

*Eat, Drink & Shrink*

# Health

## LOSE 5 LBS THIS WEEK

*Without  
Dieting*

## Cold & Flu? Not You

→ How to Stay  
Healthy This Season

## CUT 1,875 CALORIES WITH THESE SWAPS

## *Get Glowing Skin*

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## INSTANT ENERGY BOOSTERS

Who Needs Coffee?

## Holiday Slim Secrets

→ Dress  
10 Lbs  
Thinner  
Tonight

## Sofia Vergara's

STOP-THE-CLOCK  
BEAUTY TRICKS

# 8

## Germiest Spots at the Mall!

You Won't  
Believe #1

## NATURAL PAIN CURES



DECEMBER 2011

Health.com

# A Massage for Your PMS

...and other surprising down-there cures from around the world.

By Danielle Beurteaux



From Japan  
**SHIATSU**



From India  
**YOGA**



From China  
**ACUPUNCTURE**



From Finland  
**SAUNA**



From France  
**AROMATHERAPY**

## Good for Cramps

**How it works** Shiatsu, Japanese for "finger pressure," is an acupressure massage aimed at stimulating the meridians (invisible lines on the body thought to carry energy). It may help fight menstrual pain: In one study, young women who received acupressure for cramps reported a 72 percent decrease in symptoms—as much relief as those who took ibuprofen. Massage has also been shown to reduce levels of substance P, a neurochemical associated with pain, according to other research.

**Try this** Do your own on-the-go massage to alleviate cramps, suggests Pauline Sasaki, a shiatsu therapist in Norwalk, Connecticut. Firmly squeeze the fleshy webbing between your index finger and thumb for a few minutes, once or twice a day. This is known as the Large Intestine Number 4 Point, which is traditionally used to ease menstrual cramps as well as other types of pain.

## Good for Leaky bladder

**How it works** Certain postures help bolster a weak pelvic floor, which can come from having kids, gaining weight, yada yada, and is the typical reason for that pesky leakage when you sneeze or run. "Yoga builds an awareness in your body so you can feel, and then use, the muscles required to strengthen the pelvic floor," says Heather Haxo Phillips, vice president of the board at the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco.

**Try this** "The Warrior 2 pose is great for strengthening your pelvic floor," says Phillips. Stand with feet about 4 feet apart; turn your right foot out to the right and left foot in 45 degrees. Inhale as you raise your arms out to the sides, parallel to the floor at shoulder level. Exhale as you bend your right knee until the thigh is parallel to the floor (keep knee behind toes); look out over your right hand. You should feel an automatic lift upward in your pelvic region. Do Warrior 2 twice on each side—holding it between 10 seconds and a minute at a time—3 to 5 times a week to build strength down there.

## Good for Hot flashes

**How it works** This ancient healing practice (one of the oldest in the world) uses needles to target specific points on the body and manipulate qi, or energy. Research shows it can relieve many conditions—including menopause-induced hot flashes. In a 2011 study, menopausal women treated with acupuncture twice a week for 10 weeks reported significantly less severe hot flashes as a result (possibly because acupuncture boosts the production of endorphins, which may help stabilize body temperature).

**Try this** You can find a licensed acupuncturist via the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine ([nccaom.org](http://nccaom.org)). For an at-home Chinese-medicine fix, Sheila George, director of the Center for Metabolic Wellness in New York, recommends avoiding spicy foods, which can magnify menopause symptoms. Instead, George says, "eat foods that nourish the cooling yin force, like soups, artichokes, and avocados."

## Good for Hormonal insomnia

**How it works** Hormonal shifts during the menstrual cycle and menopause can mess with your ability to get a good night's sleep. Sauna—a time-tested Finnish heat therapy—eases the body toward better zzz's. Alternating between a hot sauna and a cooler environment causes the blood vessels to dilate and constrict, which improves circulation and loosens tight muscles—great for pre-bedtime relaxation, explains Teerawong Kasiolarn, a naturopathic doctor at the Medical Spa at Nova in Ashburn, Virginia.

**Try this** No sauna handy? Kasiolarn recommends dimming the lights and taking a warm bath (105°F) with Epsom salts. Soak for half an hour, about 60 to 90 minutes before bedtime. "Epsom salts contain magnesium, which can help relax the muscles," he says. "It works together with the warm water to soothe the body and mind and prepare you for restful sleep."

## Good for PMS mood swings

**How it works** Next time PMS leaves you grumpy and spacey, perk up with aromatherapy, the modern version of a 200-year-old practice developed by a French chemist. Experts think inhaling essential oils may affect the central nervous system as well as the endocrine system (i.e., hormone production). And there's evidence it works: Smelling rosemary or lavender can boost mood and improve mental performance, says a study published in the *International Journal of Neuroscience*. Kelly Holland Azzaro, president of the National Association for Holistic Aromatherapy, suggests geranium to regulate mood swings, and sweet orange and lavender for stress relief.

**Try this** Combine 6 to 8 drops each of geranium, lavender, and sweet orange oils in a diffuser. Always use real essential oils, not synthetic ones: Look for "wild-crafted" on the label. Not into DIY? Try Ashi Therapy Women's Balance blend (\$18 for 2.6 ounces; [ashitherapy.com](http://ashitherapy.com)) for a ready-made way to sniff yourself calm.