don't recommend them.

Your best bet for the environment and your health? Shop at your local farmers' market for close-to-home

foods that require less shipping, which means fewer greenhouse gases and lower costs—even for organics.

**59%**  
spend most of their  
"healthy bucks" on  
organic or low-cal food.  
—Health.com poll

## EXPENSIVE SPORTS BRA

**Worth the investment? It all depends on your cup size.**

Not all women need a crazy-supportive sports bra. "If you're small-breasted and doing low-impact activities, you can go to almost any retailer and buy a comfortable seamless bra that'll be absolutely appropriate," says LaJean Lawson, PhD, an adjunct professor of exercise and sports science at Oregon State University. "But women with a full C cup and up can't get by with a less-structured bra." That's when it's wise to spend \$30 to \$50 for support; test it by jumping up and down in the dressing room. For the best fit, get measured by a pro at a bra shop; then head to a sports or specialty-running store for a large sports-bra selection. If you don't have a good retailer for sports bras nearby, try [www.titlenine.com](http://www.titlenine.com), which has a great return policy.

### Quick tip

If you do yoga or Pilates (or even a lot of crunches), be sure the hooks and seams of your bra don't dig into your spine; lie down on the dressing-room floor to test it out.

Organic choices in the meat and dairy aisles are less straightforward. Beef, poultry, eggs, and milk rarely cop to pesticides, but conventional producers sometimes use antibiotics and hormones on their animals.

Although less than 1 percent of meat shows traces of antibiotics later, there's some evidence that antibiotic-resistant bacteria are more common in conventionally produced cuts than in organic products. You'll pay as much as 100 percent more for organic meat and dairy, but if you're a big meat eater or milk drinker it may be worth the investment.

### Quick tip

Here's how to decode the stickers on your food: A five-digit number starting with nine means it's organic; a four-digit number means it's conventionally grown.

Go organic	Skip it
Apples	Bananas
Peaches	Kiwifruit
Bell peppers	Onions
Strawberries	Mangoes
Pears	Pineapples
Lettuce	Broccoli

The pesticide difference

**25%**  
of organic fruit and veggies show traces of pesticides

**75%**  
of regular fruit and veggies do



## FANCY WATER

**Dehydrated? Drink up ... but watch the calories.**

Fortified waters, although tasty, can come with big doses of calories. And if you're really running low on your recommended intake of vitamins, a multi might work better. If you're tempted by fancy waters because you hate plain H<sub>2</sub>O, try this trick from Jessica Ganzer, a registered dietitian in Arlington, Virginia: Fill a pitcher with water, throw in some lemon, lime, and orange slices, and refrigerate for a tasty, cheap drink. Just can't resist flavored or vitamin water? Choose calorie-free.



## FANCY BATHROOM SCALE

**Weighing in can help with weight control—no matter how basic the scale.**

If you've ever shopped for a scale, you know there are models that seem to do everything but cook your dinner. They measure body-fat percentage, hydration numbers, body mass index, even bone mass—and, of course, your actual weight. You also know that having a scale is important: Dieters who weighed themselves regularly melted more pounds over two years than those who didn't, according to a University of Minnesota study, and people who stepped on a scale every day lost the most. But do you need the \$100-plus model with all the extras? "Unless you're a competitive athlete, probably not," says Cedric Bryant, chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise (ACE).

That said, digital scales, which are a bit pricier, are easier to read than analog and are generally more accurate. Look for load-cell technology, an advanced version of the levers and springs found in older (and cheaper) models; your scale will need less calibration and be less likely to break down over time. Make sure it has the ability to zero out before you step on it, and weigh yourself a few times on a hard surface to see if it's consistent. Cheaper digital scales start around \$20 and will likely be made of plastic, which is fine if the underside that contains the weight mechanism is made of metal. Beyond that, it's all about aesthetics. If the fancy glass model will get you to weigh yourself, you'll pay a little more—but it'll be worth it.



## FITNESS EQUIPMENT

**How to buy smart and get what you need.**

### • Treadmill (about \$2,000)

**Must have** good shock absorbency (something other than foam; ask the salesperson). Give the machine a practice run to check stability, sturdiness of rollers, and width and length of the belt (should be at least 18 inches wide and long enough to keep you from flying off the back). You might feel silly jogging in a department store, but would you buy a car without a test-drive? Aim for a 3-horsepower motor; it's lower than commercial grade but enough to keep you moving.

**Skip** the fancy computer console and 500 different programs to choose from.

### • Stationary bike (about \$1,000 for upright)

**Must have** high enough resistance to give you a thorough workout. Crank it up and try it out at the store.

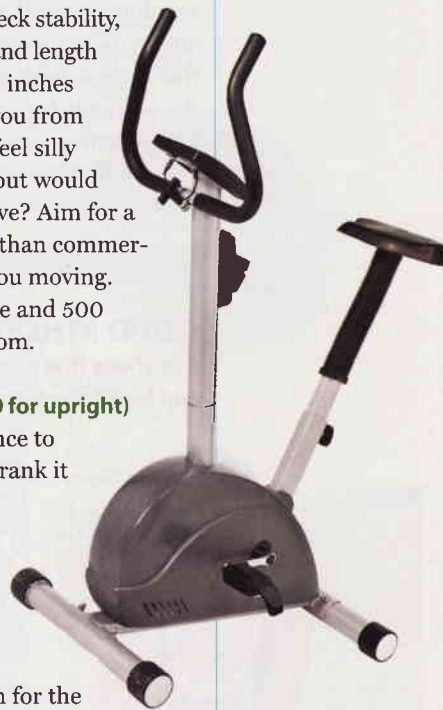
**Skip** the bells and whistles.

"If it's stable, comfortable to sit on, and you don't hear any parts rattling, you'll get a good workout" says Richard Cotton, national director of certification for the American College of Sports Medicine.

### • Elliptical trainer (about \$2,000)

**Must have** stability; also, it should operate smoothly and be easy to use. "These machines are even more mechanically complex than treadmills, especially if they have moving handles for your arms," says Bill Sonnemaker, a personal trainer in Atlanta. Do a test-drive before you buy, and make sure the warranty covers repairs.

**Skip** gym-quality models (they usually cost \$5,000-plus) or machines with multiple programs.



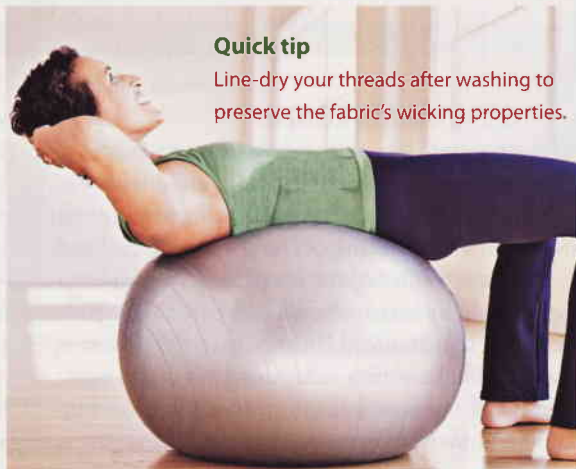
## SPECIAL WORKOUT WEAR

**Serious athlete? You'll want moisture-wicking.**

A grueling workout is hard enough. A grueling workout in a sweat-drenched shirt or chafing shorts is just miserable. For comfort's sake, invest in apparel with flat seams to avoid rubbing and moisture-wicking material to funnel perspiration away from skin. These clothes are pricier but bargains exist: There's a large selection of Champion and Duo Dry items for less than \$17 each at [www.target.com](http://www.target.com), and you can get deals on Dri-Fit and Under Armour garb at Dick's Sporting Goods, Sports Authority, Joe's Sports, and other outlets.

### Quick tip

Line-dry your threads after washing to preserve the fabric's wicking properties.



## VITAMINS

**Worth it? Yes, if your food choices aren't cutting it.**

Most experts say you don't need to take vitamins if you eat a diverse mix of fruits and veggies, lean meats, legumes, and whole grains. Problem is, if you don't eat well, are a vegetarian, have a food allergy, or are pregnant (or hope to be)—categories that include most of us—you might not be getting the nutrients you need. In that case, an inexpensive multivitamin may give you peace of mind. Look for a brand that has 100 percent of the daily recommended values of vitamins and minerals and has

the USP seal, which means that U.S. Pharmacopeia, the organization that verifies the ingredients and quality of dietary supplements, has given it a thumbs-up. Store-brand multivitamins go for about \$3 to \$6 for 100 tablets, compared with about \$8 to \$10 for brand names. Don't spend money on additional supplements (fish oil, vitamins D and C) unless your doc has ID'd nutritional gaps. For instance, if you aren't getting enough calcium from dairy (1,000 milligrams for 19- to 50-year-olds), pop a daily Tums with calcium (150 tablets cost \$5 to \$6).

## GOOD ATHLETIC SHOES

**Buy shoes that match your exercise or sport—and look for last year's bargains.**

Women sometimes splurge on a great pair of running shoes and then wear them for three other sports. That's a recipe for injury. "You can't multitask with your shoes," the ACE's Cedric Bryant says. "Running shoes are flexible and have more cushioning, while shoes for racquet sports are designed for lateral movement." Expect to spend at least \$50 on a good shoe, and get one for every sport you play—or buy a good pair of cross-trainers for multiple sports. Bargain ideas: Buy last year's discontinued model (new shoes may boast slightly different technology or colors, but the good core ingredients are still the same) and ask your running store about deals on returned

shoes. (Some chains like Road Runner Sports sell lightly worn returns at a discount.)



**52%**  
would spend  
money on the gym  
over health-care  
screenings, if they  
had to choose.  
—Health.com poll

## GYM MEMBERSHIP

**Negotiate like a pro—and then really go.**

If you see your hairstylist more often than you visit your gym, you're probably squandering your money on a membership. (The average annual cost in 2006 was \$660.) About 80 percent of gym-goers would be better off on a pay-per-use basis, according to a Stanford University study. However, if seeing that recurring charge on your credit card gets you off the couch, it's worth every penny—but it doesn't have to be so many pennies. There are

## PUMPED-UP TOOTHBRUSH

**Lazy brusher? Enter bells and whistles.**

If you regularly brush and floss, you can stop reading. For the rest of us, the novelty of a fancy brush might help with the twice-daily two minutes required for healthy pearly whites. "Power toothbrushes can be worth the cost because they can help you brush for the appropriate amount of time," says Charles Perle, DMD, of the Academy of General Dentistry. Also, electric toothbrushes with rotation-oscillation action actually work better than manual, research says. We say whatever gets you brushing is healthy.

**Whatever it takes to get you to brush for two minutes, twice a day is worth it.**



Colgate Soft-bristled toothbrush \$2 to \$4



Oral B Vitality with oscillation and timer \$20



Sonic Essence 5300 \$60

ways to negotiate like a pro, says personal trainer Bill Sonnemaker, who is also the IDEA Health and Fitness Association's 2007 trainer of the year.

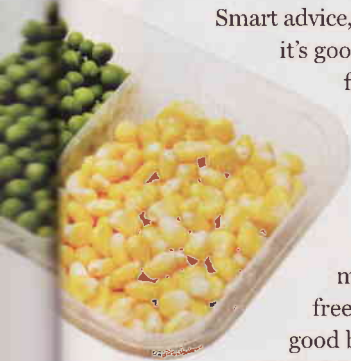
- **Buy a membership just for your gym** (not the universal deal that includes far-flung destinations).
- **Wait until the end of the month to buy**, because a salesperson will be more willing to offer you a break to make his or her monthly quota.
- **Ask for a 13th month free** or that the initiation fee be knocked off; that's usually where salespeople are allowed to negotiate.

## DIET FROZEN MEALS

**Fast and convenient are OK, but add more veggies.**

In a perfect world you'd cook a big batch of healthy food and freeze the leftovers. "Cook once and eat three times," dietician Jessica Ganzer suggests. "You'll enjoy all the benefits of a prepackaged dinner without the added sodium and preservatives."

Smart advice, but when you're running late it's good to know that affordable frozen meals have come a long way since their tasteless, sodium-laden predecessors. "They can be an effortless way to control calories," Ganzer says. "I tell my clients to keep some in the freezer for emergencies." A few good brands: Kashi, Amy's, and Lean Cuisine offer whole grains and lean protein and work to keep sodium low. You can find most frozen entrées for \$3 to \$5 per meal, and they cook in less than 10 minutes (some in less than five) in the microwave. Add a cup of veggies for good measure because some packaged meals don't include a ton of the green stuff.

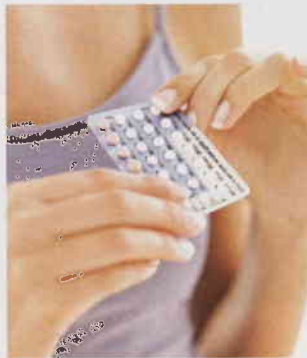


## PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

**When available, generics can save you money.**

"If a generic drug is available, it's almost always smart to buy it," says Don Kemper, CEO of Healthwise, a consumer-health-information company. Generic prescription drugs are legally required to have the same active ingredients as brand-name varieties, although they must look slightly different, so they may be a different color or shape. But they definitely cost less: Pharmacies receive \$32 for generic meds, compared with \$111 for name-brand versions, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation; and co-pays for generics are about \$11, on average, compared with \$24 to \$38 for name brands.

Ask your doctor about the generic type of any prescription drug you take. If she thinks it's right for you (in rare instances, there may be a reason you should stick with a brand name), have her check the "Generic OK" box on the prescription.



## FANCY KITCHEN GADGETS

**Of course, you want everything the top chefs have, but these basics will keep you healthy.**

If you're a techno-chef who loves to play with the latest machines—and you'll actually use that juicer that will take over your counter space—it might be worth the investment. But if you're part of the use-it-once-and-forget-it crowd, these four low-cost items are all you'll need to whip up plenty of healthy fare.

- **Nonstick skillet (\$50 to \$150)**

A skillet with a great nonstick coating allows you to cook with minimal oil; the surface is perfect for stir-frying veggies, scrambling egg whites, and prepping healthy sauces. Try one in a larger size (12 inches) and look for deep sides, a fitted lid, and an oven-safe handle. Price isn't a great indicator—in recent tests of nonstick cookware, *Consumer Reports* found that cost had nothing to do with performance. Their top pick: Kirkland Signature cookware from Costco. (A whole set costs less than \$200.) Calphalon nonstick pans perform well, too. And budgetistas can get a good \$50 nonstick pan by Bialetti.

- **Bamboo steamer (\$20 or less)**

This age-old cooking method requires no oil (just add water), and it will allow your food to retain most of its nutrients and flavor. Bed Bath & Beyond, Target, and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) offer bamboo-steamer sets for \$20 or less.

- **Steam bags (\$5)**

If you don't want to commit to an actual steamer, try the new microwave steam bags from Glad and Ziploc: Just throw in your veggies and follow the instructions on the back. Foods are crisp and delicious—and virtually fat-free!

- **Grill pan (\$25)**

If you're dying to throw some shrimp on the barbie, invest in a heavy grill pan, which can withstand much higher temperatures than a nonstick skillet. You'll achieve the same results—grill marks, low-fat cooking—that you would with a more expensive countertop grill but for less money. Tuesday Morning and other outlets carry a variety of low-price options. ●

**68%**  
have given up a  
healthy-living practice  
because of cost.  
—Health.com poll

