Healthy You

New research

Medication alert
A recent study found that the potency of 89 drugs (such as certain blood pressure meds, cholesterol-lowering agents and birth control pills) increases when combined with any form of grapefruit. So swallowing one of your pills with a glass of grapefruit juice may be the equivalent of downing 5 tablets. If your pharmacist or doctor mentions this, take the warning seriously.

SOURCE: David Bailey, PhD, study author, pharmacologist

FEEL-GREAT FEET

Even though stronger feet lead to better balance and a lower risk of injury, most of us don’t think to exercise them as we do the rest of our body. Try these simple moves once a day for better footing.

1. The golf grab
Place a golf ball under your toes and crunch them so you’re grabbing it. Hold for 5 seconds, then release. Do this with each foot for 30 seconds to strengthen balancing muscles.

2. Air writing
Write the alphabet (A to Z) in the air with your toes while sitting at a desk or table. This helps strengthen the tendons and ligaments around your feet. Plus, you can do it with your shoes on.

3. Toe stretch
Put on a toe spreader (the foam fork-like item used during a pedicure) while you watch TV or read a book. This tool can help stretch the small muscles around your toes.

SOURCES: Crystal Holness, DPM, spokesperson, American Podiatric Medical Association; Michael Sandler, running coach and coauthor, Barefoot Walking.

June 2013 | womansday.com 115
ARE HOME TESTS WORTH IT?

Do-it-yourself kits for checking cholesterol and diagnosing urinary tract infections are now common in drugstores. Here's what you need to know.

**Urinary tract infection strips**

Cost: About $10 for a box of 3

**How it works:** At the onset of early symptoms of a UTI—burning while urinating and the constant urge to go—you urinate on a small piece of paper, which checks for common UTI indicators, like white blood cells.

**FYI:** Call your doc or ob-gyn if the results are positive, as she may be able to call in a prescription without a visit or recommend an over-the-counter option. If you also experience symptoms like fever, chills or nausea, it may mean that the infection has already traveled to your kidneys. In this case, you'll need to visit your physician for antibiotics.

**Bottom line:** These tests are OK to use (along with doctor contact) in the early stages of an infection to possibly save yourself an office visit and get relief fast.

**Cholesterol kit**

Cost: Most options are about $28 for 2 devices

**How it works:** Using a finger prick, you obtain a drop of blood and put it on a small plastic or cloth strip that determines your total cholesterol. Some people use it to keep tabs on their cholesterol and stay motivated to maintain lifestyle changes.

**FYI:** These tests are sometimes inaccurate and provide mixed results, so don't rely on the kit as your only monitoring option.

**Bottom line:** The best place to check your numbers is at your doctor's office. The testing is more reliable, and she can interpret the information (along with other factors) and offer personalized advice.

**Sources:** Barbara Duty, MD, board of directors, American Academy of Family Physicians; Sandra Adkinson Fryhover, MD, clinical associate, adjunct professor, Emory University School of Medicine; Jessica Shepherd, MD, assistant professor of obstetrics and gynecology, University of Chicago.

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The best sunscreen for sensitive skin

If you're one of the 20% of people who suffer from eczema, a skin condition that causes itchy and scaly rashes, check your sunscreen bottle. To prevent flare-ups, make sure the front or back of the label contains these phrases before you apply:

- Hypoallergenic
- Mineral-based (or look for titanium dioxide or zinc oxide on the ingredients list)
- Fragrance-free
- SPF 30 or higher

**Neutrogena Sensitive Skin Sunscreen Lotion Broad Spectrum SPF 60+** This gentle unscented lotion provides UVA and UVB protection, but feels ultralight (no sticky mess!). $10.49; amazon.com

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10 seconds to serenity

Overwhelmed? Repeat a word, sound or phrase (like “everything is fine” or “relax”) to yourself or out loud for at least 10 seconds. Why it works: Research shows that repetition can help you calm down and combat your body's urge to go into panic mode.

**Source:** Linda Reikes, MD, author, Mind Over Medicine: Scientific Proof That You Can Heal Yourself