

Get fit 'down there': 10 health trends

10 wellness trends — from DNA-based diets to Kegels galore — to watch for

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You probably never thought you'd turn to a video-game console to help you get in shape. And yet, in 2008, with the popularity of Nintendo's Wii Fit, that concept suddenly made a lot of sense.

So what else is going to rock your wellness world in 2009? Redbook magazine asked medical, fitness, and nutrition experts — plus pro trend-spotters — to ID the hot ideas you'll be hearing about in the coming year. We also got a refresher on the big 2008 trends that are only getting bigger. Read on for news you can use to make this your healthiest year yet.

2008: Looking back

Exergaming

Last year, adults ditched the treadmills and free weights for something that got their minds pumping along with their hearts: video games. Sure, interactive devices that combine exercise with gaming, like Dance Dance Revolution, have been around for some time. But it wasn't until Nintendo introduced the Wii Fit — a balance board that attaches to the Wii gaming system to help you do aerobic exercise, strength training, and even yoga — that exergaming became a family-room staple. So far, Wii Fit has sold more than eight million units worldwide. And it really seems to work as a workout. Says Phil Lawler, director of training and outreach at PE4Life, a nonprofit that helps modernize physical education for kids, "We find that students exercise harder and longer using technology than they do with traditional sports games."

Multitasking shoes

Women have another reason to love shoes thanks to new footwear designed to firm up your legs as you walk: Workout shoes like FitFlop claim to tone your muscles and reduce cellulite with every step.

FitFlops are built with what's called a multi-density midsole, which makes leg muscles work harder than they would in a normal shoe. But some experts aren't convinced. "For the most part, FitFlops are not beneficial for use other than going to the beach or pool," says Robin Ross, P.D.M., a podiatrist practicing in Shelter Island, NY. "Wearing flip-flops opens you up to problems ranging from cuts and lacerations to twisting an ankle because of the lack of support."

Still, women love the idea of building better calves simply by strolling down the street. FitFlop has sold more than a million pairs of its eponymous flip-flops since they hit the market in 2007, and the company's new boot is sure to entice those whose winter habits tend more to shoe-shopping than gym-going.

Superfruits to the rescue

Move over, apples — you may keep the doctor away, but açai berries may keep the cancer at bay. Thanks to that health claim, among others such as improving heart health and slowing the aging process, exotic fruits like açai, goji berries, and pomegranates exploded in popularity last year. You'll continue to see them in the form of juices, teas, and even candy.

True, these superfruits are loaded with antioxidants, which protect cells from toxins, or free radicals, linked to aging and diseases like cancer. But it's not clear how beneficial they are, particularly when used in products like juice. "Drinking your fruit does not yield the same effects as eating it," says Keri Gans, R.D., a New York City-based spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Bottom line: It's always better to eat whole fruit — which is packed with water, fiber, and other nutrients — than drink the stripped-down juice.

Food (out)laws

The government can't stop you from eating Outback's 1,580-calorie Bloomin' Onion, but they can ensure that you know just how unhealthy it is. Last year New York City took the obesity epidemic into its own hands when it became the first city to require that chain restaurants post calorie information on their menus. California passed a similar regulation in September, and according to the National Restaurant Association, more cities are expected to follow suit this year.

Over the summer, California also became the first state to ban trans fats in restaurants, following the lead of cities like New York and Philadelphia, which passed similar laws in 2006 and 2007, respectively. Scientists believe eating trans fats (found in the oils used to fry foods from chicken fingers to doughnuts) can lead to heart disease by raising bad cholesterol and lowering good cholesterol. French fries will never taste quite the same way again — but at least we'll live long enough to eat more of them.

2009: Looking forward

Skipping the salt

Now that we're getting calories and trans fats under control, all eyes will be on salt this year. "Salt has a tremendous amount of flavor," says Bonnie Taub-Dix, R.D., a nutritionist and national spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, "so food manufacturers and restaurants have been using it as a substitute for fat." But they're simply replacing one harmful ingredient with another, she explains: As with trans fats, too much sodium can lead to health problems, such as high blood pressure. In fact, the American Medical Association says that, on average, we should all consume about 50 percent less sodium. That means limiting it to 2,300 mg per day. As consumers cotton to that fact, Taub-Dix expects to see more low-sodium products on grocery-store shelves by year's end.

Putting your health info out there

Storing your medical records on the Internet is way more convenient than keeping (read: losing) them in a filing cabinet. At least that's what Google Health — an online database that holds all of your files, flags drug interactions, and sends appointment reminders — is hoping. Watch for this and similar new services, such as Microsoft's HealthVault and Revolution Health, to become more popular in 2009. "It's like online banking," says Angel Bellon, trend analyst with Faith Popcorn's BrainReserve. "People had privacy concerns at first. But once they started to understand the benefits, they adopted it."

Talk about privacy: Experts say there will also be greater use of databases like Check Tonight, which shares your STD test results with potential dates to prove you're clean. (You get tested at a clinic; if your results are negative, Check Tonight activates your membership. If you test positive, the company informs you and then destroys your file.)

Vaginal fitness

Have you done your Kegels today? Vaginal fitness — including the tightening of the pelvic muscles, as you do with Kegel exercises — is a new kind of workout goal. Though physical therapists already use Kegels and other therapies to treat pelvic problems such as urinary incontinence, there's now a center devoted entirely to their teaching: Manhattan's Phit spa (short for pelvic health integrative techniques) offers Kegel classes, surgery to tighten your vagina post-baby, and more. Lauri Romanzi, M.D., Phit's founder and a clinical associate professor of gynecology at Weill Cornell Medical College, says keeping the pelvic muscles fit may give you better bladder and bowel control — possibly even a better orgasm.

Can't get to New York? You can do Kegels on your own, for free: First, squeeze your pelvic floor muscles for five seconds. (To get the move down, try stopping your urine flow when you're peeing. That's the feeling you should have.) Then release them. Do this 10 times, then repeat.

DNA-based diets

Nutro-*whaaat*? Right now it's just a fancy buzzword. But nutrigenomics — or the concept of using your genetic makeup to decide what diet plan is best for you — is a hot topic among nutritionists, who are exploring ways to make it a more mainstream practice. Some scientists believe that chemicals found in food can affect our health by changing how our DNA works. Using family history and genetic testing, nutrigenomics could identify which diseases we may be predisposed to, such as diabetes or heart disease, and teach us how to use food to prevent them. "Most people wait until they develop a problem before they do something about it," says Taub-Dix. "Nutrigenomics will help us predict early on which problems you may encounter later on and take every step to keep them from happening."

Bike nation

Cash-strapped drivers began ditching their four-wheelers for two last summer,

when gas prices reached \$4 a gallon. "We saw a tremendous increase in people biking to work last year," says Andy Clarke, president of the League of American Bicyclists. "When it costs 80 bucks to fill up your gas tank, that inspires a more urgent need to start riding than concerns about global warming or getting more exercise." In Fairfax County, Va., for instance, there's been a 160 percent increase in commuters who board buses with their bikes after cycling part of the way to work. Even though gas prices are starting to drop, persistent worries about our faltering economy mean that this is the year the two-wheel phenomenon will really get rolling, says Clarke. Bike-sharing programs — in which communal bicycles are made available for riders to borrow for a fee — are popping up in places like Denver, Minneapolis, and Washington, D.C., and are expected to hit at least five more cities this year.

Detoxing

No one knows how to start a fad quite like Oprah. Ever since she did her 21-day cleanse last year, women have been signing up for detox diets that claim not only to rid the body of toxins but also to help you lose weight in the process.

Oprah's diet, which cut out caffeine, sugar, alcohol, gluten, and animal products, isn't as extreme as programs like the Master Cleanse, which replaces food with a lemonade-like concoction for up to 10 days. But nutritionists like Gans don't recommend detox diets, period. "They can be dangerous," Gans says, often causing extreme fatigue and fainting. So if you want a new diet this year, steal the smart part of Oprah's cleanse — her focus on fruit, veggies, and whole grains — and forget any plan that tells you to skip solid food, with all its essential fiber, vitamins, and minerals. (A good-for-you diet that actually *requires* you to eat real food? We'll take it!)

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