healthier at home

The last year-and-a-half has been stressful, with our routines upended and more hours spent at home than we ever imagined. But we adapted and developed different ways of carrying on with our lives. This has led to many positive trends that are helping us live healthier and happier, starting at home.

Set up your home gym in a well-lit area where there are no distractions.

Venus Davis (Coach Ve) Personal Trainer, USA Weightlifting Coach

SO MANY OPTIONS TO EXERCISE

One bright spot of the pandemic: We’ve discovered the upsides of working out from home—no more gym commute and the flexible hours; your home never closes! And options for at-home equipment and classes have expanded in an exciting way. When it comes to setting yourself up for success, the first step is locating an ideal spot in your home, says Venus “Coach Ve” Davis, a Washington, DC-based certified personal trainer. You want a space that’s well-ventilated, clutter-free, and roomy enough so you can move around freely.

MAKE IT WORK

If you want to lose weight, invest in good walking/running shoes and a mat. If the goal is to work on strength training, a mat in addition to dumbbells and/or resistance bands are easy-to-use basics to get you started.

GEAR UP

A few good pieces of equipment to add to your workouts.

Marcy Rubber Hex Dumbbell These are rubber-coated so they won’t cause floor damage or roll around. From $40 per pair; marcypro.com

Gaiam Performance Yoga Mat A shockproof mat is a must-have to support ankles and knees as you’re resistance training. This one is made of recyclable TPE material. $40; gaiam.com

Rogue Fitness Jump Rope One minute of jumping rope between sets of resistance training works your heart and your muscles. $28; roguefitness.com
A FOCUS ON BETTER SLEEP

Our vital sleep habits took a particularly hard hit during the pandemic with all the stress and uncertainty. The upside is that many of us finally heard the wake-up call on just how crucial our snooze time is. One trend that’s helping us sleep better: products that filter out blue light (mostly from screens), which reminds the brain of daylight and “can affect our internal clock, making the brain think the day isn’t over yet,” says Jennifer Martin, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and professor of medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

MAKE IT WORK

MENTALLY WIND DOWN Try a meditation app or listening to nature sounds on Spotify. White noise also can help lull you to sleep.

SAM SCREENS FROM THE BEDROOM
Looking at a screen is more disruptive to sleep than light exposure during the day, Martin says. Stash a pad of paper on your nightstand for jotting down any important midnight thoughts.

TELEHEALTH

During the pandemic, seeing your doctor on a screen before heading to or in place of an in-person appointment was a necessity. Now patients and practitioners alike realize that “telehealth done well can lead to improved health care,” says Jay L. Schnitzer, M.D., Ph.D., a health technology expert and co-chair of the COVID-19 Healthcare Coalition. That’s in large part because telehealth has made it easier to get the health care you need; experts think insurance companies will continue to cover it (but call to ask).

Jot down notes before the visit so you can explain your symptoms as specifically as possible: this will help the doctor determine if you need to come in.

THERAPY GOES VIRTUAL

The telehealth innovation has been a boon to mental health treatment, allowing people easier access to therapy. One way to connect with a therapist is via an app, but you may need to test a few to find the right fit. To help filter your choices, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center created a database of mental health apps (mindapps.org) that you can search based on criteria like cost. TalkSpace (talkspace.com) and BetterHelp (betterhelp.com) are two popular apps that give you access to text, video, and audio messaging with a licensed therapist, as well as monthly sessions.

SLEEP AIDS

These gadgets can help you get to sleep easier and wake up more gently.

BLUE BLOCKING LIGHTBULB

Switch out your bedside bulbs for this one, which you can read by all night without the stimulating blue light. From $19; bedtimelightbulb.com

BLUE LIGHT GLASSES

These clear-lens glasses block approximately 30% of blue light so your nervous system can wind down easier. From $26; fostergrant.com

LOFTIE ALARM CLOCK

Trade your phone alarm for this clock that has custom playable content including guided meditations, white noise, and relaxing sounds. $149; byloftie.com
**WORKING FROM HOME**

The pandemic saw nearly 70 percent of full-time employees doing their jobs from home during 2020. Although it has its challenges, working from home has some serious good points, and half of workers clocking in remotely say they want to continue to do so. After all, it eliminates commuting time and allows our schedules to be more flexible. You can wake up, do some work, exercise, do some work—all in the comfort of your home. Along with the return to the office, many companies are offering a hybrid work schedule. The tips and products here can help you work from home in a healthy way.

**ONE GOOD MOVE**

Extra time sitting contributed to an epidemic of weak glute muscles. Try this glute kickback from Coach Ye five times a week.

- On a mat, position yourself on your elbows and knees, back in a straight line, core muscles contracted.
- Extend one leg back and up, creating a parallel line with the floor. Point your toes, sole facing upward.
- Lift the extended leg as far as you can, squeezing your glutes.
- Return to starting position without touching your knee to the ground and repeat for 15 repetitions, with a full pause at the top of the move to contract the glute muscle.
- Switch legs and repeat.

**MAKE IT WORK**

- **CHANGE POSITION**
  - Stand for 10 minutes, sit for 30, cross and uncross your legs.
  - And take activity breaks every hour: Walk to another room or jog up stairs. This keeps muscles moving to help burn calories and allows you to stretch to avoid strains, says Stacey Pierce-Talma, D.O., associate clinical professor at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine.

- **INVEST IN A GOOD CHAIR**
  - Look for one with good lower-back support, armrests you can set your elbows on (at 90 degrees when typing), and adjustable height so your feet are flat on the ground as much as possible. You don’t need the Cadillac of office chairs, but splurge if you can.

- **SLEEP NUMBER LUMBAR SUPPORT PILLOW**
  - Wider and taller than most pillows, its memory foam eases stress in the middle and lower back. $25, sleepnumber.com

- **OFFICE STAR KNEELING CHAIR**
  - Kneeling chairs engage your core and take pressure off your lower back. $96, staples.com

**OFFICEMATES**

Tools that make working from anywhere more comfortable.

- **ALCOVERISER STANDING DESK CONVERTER**
  - Rises your computer so you can stand while you work. Fits two 24” monitors and a keyboard. $150, flexispot.com