

DR MARGI BROWN ASH ON KEEPING FABULOUSLY FIT

Margi Brown Ash has spent 20 years researching protective practices to help artists live with power and integrity, good health and inner vibrancy. Margi has created theatre since the '70s, collaboratively writing and performing stories that interrogate alternative ways of being, challenge the status quo and provide opportunities to change dominant and damaging stories. Each of the 10 tips is expanded on Margi's website with links to readings: www.4change.com.au

1 The Practice of Gratitude. Gratitude is a huge protective factor. The more we recognise and acknowledge the things that are going well, the more things will go well. Grateful people are seen as more open, less neurotic, less depressed and easier to get along with (Wood, Joseph, & Maltby, 2008).

2 Friendship is Magic. Researchers believe that loneliness can pose a higher health risk than obesity and smoking (Archer, 2015). Loneliness can make us hypervigilant, defensive and consequently we can "perceive daily hassles as more stressful" (Leithman, 2017). Strong, affirming friendships, on the other hand, can boost our confidence and help us through challenging times.

3 Embracing and Celebrating Solitude. Just as connectedness is an essential ingredient for a healthy arts practice, there are times when it may be important to embrace and celebrate solitude, a time of reflection, of slowing down, of deep connection with self and something greater than ourselves. Please note that solitude is rejuvenating when one has the intention of reflecting on self before returning to the everyday, rather than forced isolation (Crane, 2017).

4 Voracious Reading. The power of literature to heal and enrich has been around for centuries, with Plato suggesting that "the muses gave us the Arts not for 'mindless pleasure' but 'as an aid to bringing our soul-circuit, when it has got out of tune, into order and harmony with itself'" (Morrison, 2008). See my website for a list of books: www.4change.com.au.

5 Yoga Nidra. For me, Yoga Nidra has become my daily ritual. I am currently on a national tour of La Boite's *Prize Fighter*. La Boite's site says touring until Nov 3 For 30 minutes before

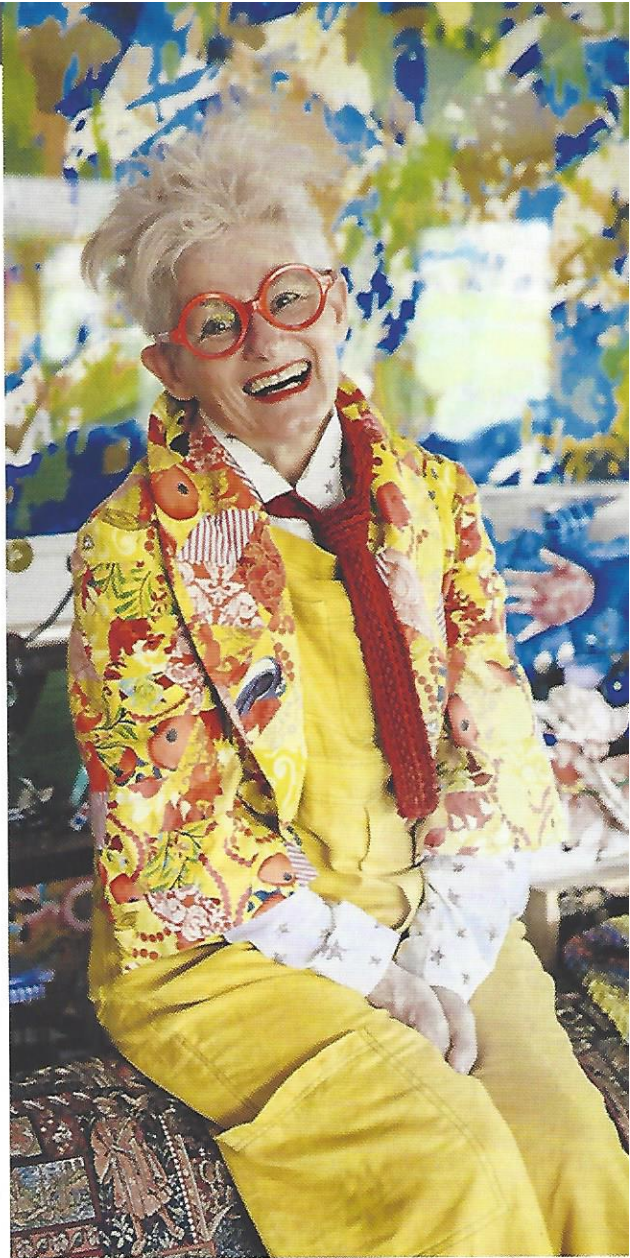
warm up, the entire ensemble lies together and experiences a balancing of our energies. Yoga Nidra reduces tension, awakens creativity and trains the mind. (www.4change.com.au for links to Yoga Nidra.)

6 Daily Walking in Nature. "The health benefits of walking are so overwhelming that to deny access to that is a violation of fundamental human rights," declared sociologist Robert A. Bullard (2015). It's easy, it's free and it not only keeps your body fit, it clears your head and improves your mood. Nature is our biggest healer.

7 Eating Deliciously. Here are Rachel Kelly and Alice Macintosh's Golden Rules of eating for good mental health: "Eat mostly plants. Use plenty of herbs and spices. Go nuts! Eating for your gut. Fats are your friends. Get the right balance of protein. Avoid sweeteners and additives. Keep an eye on your blood sugar. Vary your diet. Relax and enjoy"

8 Remembering our Artistic Ancestors. Relating back to numbers 1 and 2, we need to acknowledge our artistic ancestors (our Muses) who made it possible for us to be where we are right now. Our responsibility is to recognise our artistic lineage, turn up, and pass on this knowledge to the next generation of creatives. As part of a larger whole, we can see the importance of our vocation in making the world a better place.

9 The Importance of Mystery. There are two kinds of belonging ... one is social inclusion ... the other is belonging in that sense of being part of something larger than yourself ... [Relating back to No. 8]. Mystery is this shared but



unknowable terrain, reminding us that we are not the masters of our destiny ... dispe[re] [ling] the arrogance that we know where we're headed. It keeps our minds open, and our lives interesting" (Lancaster, in *Psychologies*, June 24, 2010). *Psychologies'* manifesto for mystery includes defying reason; inviting difference; noticing coincidences; enjoying the unsettling; walking without purpose; wondering at rainbows and spending a day with a child

10 Acknowledging Thresholds in Your Day. According to the Celts, thresholds are the thin places where our two worlds meet, the physical and the spiritual. In our case, the stage door could be seen as a 'thin' place. One way of staying mindful (and therefore alive to the moment) is acknowledging the many thresholds we cross each day, moving from one activity to the next. This is a simple technique of mindful practice that deepens our knowing. Go slower to be able to go fast. Notice what you notice as you step into the world of storytelling.