



# Keeping Fit at 50

A dose of healthy advice for those reaching the half-century mark // By Ilene Wolff // Illustration by Joseph Daniel Fiedler

When President Barack Obama blows out his 50th birthday cake candles on Aug. 4, he may notice that snuffing the flames is more difficult than when he turned 25. And it's not just because there are twice as many candles. The president acknowledges he's aging. He noted in a recent interview that he can't jump as high as he once did in the basketball games he loves. But as a fitness buff, our ex-smoker-in-chief is headed in the right direction.

"Certainly 50 is a turning point," says Dr. Rhonna Shatz, a behavioral neurologist at Henry Ford Health System. "It's the time when, if you haven't been paying attention, this is your last best chance."

Hour Detroit recently asked a variety of area experts to share their best tips for being fit and healthy at 50 and beyond. Here's what they said:

> **"I treat people like I want to be treated ... [or] even better,"** says 102-year-old Mary Fink of West Bloomfield Township. Fink snagged her first job at age 14, walked to work, and avoided fried foods and sweets. Even though she loved to bake, Fink gave away the treats from her kitchen. To this day, she limits herself to one chocolate-chip cookie and a small piece of chocolate daily.

## "Practice mindfulness, or focusing on one thing at a time."

— LAMA GELEK RIMPOCHE

> **"Think of your life like you're on vacation,"** Shatz says. Everyone has tasks they must accomplish, but get them done and then seek out and do new things, she says. Create art or crafts. Don't just read a book, look up reviews for new insights or discuss it with a group. Visit a museum. Be active in a group. "A lot of it is things that make you go 'aha!'"

> **"Don't smoke,"** says Dr. Anthony Shields, gastrointestinal tumor specialist at Karmanos Cancer Institute. Smoking decreases life expectancy by an average of seven years, decreases your level of good cholesterol, and contributes to lung and other cancers, including the ones Shields treats.

> Lynn Medow, a 10-year yoga teacher and 5-year yoga therapist, says: **"The most effective way to live a more healthy life is to breathe and to breathe deeply and evenly."** Most people breathe shallowly and don't get its full benefits, she says. Research shows that breathing fully reduces stress and can lower blood pressure.

> **"Eat like you used to when you were a kid,"** says Todd Coburn, personal trainer and creator of Get Downsized, an extreme weight-loss program. He explains that his advice means eating as close to nature as possible and avoiding pesticides, antibiotics, hormones, and other additives. So, munch on an apple instead of eating a fruit rollup or downing a glass of apple juice.

> **"Know your numbers,"** advises Dr. Kim Eagle, a University of Michigan preventive cardiologist. By that, he means know your cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, and body-mass index. If they're not ideal, "move in the direction of health," one meal and exercise session at a time instead of feeling defeated. When one of his patients stops smoking or loses weight, Eagle gives him \$1. "It's not the dollar, it's the praise," says Eagle, who opens his wallet a few times each day to reward successful patients.

> **Be a "daily warrior," not a "weekend warrior,"** says Dr. Joseph Guettler, a Beaumont Health System orthopedic surgeon. "Compressing your physical activity into two days sets you up for trouble." Staying fit on a daily basis with walking, gardening, playing with the kids, or using the stairs instead of the elevator will make it easier for your muscles, tendons, and ligaments to adjust when you do hit the field or court.

> **Check yourself out.** "The No. 1 tip for keeping healthy skin over 50 is to examine it monthly, from head to toe," says Dr. Bobbi Edwards of Providence Hospital. Self-skin exams are essential for early detection and treatment of irritating eruptions, abnormal overgrowths of tissue, and skin cancers.

> **Practice mindfulness, or focusing on one thing at a time,** says Lama Gelek Rimpoche, founder of the Jewel Heart Buddhist center in Ann Arbor. Mindfulness, what Rimpoche calls "single-pointed focus," reduces stress by eliminating the chatter that goes on in our minds. Mental-health therapists often prescribe mindfulness as an antidote to depression.

> **Laugh — at yourself most of all,** says Dr. Laura McMahon, a psychiatrist at St. John Hospital and Medical Center. Research on laughter is scanty and may be biased, but some studies show that it dulls pain, facilitates blood flow, increases immunity, and enhances relaxation and sleep.

### THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE WITH DETROIT TIES ALSO TURN 50 THIS YEAR.

**LYNN HILL**  
rock climber, Jan. 3.

**AL JEAN**  
executive producer,  
*The Simpsons*, Jan. 9.

**STEVE HAMILTON**  
detective-fiction writer,  
Jan. 10.

**TIM MEADOWS**  
comedian, Feb. 5.

**DEVORAH SPERBER**  
artist, Feb. 25.

**BYRON ALLEN**  
comedian, April 22.

**MARK PLawecki**  
Dearborn Heights District  
Court judge, April 25.

**ISIAH THOMAS**  
ex Detroit Piston/college  
hoops coach, April 30.

**DENNIS RODMAN**  
ex Detroit Piston, May 13.

**GAIL POTOCKI**  
painter, May 24.

**EL DEBARGE**  
singer, June 4.

**SCOTT WEINBERG**  
criminal defense attorney,  
*Weinberg on the Law* radio  
show, June 29.

**BOB WOODRUFF**  
ABC network journalist,  
Aug. 18.

**MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN**  
epic-fantasy writer, Sept. 17.

**JANE ABRAHAM**  
former Michigan GOP  
vice chair, Sept. 28.

**MARIELA GRIFFOR**  
writer/publisher (Marick  
Press), Sept. 29.

**RICK MARGITZA**  
jazz tenor saxophonist,  
Oct. 24.

**HAROLD BONHART**  
singer (The Spinners,  
The Four Tops), Nov. 13.

**BOB WOJNOWSKI**  
*Detroit News* sports  
columnist, Nov. 19.

**TOM SIZEMORE**  
actor, Nov. 29.

**DAVE KING**  
lead singer, Irish-punk band  
Flogging Molly, Dec. 11.

**MIKE COX**  
ex Michigan attorney  
general, Dec. 30.