

FAMILY & COMMUNITY HEALTH

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23 Healthy New Year's Resolutions You Can Actually Keep

Source: Written by Jillian Kubala, MS, RD on December 23, 2019 - Medically reviewed by Katherine Marengo LDN, R.D.

A new year often signifies a fresh start for many people. For some, this means setting health goals, such as losing weight, following a healthier diet, and starting an exercise routine.

However, more often than not, the health and wellness resolutions chosen are highly restrictive and unsustainable, leading most people to break their resolutions within a few weeks. This is why many people make the same resolutions year after year.

To break that cycle, it's important to make resolutions that can not only improve health but also be followed for life.

Here are 23 New Year's resolutions you can actually keep.

1. **Eat more whole foods** - Whole foods, including vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and fish contain a plethora of nutrients that your body needs to function at an optimal level. Research shows that following a whole-foods-based diet may significantly reduce heart disease risk factors, body weight, and blood sugar levels, as well as decrease your risk of certain diseases, such as type 2 diabetes. Adding more whole foods to your diet can be done slowly and consistently. For example, if you're not use to eating vegetables, start by adding one serving of your favorite veggie to your diet every day.
2. **Sit less and move more** - Sitting too much can have negative effects on health. In fact, it may be linked to an increased risk of overall mortality. Making a resolution to sit less is an easy and attainable resolution that can be tailored to fit your lifestyle. For example, if you have a desk job that requires long periods of sitting, make a resolution to go for a 15-minute walk at lunch or to get up and walk for 5 minutes every hour.
3. **Cut back on sweetened beverages** - Sugary drinks are linked to an increased risk of obesity, fatty liver, heart disease, insulin resistance, and cavities in both children and adults. Though quitting sweetened beverages cold turkey is always an option, gradually minimizing your intake may help you kick your sugary drink habit for good.
4. **Get more quality sleep** - Sleep is an essential part of overall health, and sleep deprivation can lead to serious consequences. For instance, lack of sleep may increase your risk of weight gain, heart disease, and depression. There are many reasons why people don't get enough sleep, so it's important to focus on your schedule and lifestyle to determine the best ways to improve sleep quantity and quality. Decreasing screen time before bed, reducing light pollution in your bedroom, cutting back on caffeine, and getting to bed at a reasonable hour are some simple ways to improve sleep.
5. **Find a physical activity that you enjoy** - Choose an activity based on enjoyment and whether it fits into your schedule. For example, taking a half-hour walk, jog or bike ride before work, or swimming at a gym that is on your way home, are simple and sustainable exercise resolutions.
6. **Take more "me time" and practice self-care** - Taking time for yourself is not selfish. In fact, it's imperative for optimal health and wellbeing. This is especially true for those in caretaker roles, such as parents and healthcare workers. For people with busy schedules and limited time, making a resolution to engage in self-care may take some planning. However, it's worth the time investment. Self-care does not have to be elaborate or time consuming. It can simply mean soaking in a bath, attending your favorite weekly yoga class, preparing a healthy meal for yourself, going for a walk in nature, or getting an extra hour of sleep.
7. **Cook more meals at home** - Research shows that people who cook more meals at home have a better diet quality and less body fat than people who eat more meals on the go. A study in 11,396 adults found that those who ate 5 or more home-cooked meals per week were 28% less likely to be overweight, compared with those who ate fewer than 3 home-cooked meals per week. You can start by making one meal a day, then increase the frequency over time until you are making the majority of your meals and snacks at home.
8. **Spend more time outside** - Spending more time outdoors can improve health by relieving stress, elevating mood, and even lowering blood pressure. Making a New Year's resolution to spend more time outside every day is a sustainable and healthy goal that can benefit most everyone, not matter where you live. Taking a walk outside during your lunch break, hiking on weekends, going camping with friends, or simply soaking in the beauty of your backyard or local park are all ways to incorporate nature into your daily routine.
9. **Limit screen time** - Spending too much time on electronic devices, particularly on social media has been linked to depression, anxiety, and loneliness in some studies. Setting a resolution to cut back on the time you spend scrolling through social media, watching TV, or playing computer games may help boost your mood and enhance productivity.
10. **Try meditation** - Meditation is an evidence-based way to promote mental well-being. It may be particularly helpful for people who have anxiety or depression. Trying out this practice is a perfect New Year's resolution because there are many ways to meditate, and it's easy to find books, podcasts, and apps that teach you how to start a meditation practice.

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The New year is like a blank book, the pen is in your hands, it is your chance to write a beautiful story for yourself.

Happy New Year

11. **Rely less on convenience foods** - Many people rely on convenience foods, such as packaged chips, cookies, frozen dinners, and fast food, for a quick meal or snack. Though these items may be tasty and readily available, they can have detrimental effects on your health if eaten too often. Frequent fast food intake is associated with poor overall diet quality, obesity, and an increased risk of numerous conditions, including heart disease and diabetes. To cut back on your consumption of convenience foods, make a resolution to prepare more meals at home using healthy ingredients.
12. **Rethink dieting** - Chronic dieting is harmful to both physical and mental health. Plus, most people who lose weight through restrictive dieting regain up to two-thirds of the weight lost within 1 year. Dieting can also make it harder to lose weight in the future. Rather than setting a New Year's resolution to lose weight by using restrictive measures, such as a fad diet, try a healthier, more sustainable method of weight loss by focusing on increasing physical activity and eating healthier foods.
13. **Go grocery shopping regularly** - Having a well-stocked pantry and fridge is necessary to prepare healthy, home-cooked meals. If you are not used to going grocery shopping, make a New Year's resolution to go to the supermarket or farmer's market more regularly to stock up on nutritious ingredients. Depending on your schedule, it may be helpful to designate 1 day each week as your day to shop. Ensuring that you have time to buy the groceries you need to make tasty, nourishing meals is a savvy way to improve your diet quality.
14. **Use healthier household products** - What you put into your body can significantly impact your health as well as what you put onto your body and what products you use in your home. Make a New Year's resolution to purchase more natural body products, household cleaners, laundry detergents, and personal care products to create a healthier environment for yourself and your family.
15. **Add more produce to your diet** - Adding more cooked and raw vegetables and fruits to your diet can go a long way towards improving your health in the new year. Numerous studies have shown that eating a diet rich in produce helps protect against various illnesses, such as diabetes, heart diseases, certain cancers and obesity, as well as overall mortality.
16. **Cut back on alcohol** - Though alcohol can certainly fit into a healthy diet, imbibing too often can negatively affect your health. What's more, drinking alcohol frequently may keep you from reaching your health and wellness goals. If you think cutting back on alcohol may be helpful for you, set a reasonable goal to keep yourself on track, such as limiting drinking to weekend nights only or setting a drink limit for the week.
17. **Be more present** - Research shows that being more present may improve life satisfaction by decreasing negative thoughts, which may improve psychological health. Making a New Year's resolution to be more mindful and present may help you feel more content in your everyday life. Spending less time on your phone, stopping to notice your environment, and listening intently to others are simple ways to be more present.
18. **Take a vacation** - Taking a vacation - even a short one - may have significant and immediate positive effects on stress levels and may enhance well-being. In the New Year, make a resolution to take a vacation with friends or family members, or on your own. Whether you travel to an area you've always wanted to visit or simply plan a staycation at home, taking some time for rest and relaxation is important for health.
19. **Try a new hobby** - It's common for adults to let once-loved hobbies fall by the wayside as they get older due to busy schedules or lack of motivation. However, research shows that partaking in a hobby that you love can help you live a longer, healthier life. Make a resolution to try out a hobby that you've always been interested in—or pick back up a hobby that used to bring you joy.
20. **Stop negative body talk** - Talking negative about your body can lead to feelings of body shame. In fact, research shows that engaging in and hearing negative body talk is associated with higher levels of body dissatisfaction and decreased self-esteem in both women and men. Make a healthy New Year's resolution to engage in positive self-talk regularly and reduce negative body talk. This may not only help improve your relationship with your own body but also encourage others to stop talking negatively about themselves.
21. **Visit your doctor** - Getting examined regularly by your healthcare practitioner is important for many reasons. Have regular blood work and necessary screenings can help spot potential problems before they turn into something more serious. Though your pace of doctor's visits depends on many things, including type of medical care, your age, and your medical history, most experts recommend seeing your primary care physician at least once a year for a checkup.
22. **Take care of your teeth** - Maintaining your oral health is a New Year's resolution idea that can and should be sustained for life. Brushing and flossing your teeth regularly can help prevent oral conditions like gum disease and bad breath. What's more, some research suggests that gum disease may be associated with serious health conditions, such as Alzheimer's and heart disease, making oral care all the more important.
23. **Create a sustainable, nourishing diet** - You may be making a resolution to eat healthier or lose weight year after year because you're prioritizing short-term over long-term health benefits. Instead of making a plan to follow yet another restrictive fad diet, this New Year, make a resolution to break the dieting cycle and create a sustainable, nourishing eating pattern that works for you. The healthiest diet is one that's rich in whole, nutrient-dense foods and low in heavily processed, sugary products. A healthy, long-term diet should not only be nutritious but also adaptable, meaning you can follow it for life no matter the circumstances. A sustainable eating pattern can be maintained on vacation, during holidays, and at parties because it's unrestrictive and suited to your lifestyle.

The bottom line

Though most New Year's resolutions are only kept for a short period, the healthy resolutions listed above are sustainable ways to improve your physical and emotional health that can be followed for life. Creating a healthier relationship with food and taking better care of your body and mind can drastically improve your health in various ways. This New Year, try out a few of the resolutions in this article to help make this year and the years that follow the healthiest and happiest possible.



Super Fruits & Berries

1. Apples are high in fiber, vitamin C and antioxidants. They are very filling and make the perfect snack.
2. Avocados are different than most fruits because they are loaded with healthy fats instead of carbs. Not only are they creamy and tasty but also high in fiber, potassium, and vitamin C.
3. Bananas are among the world's best sources of potassium. They're also high in vitamin B6 and fiber, as well as convenient and portable.
4. Blueberries are not only delicious but also among the most powerful sources of antioxidants in the world.
5. Oranges are well known for their vitamin C content. What's more, they're high in fiber and antioxidants.
6. Strawberries are highly nutritious and low in both carbs and calories. They are loaded with vitamin C, Fiber and manganese.

Source: healthline.com/nutrition/50-super-healthy-foods



Mindful Living - Exercise

Mindfulness, as it pertains to exercise can be described as being attuned to your body, sensations and energy while being aware of thoughts and emotions as they develop, without judging anything or anyone, including ourselves.

Why Be Mindful?

The purpose is to use our awareness of our body and thoughts to have enjoyable, safe and beneficial exercise. Regular exercise or 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week, has long been touted as a key factor of healthy living, especially to decrease risk of chronic diseases, like heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. So, practicing mindfulness could help eliminate issues or thoughts that often act as barriers to a healthier life.

How To Be Mindful

Take a moment to scan your body and then be flexible with the goals of that workout. Do you have aches or pains? Do you feel great? Remember, exercise should not be self-torture. Exercise is self-care. You are doing something great for yourself by simply moving, but a high-impact activity or lifting heavy weight might not be the best option for you right now. Make the best choice for you after listening to your body.

Many of us have jobs where sitting is very common, and our spines, shoulders, and hips have learned to curve/ tilt. We are not actively using our muscles to align and keep them straight. We need proper posture during exercise and everyday activities to prevent injury.

Choose a way to focus on your breath. You might feel your chest or abdomen expand as you breathe. You might feel the air hit the back of your nostrils. Breathing is a constant in life and we rarely notice it. Focusing on breathing especially with our movements has a tremendous centering effect and can help us throughout our workout. For example, for brisk walking, try inhaling for every 2 or 3 steps, then exhale for 2 steps; find the best breathing pattern for you.

As with any task, we become distracted or our mind might wander during exercise. This happens all the time to everyone, but part of the mindfulness is about being present in the moment. So, without scolding yourself, return your attention to your movement or your breathing pattern, or both. This could help prevent injury and make exercise more a time of mindfulness and focus.

Source: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

