Yoga Basics
Yoga has become quite popular in the United States, where it ranks in the top 10 alternative practices used. Originating over 2,000 years ago in India, yoga combines a set of disciplines and attitudes to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Yoga involves physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation and philosophy, though different styles of yoga emphasize some of these aspects more than others. Hatha yoga, the most common type practiced in the U.S., focuses on postures and breathing as a way to decrease stress and balance the mind, body and spirit. Studies suggest that yoga might be useful for managing blood pressure, anxiety, depression and insomnia. Yoga may also help with breathing problems (such as asthma) by increasing lung function. Yoga is generally considered safe, but some moves may not be advisable for those with certain medical conditions, people with back problems or pregnant women. Check with your health care provider before adding yoga to your routine.

Currently, there are no licensing requirements for yoga teachers. Depending on the style of yoga, training time for teachers can vary from two days to two years. If you're considering taking a yoga class, ask about the difficulty level as well as the teacher's training and experience.

For more information, go to www.iayt.org.

Enjoying Healthy Berries
You may have heard of acai or goji berries, two of the newly designated “super foods.” Good news: The more common berries — blueberries, strawberries, raspberries — are fantastic for your health as well. Berries contain abundant amounts of antioxidants, chemicals that neutralize harmful free radicals produced by your body. Unchecked free radical production could lead to problems such as heart disease or cancer.

(continued on next page)

Secrets for Staying SUPER HEALTHY
Do you know people who never seem to catch a cold or the flu? These people may seem “lucky,” but it turns out that anyone can build a stronger immune system by taking these factors into account:

MENTAL. Your thoughts influence how well your body functions. Stress, anxiety, a negative attitude and even the expectation that you’ll get sick may make you more prone to illness. What can you do? Reduce your stress. Massage or laughter may help. Do something you enjoy every day.

PHYSICAL. Diet and exercise affect your resistance in a big way. Getting enough quality sleep is also really important, as is regular hand washing. As you age, these things become even more crucial. What can you do? Eat a variety of quality foods, especially colorful produce and whole grains. Write down whatever keeps you awake, and tackle each problem. Scrub your hands several times a day with soap for at least 20 seconds each time.

SOCIAL. Positive relationships can have a protective effect on your health. Studies also show that dog owners get sick less often. Spiritual connections can be beneficial too. What can you do? Widen your social circle. Consider getting a pet; even something as small as a fish may help. Practice regular meditation or prayer.

Q&A What is “movement-based” complementary therapy?
See answer on other side.
THINKING YOUNG

You may be getting older, but your state of mind can have a big effect on how old you feel — and maybe even how long you’ll live.

Consider these findings:

• The Women’s Health Initiative (a study of over 97,000 women) found that an optimistic outlook reduced the risk of death by 14 percent; hostile and negative women were at higher risk. In another recent study, optimistic people showed signs of having a stronger immune system.

• A seven-year study at the University of Texas revealed that more upbeat seniors were less likely to become frail.

• Among adults ages 65 and up, 60 percent felt younger than their actual age. In fact, one-sixth felt at least 20 years younger than their age, and only one-fifth of those aged 65 to 74 felt “old.”

But what if you’re not naturally sunny and cheery? How can you become more positive?

• Each day, list at least three things that went well.
• Take stock of the things in your life that you appreciate, and express gratitude directly to those who deserve it.
• Find activities you love, and take time to become fully absorbed in them.
• Have regular contact with those who support you, whether it’s family, friends or co-workers.

Give it a try: You just might increase the quality and the quantity of your years at the same time.

Q & A

Q: What is “movement-based” complementary therapy?
A: It’s the physical therapy, yoga, Pilates, tai chi and Feldenkrais that’s thought to help musculoskeletal, joint or lower-back pain by strengthening muscles, improving alignment and releasing natural pain-numbing chemicals in the body.

Though pain medication can be very effective, the addition of drug-free complementary therapies (such as movement-based techniques) can sometimes produce more complete or lasting relief. Other options include:

• Energy healing methods: Acupuncture, acupressure, chi gong and Reiki are believed to balance the body’s electrical energy. They may be useful for pain that lingers after an injury or is complicated by anxiety or depression.
• Physical manipulation: Massage, chiropractic treatment and osteopathy can help with musculoskeletal pain or discomfort from over- or underuse of muscles by restoring mobility, relaxing muscles or moving joints into proper alignment.
• Mind/body medicine: Meditation, guided imagery, biofeedback and relaxation are useful for all types of chronic pain, reducing stressful emotions or redirecting focus away from the pain.

Nutritional/herbal remedies: Some food choices and dietary supplements are believed to boost immunity, reduce inflammation and soothe pain. These approaches are often used to treat abdominal discomfort, headaches and inflammatory conditions such as arthritis. However, some nutritional or herbal supplements can interfere with other medications, so use with caution and discuss with your health care provider.

If conventional treatments don’t work, consider visiting a pain clinic. Successful treatment often needs to address the biological and psychological aspects of pain. For more information, go to www.nationalpainfoundation.org.

NEX T MONTH: PROTEIN FROM PLANTS

Healthy Berries ...

(continued)

Just one cup of berries per day provides a good supply of antioxidants. While some people prefer supplements, foods contain thousands of different antioxidants — far more than most supplements deliver. Eating a variety of foods rich in antioxidants is often recommended for the best health benefit. The fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals in these foods make them even more appealing.

Finding antioxidant-rich fruits is easy. Look for fruits colored purple, blue, red or orange. Wild blueberries, acai berries, blackberries and cranberries rank high on the scale of antioxidants supplied. While strawberries contain lower levels of antioxidants, they do provide ellagic acid, a known cancer fighter.

If these fruits aren’t your thing, other foods such as apples, avocados, spinach and oats are “berry” good sources of antioxidants as well.

Weight Loss Sabotage. Many people try to lose weight fast by cutting calories dramatically — but this can shift the body into starvation mode, slowing calorie burn to conserve energy. In addition, eating too little can cause health issues such as heart rhythm abnormalities or depression. Opt for a diet and exercise program that allows you to lose 1/2 to 2 pounds per week so you’ll be more likely to keep the weight off.