

Resolving to Get a Healthy Start on the Year Ahead

If you're like most people, this is the time of year when you look ahead to the next 12 months and resolve to make changes in your life. Some of those resolutions likely will be about trying to lead a healthier lifestyle—whether that's quitting smoking or trying to lose a few pounds or getting more sleep.

There's a good bet that many resolutions made New Year's day won't be kept during the year, but Don R. Powell, Ph.D., president of the American Institute for Preventive Medicine, says that's because we don't set realistic goals. It takes time to develop a bad habit, so you can't expect to change overnight. You also should try to work on only one bad habit at a time. Trying to change too much too soon is a recipe for failure.

Dr. Powell offers a list of major changes to consider. You should pick one or two that are important to you. Once those goals are met, work your way down the list, one goal at a time.



Healthy resolutions

I resolve to get moving. A regular exercise routine is one of the most important steps you can take to improve your health and longevity. Starting this year, devote 60 minutes most days of the week to an aerobic activity you enjoy. Good choices include walking, running, swimming, biking, skating and aerobic dancing. Be sure to check with your health care provider before beginning an exercise program.

I resolve to aim for an ideal body weight. This year, eat high-fat foods in moderation. Sixty-five percent of American adults are overweight or obese, and these extra pounds contribute to heart disease, diabetes, stroke and an increased risk of certain cancers.

I resolve to stop smoking and avoid people who still light up. Cigarette smoking is the leading preventable cause of death and disease in America today. Secondhand smoke is just as bad; it can be deadly to nonsmokers who inhale it on a regular basis. Cigarette smoking has been linked to diseases such as leukemia, cataracts, pneumonia and cancers of the cervix, kidney, pancreas and stomach, according to the U.S. Surgeon General.

I resolve to keep my blood pressure under control. If you haven't had your blood pressure checked recently, do so. Follow your doctor's instructions if it's high, and faithfully take any prescribed medication. If left untreated, high blood pressure is the primary cause of stroke.

I resolve to develop a strong social support network. Studies have shown that people who have supportive relatives, friends and co-workers are sick less often than those who don't. Be a friend to others and keep your family close and caring.

I resolve to reduce my cholesterol. This year have your cholesterol tested. About 37 million Americans have a cholesterol level of 240 or greater, which is considered high risk. (Below 200 is considered healthy.) If your level is high, follow your doctor's instructions and reduce your consumption of red meat, regular dairy products and foods high in saturated fats.

I resolve to control my temper. For your heart's sake, make an effort to control a bad temper. Anger and hostility may be as bad for your heart as smoking and high blood pressure.

I resolve to drink moderately, if at all. Heavy drinking is a leading cause of preventable death in this country. Two corollary resolutions are to never drink and drive, and to never ride with someone who has been drinking.

I resolve to develop a positive attitude. People who live long lives characteristically possess a positive attitude about life. Try not to dwell on negative thoughts, which may negatively influence your health and emotional well-being.

I resolve to always wear a seat belt. Don't start your vehicle until you and all your passengers are buckled up. Make sure that any children riding with you are in an appropriate child safety seat or booster seat.

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