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Home, Slim Home

You don't have to hit the gym—or even change out of your pj's—to burn more calories. Make these supereasy home improvements to start tipping the scales in your favor.

By Jessica Girdwain
Photographs by Dan Saelinger

Cut the Lights

Installing a dimmer switch in your kitchen and turning on some Adele is a bright idea: Diners who ate a meal under soft lights with relaxing music in the background consumed 133 fewer calories compared with those who ate in bright, noisy environments, a recent Cornell University study revealed. Calm vibes encourage you to eat slower, so your brain has time to register that you're satisfied before you're stuffed. Not handy? No problem. Mike Scott, the resident lighting expert for Lowe's, says even a novice can install a dimmer switch in 15 minutes or less (click on the Ideas & How-Tos tab at lowes.com for a step-by-step video tutorial).

Take a Stand

The average woman packs on about a pound a year once she hits 25. Fight Father Time by spending an extra hour a day standing, which burns about 40 calories more an hour than sitting does, says Barry Braun, Ph.D., a kinesiology professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. What's more, "not activating muscle fibers for a prolonged period of time causes negative changes in the pathways that regulate your metabolism," Braun says. Translation: Standing doesn't just use more energy, it also keeps your metabolism humming. You can purchase a computer stand for about \$90, or just park yourself at the kitchen counter as you send e-mails. If standing for an hour straight sounds too drastic, Braun suggests taking a five-minute walking break every 30 minutes.

Chill Out

Even if it's been a laze-around-in-your-yoga-pants day, you can still burn more fat for basically no effort by adjusting your thermostat. A recent study in the *Journal of Clinical Investigation* found that when people were exposed to cold temps for three hours, they burned



No-sweat secret: Lowering your thermostat by a few degrees can help you burn hundreds of extra calories.

an additional 250 calories. Your body has to go into overdrive to heat itself up to a cozy 98 degrees, and extra calories are zapped in the process, explains Scott Isaacs, M.D., an endocrinologist and the author of *Beat Overeating Now!* You don't have to walk around shivering to get the benefits, he says; just lower your thermostat by two to three degrees.

Get Your Rear in New Gear

"Worn-out clothes can hold you back and even keep you from going to the gym in the first place, while a flattering, comfortable outfit boosts your confidence and energy while you work out," says body image expert Sarah Maria, the author of *Love Your Body, Love Your Life*.

So, do a clean sweep and get rid of anything with stains or stretched-out elastic (the life span of a sports bra, for example, is six months to a year). Then reward yourself with a few purchases that fill the gaps in your workout wardrobe. "A neon sports bra or a moisture-wicking tank may be motivation enough to run an extra mile or bust out a few more

reps," says Ramona Braganza, a Los Angeles-based celebrity trainer.

Make a Little White Noise

The key to a good night's sleep could be snoozing to the sound of an overhead fan. "It helps you tune out disruptions. If you're in a too-quiet room, any little sound, whether it's the house creaking or your neighbors coming home, will wake you up," says Lisa Shives, M.D., the founder of the Linden Center for Sleep and Weight Management in Evanston, Illinois. And when you're tired, you eat more: People who got just five hours of shut-eye a night put on nearly two pounds over a five-day period, according to a new study from the University of Colorado Boulder. If you don't have a fan, invest in a white-noise machine or download an app like White Noise (\$2; Android and iTunes) or Relax Melodies (free; Android and iTunes).

Cool Your Jets

Just as cold temps help melt flab, so, too, can a chilly shower. "Cold temperatures activate brown fat, a type of fat that burns calories instead of storing them," Dr. Isaacs says. Of course, polar bear plunges can't replace exercise, "but exposure to cold can bring about a small bump in metabolism that adds up to weight loss in the long run." Only about 1 percent of our body fat is made up of brown fat, most of it found in the neck and upper chest. Letting cool water run over this area while scrubbing up—or better yet, blasting it with cold water for a minute—may be the most effective way to stimulate this natural calorie blaster.

Come Clean

Clutter can increase frustration (Where is that other sock?) and compromise relaxation (you sit down to a nice meal only to... sit on your sock). So it's no surprise that women who described their digs with words such as *overflowing* and *messy* had higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol, according to research from the University of California, Los Angeles. The less obvious consequence: "Because ab flab contains more cortisol receptors, your body responds to chronic stress by storing fat around your waist," explains Caroline Cederquist, M.D., the medical director of Cederquist Medical Wellness Center in Naples, Florida. Fortunately, you don't need to keep things spotless to lose that spare tire. Start by tackling one highly visible area, like the top of your dresser, says Linda Rothschild, the chief executive organizer for Cross It Off Your List in New York City.

Do Yourself a Solid

If you love to bake but have a hard time controlling yourself around cookies, scoop the dough into an ice cube tray, freeze it and pop the

cubes into a freezer bag. Then, the next time a craving comes on, stick one in the toaster oven, suggests Heather Bauer, R.D., the author of *Bread Is the Devil*. "The freezer keeps cookies out of sight, and baking them individually forces you to practice portion control," she says. Another way to slow your roll: Instead of whipping up an entire pan of brownies or a loaf of banana bread, mix up a microwaveable mug cake for one (search *mug cake* on Pinterest for recipes).

Weight Here

You won't find this tip on your favorite interior-design blog: Stash two lightweight dumbbells next to your remote control. "They serve as a visual cue to squeeze in a few extra minutes of activity," Braganza says. Use them to crank out full-body exercises, like squats plus biceps curls or lunges plus shoulder presses, during commercial breaks and you'll torch about 100 calories in the course of an hour-long episode. By paying attention to your form instead of the TV, you'll also be less tempted to raid the pantry: Research published in *Health Psychology* found that people who watched ads for junk food were likelier to snack.

Serve Yourself Right

The right plates can help you cut portions painlessly. Research shows that you pile more food on large dishes, so downsize from dinner plates to salad plates. Another study, from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, showed that serving white food on white plates prompted people to help themselves to 30 percent more. To avoid these results at home, follow the lead of study author Brian Wansink, Ph.D., a FITNESS advisory board member, and invest in a few brightly colored dishes. Use them to serve rice and pasta, reserving your whites for chocolate cake and ice cream. ●

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