



New You

By Sarah Lavender Smith

Photography by Jan Stürmann



25 Ways to Reinvent Yourself Through Healthy Living

Trina Rockefeller of Oakland made a life-changing commitment the day she opened her closet and saw a denim skirt that no longer fit.

Lots of things made her want to lose the extra 30 pounds she had carried since the birth of her second child: She had severe back pain, felt tired all the time and lost her breath walking upstairs. She also wanted to set a healthy example for her kids, since she knew that overweight African-American children face a higher risk for Type 2 diabetes. But as a working mom with no free time, she felt powerless to change the person she had become.

Then she saw that skirt hanging there, just waiting for her to wear it again, and she decided enough was enough: She had to change.

"I realized that dieting is not an option—you have to make a lifestyle change," says Rockefeller, 34, who gained confidence and energy as she got in shape and transformed her family's eating habits. In the process, she found that her personal quest for health had a ripple effect that boosted other areas of her life, including her relationships and work. She didn't join any expensive or time-consuming program but made simple yet effective changes in her regular routine. "There is so much you can do to get healthy with the things and people that are available everyday in your life." ▶▶



You'll find Trina Rockefeller's tips among the 25 presented below as ways to help you reinvent yourself and achieve wellness through healthy living. "Reinvent" in this context does not involve 21st-century cosmetic quick fixes for a superficial makeover. Rather, it involves tapping into your authentic self to envision the healthier, happier person you yearn to be—and perhaps once were—and then taking steps to achieve that vision of your better self. For many, the process may be one of rediscovery as you regain a more wholesome and balanced way of living.

Given that the mind and body are intertwined, the advice below aims to help the whole you: not only your physical fitness but also your feelings. There's something for everybody—and every part of the body—on this list. It's meant to inspire, not to overwhelm. Start with whichever one or two suggestions below are most likely to knock you out of the rut you're in, and then try more. Build momentum and build on success.

Who says you can't? Only you—and you can.

Get Moving

#1 Walk 10,000 Steps a Day

Anyone who can walk can find ways to walk more. Trina Rockefeller and her family got in the habit of deliberately parking their car farther away from their destinations. Most Americans walk 3,000 to 5,000 steps each day (2,000 steps equals approximately one mile), and by working up to 10,000 steps, you're more likely to meet the standard health goal of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily. There's a program and a pedometer to get you going: the 10,000 Steps Program through Kaiser Permanente (non-Kaiser members welcome too), <https://kp.10k-steps.com>.

#2 Build a Base With Basic Training

Think "boot camp" and you may think of someone yelling at you as you crawl on your elbows. Fear not. Forward-thinking fitness experts took the concept of military basic training and created an outdoor workout that's demanding yet friendly. Several boot camps meet at Lake Merritt in the early morning for exercise routines that melt calories as they improve strength, flexibility and aerobic capacity. "Many women say this is the first fitness program they have ever enjoyed and seen results from, and most of these ladies are in their 40s or 50s and have not worked out in years," says Anna Gunn, a certified personal trainer who leads Oakland Adventure Boot Camp (www.oaklandbootcamp.com).



Trina Rockefeller on a walk at Lake Merritt with her husband, James C. Earl-Rockefeller III.



Oakland Adventure Boot Camp

Her program is for women only, meets five days a week and includes cardio conditioning as well as strength training. By contrast, PacWest Boot Camp (www.pacwestathletics.com) is co-ed, meets two mornings a week and focuses on strength and core work for people who get an aerobic workout on their own on other days. "Folks say, 'Two days a week—I can handle that,'" says Richard Martinez, co-founder of PacWest Athletics.



Courtesy of Stroller Strides

Stroller Strides

#3 Make It Work With Family

"Moms have to find ways to make working out work, because we don't have time or money for expensive gyms. Your home is a gym," says Trina Rockefeller. "I have stairs in my house—my own personal Stairmaster—so I'll walk up and down the stairs while dinner is warming." Her other tricks? "My 9-year-old son is required to read to someone 20 to 30 minutes per day, so I exercise while he reads to me. Plus, I take long walks with my husband." Parents with kids still in diapers might try a stroller-brigade workout where the tots go too. Several have cropped up to help new mothers lose their jelly bellies and regain their sanity, such as Baby Boot Camp (www.babybootcamp.com) and Stroller Strides (www.strollerstrides.com).

#4 Hire a Trainer to Pump You up

Making a date with a personal trainer at least once or twice a week keeps you from falling off the workout wagon. Just avoid anyone who tries to squeeze you into a one-size-fits-all program or who wants to be your paid friend more than your smart coach (craigslist is crawling with 'em). "A good personal trainer is going to push someone harder than they want to push themselves, in a safe environment and in a safe way," says personal trainer David Bordessa, owner of Montclair Fitness (510-530-4000) and a former Cal rugby and football player.



Courtesy Oakland Adventure Boot Camp

Certified trainers who'll customize a plan for you and coach you along the way also can be found at Montclair Physical Therapy & Wellness (www.montclairpt.com).

#5 Belly up to the Barre

The ballet barre—the unassuming wooden railing that runs along the perimeter of a dance studio—is central to a well-designed strength and conditioning class known as The Dailey Method (www.thedaileymethod.com). The East Bay's one and only Dailey Method studio opened on Piedmont Avenue in 2005. You don't have to be a lithe dancer to do this workout; on the contrary, it's for all body types, including pregnant and postpartum moms. The Dailey Method strengthens and stretches all major muscle groups, with special emphasis on core conditioning, and as such is an excellent supplement to the walking, running or other aerobic work you can do on your own. The same could be said about Pilates, but many Dailey Method devotees rave about the integration of the barre into the workout as well as the socially supportive and energizing environment of the classes.

#6 Sweat for a Cause

Legions of regular folks have joined the no-longer-elite ranks of those who run 26 miles and cycle centuries thanks to the popularity of charity programs such as Team In Training and the AIDS/LifeCycle. You receive training to complete an endurance event in exchange for your commitment to raise money for the cause. Many participants sign up multiple times, not only to support a cause and stay in shape, but also to stay in touch with a social scene that fosters friendships over the course of all those miles. A sampling: the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training (www.teamintaining.org), the Arthritis Foundation's Joints In Motion (www.arthritis.org/joints-in-motion) and the AIDS/Lifecycle (www.aidslifecycle.org). Closer to home, try the annual Swim a Mile for Women with Cancer event (www.wcrc.org) in the fall at Mills College to benefit the Oakland-based Women's Cancer Resource Center. ▶



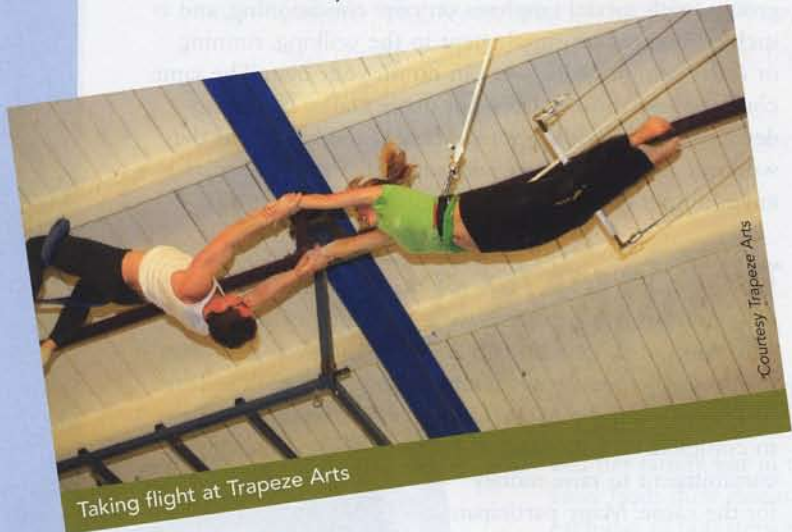
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training Program

Courtesy The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

Eat Right

#7 Take the Trails Challenge

Get off that treadmill (both the real and metaphoric) and take a hike. Each year, the East Bay Regional Park District (www.ebparks.org) hosts the Trails Challenge and May Marathon, two self-guided hiking programs. Those who do the Trails Challenge aim to complete at least five hikes by December, while those who sign up for the May Marathon complete 26 miles (not necessarily all on the same day!) by August. Registration opens in mid-February.



Taking flight at Trapeze Arts

Courtesy Trapeze Arts

#8 Develop the Sport or Skill You Always Dreamed of Doing

(But Were Too Scared or Shy to Try)

"You must do the thing you think you cannot do," Eleanor Roosevelt once said. Think of what that one thing is for you. Now find a way and make a day to do it. Maybe you always wanted to dance like a street-smart bgirl, box like Rocky Balboa or flex and fly like a Cirque du Soleil star. Look no further and wait no longer: You can move to hip-hop rhythms at New Style Motherlode on College Avenue (www.newstylemotherlode.com), grip a glove and punch some guts at King's Boxing Gym in East Oakland (www.kingsboxinggym.com) or fly through the air with minimal unease at Trapeze Arts in West Oakland (www.trapezearts.com). Lots of places like these have instructors willing to work with anyone regardless of age or ability—it's just up to you to risk feeling awkward the first time you try it.

#9 Forget Fads, Learn Fundamentals

Because you're bombarded by an overabundance of food choices and confused by diets du jour, doing what should be simple—eating wholesome food when hungry and stopping when full—can feel impossible. Attend a nutrition seminar or meet one-on-one with a nutritionist to take a close look at what you feed your body and to relearn the basics. Trina Rockefeller learned how to decipher food labels and adopt healthy eating habits through a program at her daughter's school called the Healthy Living Council, sponsored by the Alameda County Health Department. Matthew Johnson, a nutrition and exercise scientist (mattlj@berkeley.edu), advises individuals as well as sports teams and businesses. "Everyone I work with first needs a good nutrition lesson since most of us have never gotten one, and what we do know is wrong," he says. Helayne Waldman, another nutrition educator with stellar credentials, offers nutritional house calls through her Oakland-based service Turning the Tables (www.turning-the-tables.com). She'll come to your house, study your pantry and refrigerator, and give you and your family's eating habits a makeover that you can live with and love.

#10 Go SLO

Think seasonal, local and organic when shopping or eating out. Choosing minimally processed products that are in season, produced close to home and raised in a natural and sustainable way is healthiest for your body as well as the planet. Make a goal to shop at one of the dozen farmers markets around Oakland at least twice per month. Check out Oakland's new Whole Foods (www.wholefoods.com) at 230 Bay Place for inspiration. If you're stuck with a traditional chain supermarket as your closest grocery, then try to fill your cart from its perimeter more than from its center aisles so you'll choose healthier, fresher items. Shopping done, eat slowly. Discover the health virtues of the slow food movement (www.slowfoodusa.org).





Rockefeller shops at the Grand Lake Farmers Market.



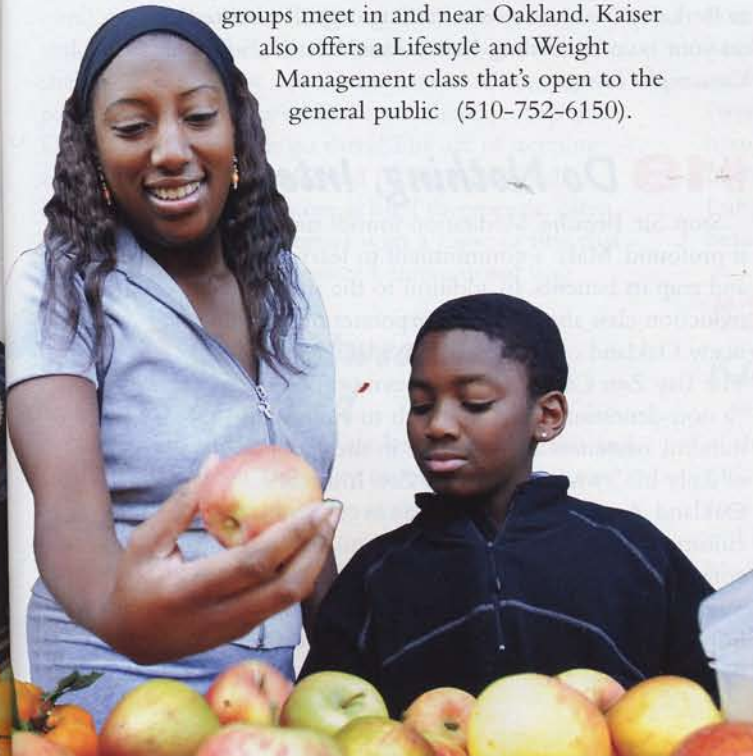
Head in the Right Direction

#11 Hire out the Planning and Prep

Does it still seem too complicated to eat right, or do you find you can't make the time to plan, shop and cook? Then take out a nutritional health insurance policy in the form of a personal chef who can take care of all the cooking at least a couple of nights a week. Try Jennifer Knapp and her team (www.jenniferknappchefs.com). Or, fill up at The Full Plate (www.thefullplate.com), a home-grown business in Montclair where chefs do all the planning and prep for a healthy, high-quality meal. You pick it up and take care of last-minute assembly at home, or—even easier—you can have The Full Plate deliver meals to your home and office.

#12 Get Group Support

Some weight-management programs “succeed” only in terms of weight regained and self-esteem lost. One, however, has proven itself over four decades to offer sound nutritional advice and scientifically proven results: Weight Watchers (www.weightwatchers.com). About a dozen groups meet in and near Oakland. Kaiser also offers a Lifestyle and Weight Management class that's open to the general public (510-752-6150).



#13 Find a Good Therapist

You can't feel healthy and be the person you want to be if distress from depression, angst from anxiety and fear from phobias keep dragging you down and jeopardizing your relationships. A therapist can help. The hitch is finding a good one. Try the San Francisco Bay Area Center for Cognitive Therapy (www.sfbacct.com) in Rockridge, headed by one of the nation's top researchers in cognitive-behavior therapy (aka CBT). The most practical and proven form of psychotherapy, CBT helps people feel better by helping them recognize and modify distorted thoughts and negative behaviors that are triggered by everyday events. “Cognitive-behavior therapy teaches people tools they can use to manage their emotions and behaviors to reach their personal goals,” says Jacqueline B. Persons, Ph.D., who directs a team of six psychologists at the center. Additionally, the American Psychological Association (www.apa.org) and California Psychological Association (www.cpapsych.org) have useful articles on mental health and locator tools to help you find a qualified psychologist close to your neighborhood.

#14 Heal Hurtful Relationships

That stress and heartache from bad relationships might actually make you sick. According to a study published in October 2007, marital strife raises the risk of heart disease. If personal relationships are a significant source of distress in your life, then you might need counseling with your loved ones more than individual therapy. The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (www.aamft.org) has advice on how to find a couples or family therapist and a directory so you can search for one nearby. ▶▶



Catch Your Breath

#15 Envision and Get on the Right Path

Who are you, and who do you want to become? Where do you want to go, and why? What will it take to get there? A professional life coach specializes in helping you answer those big-picture questions. "Life coaching starts with the present, looking at who you are today and who you strive to become. It is an action-oriented kick in the pants that gets you moving and motivated," says Oakland-based life coach Laura Sari Geduldig (www.gotherecoaching.com). Other certified professional life coaches can be found through The Coaches Training Institute (www.thecoaches.com).

#16 Give Church a Chance

Turned off by church or too busy to bother, you might wonder what religion has to do with healthy living. Suffice to say that involving yourself in a spiritual community rooted in sacred tradition can promote virtues such as compassion, contemplation, humility and gratitude that contribute to a well-balanced, peaceful and purposeful life. The East Bay is home to places of worship and interfaith alliances that are intellectually as well as spiritually grounded, open-minded and diverse. One good example is one of Oakland's oldest: First Presbyterian at 2619 Broadway (www.firstchurchoakland.org), where the progressive wisdom of the Rev. Chandler Stokes lifts hearts and minds in an exquisite neo-Gothic sanctuary that both humbles and inspires.

#17 Find Yourself in Yoga

The timeless practice of yoga is in many ways an ideal antidote to the stress and artifice of today's world. Through yoga you can develop greater balance, relaxation and flexibility. Its growing mainstream popularity, however, has led some to think of it primarily as an "exercise class" and to therefore sidestep the spiritual essence of yoga. Think of it as "a tool for investigating, cultivating and realizing your truest essence," as stated on the Web site for the Piedmont Yoga Studio (www.piedmontyoga.com), home to some of the East Bay's acclaimed yoga instructors.

#18 Become Mindful to Calm and Cope

Mindfulness, a practice rooted in Buddhism, has been proven to reduce pain and stress so much so that Western medicine now touts its benefits for improving health. An eight-week mindfulness-based stress reduction program based on the pioneering work of Jon Kabat-Zinn and colleagues at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center is offered at Alta Bates in Berkeley (www.stresscaretraining.org). Get started on your own by reading Kabat-Zinn's classic *Full Catastrophe Living*.

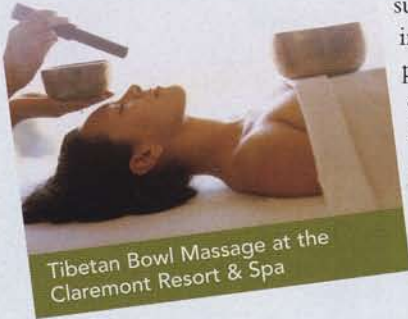
#19 Do Nothing, Intentionally

Stop. Sit. Breathe. Meditation sounds simple but is profound. Make a commitment to learn, practice and reap its benefits. In addition to the stress-reduction class above that incorporates meditation, many Oakland centers teach the ancient practice. The Bay Zen Center (www.bayzen.org) offers "a non-denominational approach to cultivating mindful awareness and presence in the activities of daily life," while the Pacific Zen Institute's Oakland Zendo (www.pacificzen.org) creates "a culture for transformation" through meditation and conversation. The vibrant and family-friendly Siddha Yoga Meditation Ashram (www.oaklandsyda.org) is home to classes in a spiritual, Indian-based form of meditation and yoga.

#20 Schedule a Guilt-Free Spa Date

Many of us sit in steam and get wrapped or rubbed down only when someone splurges on a spa gift certificate. It's OK to treat yourself more frequently; in fact, a regular spa date is good for you. To find time and money, swap a spa date for a less essential, more costly activity. (C'mon, you don't really need to shop and get your nails done that often, do you?) Everyone knows about the queen of the East Bay spas, the Claremont Resort & Spa (www.claremontresort.com), but for quality, price and personal service, bigger is not always better. Look for a clean, wholesome day spa with certified massage therapists and estheticians who offer non-gimmicky treatments that are as restorative as they

are relaxing—places such as Phoenix Rising in Montclair (www.phoenixrisingsalon.com) or Piedmont Springs on Piedmont Avenue (www.piedmontsprings.com/index).



Tibetan Bowl Massage at the Claremont Resort & Spa

#21 Get Between the Covers of a Book

Go to an independent local bookstore such as Diesel on College Avenue (www.dieselbookstore.com) or Walden Pond Books on Grand Avenue (www.waldenpondbooks.com) and browse the self-help shelves. If you've got a problem that's blocking your path to wellness, there's a book out there to help you. Do not do this online; go there! The act of stepping away from your computer and taking a mere half hour to browse a bookstore is itself therapeutic, often serendipitous, as you connect with a topic or title that speaks to you in an unexpected, inspirational way.

#22 Get Between the Covers of a Bed

Good sleep and good sex are key to good health and satisfaction. Make it a priority to make time for more of both. If you have problems in the bedroom, don't wait any longer to do something about it. Research the topic, talk to your doctor and get a handle on the stress and interpersonal troubles that sabotage sleep and intimacy by consulting the stress-management and therapy resources above.

Look as Great as You Feel

#23 Uncover Your Style

To feel your best, you want your style—your outer shell—to reflect the real you. You also don't want to waste time and money when you shop. Book a session with a style consultant such as Anthea Tolomei (www.tolomeiandassociates.com), who will assess your wardrobe, get to know your tastes and needs, and take you shopping. "My clients are real people with real lives, not obsessed with their image," says Tolomei. A good stylist will not do a makeover per se, but rather uncover and express the person's inner qualities through their image, she adds. "Style has to hit the interior note of that human being."



#24 Switch Salons

You're not married to your hair dresser. You owe it to yourself to shop around to find a stylist who can create the most flattering look for you, in a salon whose setting makes you feel good. Save time by finding a one-stop spot with head-to-toe care. At 4315 Piedmont Ave., a cluster of high-quality salons are housed in a Victorian next door to Polish (www.polishspa.com), which provides a full menu of little luxuries. Take a book to read and avoid all those glossy mags in the waiting room, keeping in mind the line from Baz Luhrmann's "Wear Sunscreen" poem-song: "Do not read beauty magazines. They will only make you feel ugly."

#25 Last but not Least, Kick Your Butts

One thing could make you feel and look better than all of the tips above combined: Stop smoking. If the risk of an early, painful death isn't enough to make you quit, maybe your vanity will save you—think of the premature wrinkling and bad breath caused by cigarettes. Kaiser's Oakland Medical Center offers stop-smoking workshops that are open to the general public (510-752-6150). Or contact your local branch of the American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org) for resources. ■