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# Ways to Get a Fresh Start for Spring!



You've set the clocks forward and swapped your down parka for a trench. Now plant the seeds for amazing changes in your life and watch your looks, relationships, finances, career, health and spirit blossom! **BY CLAIRE R. McINTOSH | ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL OAKLEY**

## ❁ 1. Refuse to wait another day! Start small but start now. Record your goals for the year.

**2. BELIEVE IN THE DOMINO EFFECT.** Jovette Gadson, 31, discovered what personal growth experts say is our secret weapon when it comes to reinvention: Adjust one area of your life and you'll likely set off a chain reaction of positive outcomes in others. Gadson, a program adviser for a government agency who had gained 75 pounds over the last decade, knew she had to do something to get her life going again.

The Washington, D.C.-area resident decided to post her goals and poems online and let friends in on her mission to become "fierce, fly and fabulous." A friend saw her posts and invited her to perform at an open-mic event. Though excess weight had been her excuse to hide out, she made herself say yes. For the big night Gadson traded her outdated "intern look" for a sexy pencil skirt and knee-high boots, and performed an intimate poem she'd written about a former beau. The crowd loved it! She says the high she felt was "indescribable," as if something deep inside her were reborn.

Her newfound confidence led her to initiate changes in other areas. She joined her gym's wellness challenge and found a trainer. She traded fruit for candy, cut out sodas, and upped her water and veggie intake. Now, with the weight falling off at a sensible one pound per week, she's confident she'll reach her goal of a curvy 180 pounds. And just recently, having polished her credit score, she prequalified for a mortgage and began shopping for a town house. She wants to close on the property by April 30 to claim the federal tax credit. With the \$20 a day she saves avoiding vending machines and eating out, she'll have the cash to furnish it. "I've been sleepwalking for nine years," says Gadson. "It's time to feel alive again!"

**3. GO ON VICE PATROL.** Life coach and clinical psychologist Pamela Thompson offers an exercise that can help you break bad habits and radically alter your perspective. "I often recommend spring-cleaning the heart and mind with a fast," she says. That means for 21 days her clients give up one or more of the following: complaints, gossip, sex outside of marriage, screens (including TV, movies and even their computer or BlackBerry if they can manage it) and unnecessary spending. By the time you end the fast, she explains, you'll reset your life.

**4. FORGIVE SOMEONE.** Before we can push out new roots and shoots in our lives we have to clear mental debris that can choke off our dreams. Often that means forgiving some people in your life, says motivational speaker Bessie A. Winn-Afeku, who runs an advocacy foundation promoting self-esteem in women and girls. "The last thing you want to do is enter a new phase of your life holding on to old grudges," she says. Practicing forgiveness is one of the most powerful ways to achieve a clean slate.

## ❁ 5. Give your superwoman cape a rest.

**6. PUMP UP YOUR ANTHEM.** Ladies, it's time to do you. Whether it's Jill Scott's "Golden" or Chaka Khan's "I'm Every Woman," find a song that makes you feel as if you can take on the world and put it on repeat!

## 7. CLEAR CLUTTER.

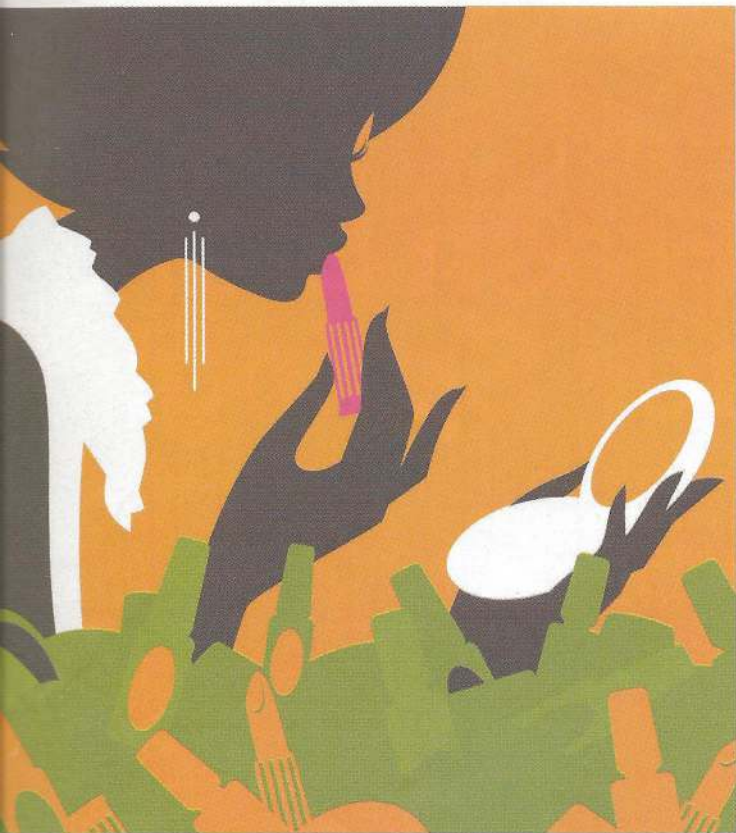
Surrounded by piles of magazines, junk mail, gifts you never use or clothes you never wear? "If you haven't looked at an item in a year, get rid of it," advises interior decorator Lisa Turner.

## 8. SEE YOUR DREAMS IN TECHNICOLOR.

Hang a corkboard in your bedroom or study, and fill it with photos of what you desire. Aiming to get promoted? Add pics of successful sisters like Oprah and Michelle Obama. Fantasizing about a vacation? Post images of your ideal destination. ▸



## 40 ways to get a fresh start for spring



✿ **9. Revel in the attention a great hat gets you. Not convinced? Just ask Aretha.**

**10. EMBRACE SPRING COLORS.** Celebrity makeup artist Cynde Watson suggests purging your old cosmetics and trying on new shades like Kissable Couture Lip Gloss in Peony or Rose Gardenia or a looks-great-on-you raisin hue.

✿ **14. Be open to romance—or just a good time. Say yes to the next invitation, or issue your own.**

**15. RELINQUISH THE PAST.** Write a letter to any men who hurt you. Close it with the statement that you forgive them and release the pain. Burn the letter where a fire will not pose a hazard. Welcome new love into your life as you watch the past turn to ash.

**16. BECOME A DIVA.** Are you sick and tired of watching others find love as you simply find a new show to watch on Friday nights? Become irresistible from the inside out, says Shay Williams-Garrett, author of *D.I.V.A. Don't Get Played!* D.I.V.A. stands for Divine, Intelligent, Vivacious and A Challenge. Decide to be all that.

**17. REV UP YOUR SEX LIFE.** A quickie in a semipublic place (think upstairs bathroom at

a noisy house party) gives you both the naughty rush of an affair without any actual cheating. Be sure to lock the door before it's on and poppin'!

**18. REKINDLE THE SPARK.** Write a letter of appreciation to your guy, advises Williams-Garrett. "Men say this makes the difference between them feeling like a hero or a zero." Slip your love letter into his pocket or briefcase before he leaves the house, then daydream about the delicious time you'll have when he brings all that brimming good feeling right back home to you.

**19. RENEW VOWS.** Tell each other in front of your minister, children, family and friends why you're still meant to be.

**11. GET YOUR BEAUTY SLEEP.** It combats stress, boosts energy and optimism, wards off high blood pressure and diabetes, and even primes your body to shed pounds more easily. So invest in some silky sheets and luxuriate in dreamland for eight hours every night.

**12. STEP OUT IN BODY-LOVING STYLE.** There's no fabric more fashionable and forgiving than knit jersey. It complements curves, flows over those few extra pounds, and packs like a dream since it's wrinkle-free, says fashion designer Angela Dean, who's outfitted stars from Jada to Halle to Queen Latifah in the fabric. Try a jersey wrap dress, or mix-and-match separates in solids and prints for a new look. A T-shirt or scarf in a bold color can take an outfit from suitable to sensational, says Dean.

**13. RELEASE YOUR SENSUAL AURA.** It's as simple as sharing a smile. Studies show it's the most potent of aphrodisiacs.

✿ **20. Pray or meditate every day.**

**21. MAKE A SPACE FOR GRACE.** You can use a mantel, shelf, windowsill or corner as a prayer nook. Incorporate items such as candles and flowers. Visit [myhomealtar.com](http://myhomealtar.com) for ideas.

**22. REINVIGORATE YOUR FAITH.** A visit to a new place of fellowship might be just the soul food you need. Drop in on worship services over the next few weeks to discern which one speaks most deeply to your spirit.

**23. CONSIDER YOUR CIRCLE.** Sometimes we outgrow friendships. How to tell if it's time to walk? Psychologist Brenda Wade says let a friend go if she or he is unwilling or unable to treat you with respect or kindness, leaving you feeling hurt or wounded.

**24. MAKE A NEW FRIEND.** Take a class, help at church, join a walking club. Start a conversation. Be a good listener. Laugh.

**25. DO UNTO OTHERS.** Helping in a soup kitchen, mentoring a child or shopping for an elderly neighbor is good for the heart. A 2007 study found that heart patients who did volunteer work added years to their lives. Giving makes the heart grow stronger—literally.

**26. EXPECT MIRACLES.** "Even if what is taking place in your life at the moment seems negative, expect God to bring good out," says Joyce Meyer, a leading practical Bible teacher. ▶



## ❁ 27. Rescue yourself from late payments. Put bills on auto pay.

**28. CLAIM A WINDFALL.** “The number of people who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit and don’t claim it is astonishing,” says on-air financial expert Stacey Tisdale. “There are billions in unclaimed funds.” You can claim past years’ funds retroactively, meaning some families could see upward of \$10,000 in the mail. For details, visit [irs.gov](http://irs.gov).

**29. OWE LESS.** “I’ve been paying cash and freeing myself from credit card-debt slavery,” says Sheree Adams, 35, of West Grove, Philadelphia. “I clip coupons, brown-bag my lunch, use promo codes, and maintain my own locks. And I put all my bills on the table and called my creditors. I should be debt-free by October 2011.”

**30. SPLURGE WHERE IT MATTERS.** A housekeeper once a month can liberate you to enjoy the sanctuary of your home. A personal trainer can help you sculpt and tone for the summer reveal. A home attendant to care for a frail elder can free you to spend more quality time with your loved one. Money well spent!

## ❁ 31. Don’t aim for thin—aim for healthy.

**32. REDISCOVER FRUITS AND VEGGIES.** “When the farmers’ market opens, I wake up early to grab the first pick of organic ingredients,” says Sunny Anderson, host of *Cooking for Real* on Food Network. Freshen up menus with okra, zucchini, artichokes, asparagus, spring peas, broccoli, pineapples, cherries and other seasonal produce.

**33. MAKE OVER YOUR KITCHEN.** Purge fatty foods like cookies and white starches, and replace them with healthy options such as whole grains.

Start a container garden on your windowsill, filling it with basil, thyme, rosemary and more. Experiment with fresh herbs in recipes. More flavor means meals with less sodium and fewer calories.

**34. SAVOR YOUR FOOD.** Stop eating in isolation, and with little awareness or enjoyment. Host a potluck. “Make plans with friends you seldom see,” suggests Anderson. You’ll come away nourished by more than just the food. Or take a cooking class with your special someone. You’ll learn recipes and techniques, and share the thrill of trying something new together. Find events in your local paper’s food section.

## ❁ 35. Take a deep dive into the present moment. Breathe.

**36. FIND YOUR TRUE PASSION.** Stacey Tisdale, coauthor of *The True Cost of Happiness*, suggests adapting an approach from life planner George Kinder ([kinderinstitute.com](http://kinderinstitute.com)). Ask yourself these three questions: If money were not an issue, what would you do with your life? If your doctor informed you that you’d live without physical distress but would die in ten years, what changes would you make? If you had just 24 hours left on earth, what would be your regrets?

**37. TURN STRESS ON ITS HEAD.** AntiGravity yoga is a hot new trend. It’s a technique that uses hammocks to suspend the body. As you turn upside down, supported by the hammock, you release joint tension and get the heart pumping. Visit [antigravityyoga.com](http://antigravityyoga.com) to find a class near you.

**38. RELY ON YOUR EMERGENCY HAPPY KIT.** Sylvia Coleman, author of *Creating a New Normal*, advises you to keep a running tally of things that instantly put a smile on your face: comedy DVDs, an aromatherapy scent, a favorite book or poem, a letter from a loved one, or a gift certificate for a massage (but purchase it ahead of time so you won’t talk yourself out of the expense when you’re feeling down).

**39. REVERSE AGING INSTANTLY.** Practicing good posture prevents pain and injury—and subtracts ten years from your looks, says master trainer Wendy Ida. As we age gravity rolls shoulders forward, causing the chin to jut out and the belly to protrude. Counteract the pull of gravity by standing tall.

**40. REMEMBER, IT’S NEVER TOO LATE.** Wendy Ida’s size-4 body, runway-ready legs and sexy six-pack belie the fact that the onetime size-12 desk jockey never hoisted a barbell until her forties. Hard to believe the “fitness warrior” on [wendyida.com](http://wendyida.com) is actually 57 years young. Girlfriend is aging backward and credits her energy, strength and good looks to simple commitment: “Health, happiness and sex like you’ve never experienced can be yours. Make your body a priority. Put yourself at the top of your to-do list. Life begins to bloom if you hold a vision and change your mind-set.” □

Claire R. McIntosh frequently writes about lifestyle and personal growth. Additional reporting by Amber J. Adams.

