

New Year, Renewed You

Time to focus on you, Mami! These simple tips from Latina wellness experts will treat your mind, body, and soul.

BY **SUNNY SEA GOLD**

IF ANYONE BELIEVES in self-care, it's Latinas. No matter how woo-woo the practice—flotation therapy, anyone?—it's worth a try if it makes life better. But it's not always easy to carve out “me time” when you're also coordinating school drop-offs, managing work, and cooking dinner for a small village. So we talked to Latina-mom wellness gurus—from shamans to yogis—for simple steps you can take to find balance in your busy day.

● **Get Green Time**

Nature can do wonders for your well-being. In fact, a 2018 study found

that spending time in green spaces can improve sleep, lower your heart rate, and reduce your risk of diabetes and heart disease. Stacy Dockins, a Mexican-American yoga and mindfulness educator in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, recommends ten minutes of “green time” a day. “Engage your senses,” she says. “Go outside in the morning and walk barefoot in the damp grass. Feel the coolness on your feet, look at the colors in the sky, listen to the birds chirping.” If you're in a rush, a walk around the block or a few stretches in the backyard can also do the trick.

● **Scream It Out**

To get rid of negative, pent-up energy, find inspiration in ancient shamanic “shedding” ceremonies, recommends Nikki Novo, a Cuban-American spiritual coach and medium in Miami. In the traditional ceremonies, which still take place in Mexico and Peru, everyone sits in a circle around a fire and plays music, and each person takes a turn to stand up, yell, sing, or dance to “move out” the negative energy. But you don't have to travel to the Peruvian Andes to make it work for you. “Put on your favorite song and make whatever movements feel



NAMASTE.

intuitively right—sing or scream if you need to,” says Novo, who likes to get her kids involved too. “My family does it to the song ‘Who Let the Dogs Out?’”

● Meditate in the Shower

If you're hard-pressed to find a time or place for meditation—which can lower blood pressure, boost mood, and improve sleep—try it in the bathroom. “I practice shower meditation almost nightly,” says Karineé Lopez, a Dominican holistic endometriosis educator in Port St. Lucie, Florida. To start, spend about a minute focusing on the sensation of the water on your body—where it hits, the pressure, the temperature. This helps bring your awareness to the present so your mind lets go of the events of the day. Then, for the next four or five minutes, scrub mindfully, paying attention to each area of your body separately. “Notice the sensations and imagine that the soap is cleansing you of anything that was negative, hurtful, or worrisome during the day,” Lopez says. “And, as you rinse, imagine it all being washed away.”

● Practice Gratitude

Studies show that people who regularly give thanks are happier, healthier, and less prone to burnout. Here are three ways to develop an attitude of gratitude.

1. PICTURE IT.

When Dockins notices negativity or doubt creeping in, she does a morning “gratitude visualization.” To try it, sit quietly and picture three people, places, or things you're thankful for. “I spend several minutes on each one—not only visualizing it, but noticing how my body responds to the thought,” Dockins says. “I might think of how happy my dog is to see me when I get home or what my kids smell like when I hug them. And immediately, I feel more at peace.”

2. COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS.

Once a month, Veronica Torres Hazley, a Mexican-American yoga and meditation instructor in Dallas, does a gratitude ritual with a string of beads. “First, take a few nice, long breaths to relax,” she says. “Then hold the beads. With each bead you pass through your fingers, express gratitude for someone or something until you get to the end of the string.” Torres Hazley uses a *mala*, a



WELLNESS TO GO

Our experts share the item they throw in their bag in case of a self-care emergency.

“My favorite crystal is amethyst—it has protective and calming benefits. I hold on to it whenever I'm stressed.”
—Karineé Lopez

“I wear patchouli essential oil, which you can find at beauty and health stores, because it reminds me of my late father. He wore it every day. Now I wear it to honor his presence around me and for guidance and protection.” —Veronica Torres Hazley

“I carry a rosary. It helps me refocus and release negative feelings during times when I may encounter difficult people or situations.” —Nancy Ruffin

“I keep a small notebook and flip back to mantras I've written to remind me of clear moments I've had in the past.” —Nikki Novo

“I grew up with Agua de Florida, a fragrant body splash that's also used to cleanse auras. I put it in a spray bottle with essential oils, and spritz myself throughout the day. The act of anointing my hands, feet, and head is a reminder that my body is a sacred gift. And the flowery citrus scent reminds me of childhood, when I had boundless energy!”
—Nicoletta Darita de la Brown

meditation necklace of 108 prayer beads, but you can use anything from a rosary to your kid's plastic jewelry.

3. STRIKE A POSE.

For a double whammy of self-care, combine gratitude with a yoga stretch. Dockins suggests the Child's Pose. "It's perfect for practicing thankfulness," she says. "It provides a stretch for your lower back and hips and symbolizes self-reflection and turning inward." Start on your hands and knees, then spread your knees apart while keeping your toes together. Exhale and fold your body forward so your torso rests between your thighs. Stretch your arms along the ground, palms down. Breathe deeply and think about what you're thankful for. Hold the position for several minutes or as long as feels comfortable.

● **Eat Thoughtfully**

Mindful eating—paying attention to your meal, moment by moment, without distractions—can improve digestion and even minimize unhealthy behaviors such as binge eating. These two strategies can help you eat with care.

1. GIVE TECH THE BOOT.

A study in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* found that eating with tech at the table can cause a drop in happiness. So try a "no screens" rule at meals, suggests Gisela Bouvier, an Argentine registered wellness dietitian in Punta Gorda, Florida. "Distractions keep you from tapping into your senses to fully taste and feel the textures of your food," she says. "Pause to take deep breaths before and during your meal. It will help you focus on what you're doing, even if your attention wanders."

2. SCHEDULE SOLO MEALS.

Eating alone can be rejuvenating, according to Panamanian-American Nicoletta Darita de la Brown, a shaman, performance artist, and energy healer in Baltimore. "I've turned lunch into a very pleasurable ritual," she says. "I use my favorite colorful bowl and special gold



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BLISS OUT YOUR COMMUTE

An hour in traffic or on a crowded train could be the most Zen time of your day, with these wellness podcasts picked by our experts.

GISELA BOUVIER:
Superconscious Soul

Self-care practitioner and meditation teacher Sandy Vo uses spiritual wisdom to tackle topics such as letting go of perfectionism and gaining mental clarity.

NIKKI NOVO:
That's So Retrograde

Two friends from L.A.—a fashionista and a comedian—talk to aura readers, astrologers, fitness fanatics, and other New Agey experts for the inside scoop on living authentically.

KARINEÉ LOPEZ:
The Beyond Resilience Life

In this bilingual podcast, psychologist Lydiana Garcia, Ph.D., shares tips on recovering from trauma and adversity.

VERONICA TORRES HAZLEY:
Brunch and Slay

Every week, host Ameerah Saine features a new female "Disrupt(HER)"—aka a female innovator—to discuss wisdom, love, balance, and joy.

utensils, and I play lo-fi hip-hop music as I prep the meal. I really look at my food before taking the first bite." She also eats her food slowly to savor every flavor. "It feels like a ceremony," she says. "And it helps me better understand the nourishment my body is asking for."

● **Breathe In, Breathe Out**

In a truly stressful situation—say, a toddler tantrum in aisle four of the supermarket—your heart rate speeds up, your muscles tense, and you could go into fight-or-flight mode. If your body is constantly on high alert, it can weaken



your immune system, affect sleep, and even lead to depression or anxiety. Deep breathing, though, can trigger your body's natural relaxation response on the spot. When stress calls, Nancy Ruffin, a Puerto Rican life coach and self-help author in Bergenfield, New Jersey, relies on an emergency breathing plan. "I go to the nearest restroom, close my eyes, place my hand on my heart, and focus on the sound of my breathing until I feel calmer," she says. You can also try paced breathing: Inhale for four counts, exhale for six, and repeat as needed.

● **Write a Love Letter...to Yourself**

If you're in a rut, go ahead and put pen to paper. Katia Beauchamp, the Mexican-Greek American cofounder and CEO of the beauty subscription service Birchbox, in New York City, recently wrote a love letter to herself as a reminder of everything she's doing right—even if she doesn't always make it home in time to put the kids to bed. To follow her lead, take ten to 15 minutes to quietly reflect and then purposely reframe anything that you have been struggling with. "Approach it with honest vulnerability and emotional self-awareness," Beauchamp recommends. "Think of all the unkind things that you've ever thought about yourself, and then notice the power in supporting yourself by saying, 'You are enough. You are once in a lifetime.'" ✖

