

Keeping the Holidays Healthy and Happy

No matter what, this holiday season will look different than previous ones. There is no avoiding the COVID-19 pandemic. But you can still make this season a bright and bountiful one by giving yourself the best present of all: peace of mind.

One of the most important things you can do is manage your own expectations. Understand right away that there will be constraints on gatherings, shopping trips and other holiday activities we've come to take for granted. The upside is that, thanks to these limitations, it will be easier to make your holidays a happy, stress-free time by taking care of yourself, bringing balance to your work and home life and keeping worries from overwhelming you.

Tips for Coping with Holiday Stress This Year

- **Do not be perfect; be you.** One of the quickest ways to holiday burnout is to set high, unrealistic expectations for yourself. Make your plans simple and your activities doable.
- **Create your wish list early.** Ask yourself what you want to accomplish this holiday season. Write down your holiday goals, and list out the steps you need to take to reach them. Prioritize what is important, and get organized from the start.
- **Pace yourself.** Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa and New Year's Eve can all be busy times. Remember, the season lasts for several weeks. Break your preparations into small steps so you can accomplish a little each week. Delegate responsibilities with others, and do not be afraid to ask for help.
- **Budget wisely.** It is easy to buy on credit and ignore the bills until after the holidays, but spending within your means requires a disciplined approach. Set a holiday budget limit ahead of time, and determine exactly what you can afford.
- **Get into the spirit.** Deck the halls. Build a snowman. If you have a tree, decorate it early. Too often adults miss out on the simple pleasures of celebrating the holidays and truly enjoying the moment.
- **Take time out for yourself.** Too often the holidays feel rushed and exhausting. Unwind and pamper yourself with a break from the action. Try relaxation techniques, meditation and deep-breathing exercises. Spend one quiet evening a week away from the hustle and bustle of your hectic routine. Do something you really want to do.
- **Give of yourself.** One of the best gifts you can give yourself during the holidays is self-sacrifice. Try to find time during the season to volunteer your services. Doing things for others can bring a real sense of inner warmth and self-worth that is more valuable than all the presents piled under your tree.
- **Embrace family.** Look forward to reuniting with relatives this holiday even if you have to do it via video chat or just on the telephone. Cherish the time you spend with your loved ones, and make a better effort to be as relaxed, positive and cheerful as you can.
- **Reflect on past holidays.** Think back to moments you have treasured during past holiday seasons, and try to recapture the essence of what made those times special.
- **Celebrate safely.** One of the keys to holiday happiness is celebrating in moderation. Give your body a gift this year by treating it with respect. Try not to overindulge in sweets and goodies. Know your limits when it comes to alcohol, and never attempt to drive if you have been drinking.
- **Exercise.** It is important to stick to an exercise plan even when the holiday season kicks into full swing. The holidays can be a good time to start an exercise program, since exercise can help to relieve stress.
- **Make New Year's resolutions.** Setting goals challenges us to aim for higher fulfillment and self-improvement. Give yourself something to look forward to next year. Stick to these resolutions, and ask others to continue to encourage you to keep your goals.
- **Talk to someone who cares.** If you feel bogged down by a case of the holiday blues, do not suffer through the season. Reach out and talk to someone you trust.

Being Alone During the Holidays

For many of us, the holidays are synonymous with family, so spending a holiday alone can be a rough experience. This year, with restrictions on travel, social gatherings and other traditional aspects of the holidays, many of us will be on our own throughout the season, maybe for the first time ever. While that may be difficult, keep in mind that there are many things you can do to ensure you get as much as you can out of your holiday season.

Stay in Touch

You may not be able to be with your family physically, but you can still be in contact with them. Schedule time for everyone to join together on a video chat over Zoom or Skype or other virtual gathering platform. Make it feel like a holiday gathering by sharing photos, raising a glass to each other or opening presents with each other. You can even plan to sit down for your holiday meals at the same time and share the experience via video.

Seek Others Out

Chances are that if you do not have holiday plans, at least one other person you know also does not have holiday plans. Ask around and see if some friends want to get together via video chat or an outdoor, socially distanced and safe gathering. They will be grateful that you took the initiative to make plans.

Another good option for being around others is volunteering. Many organizations, including soup kitchens and homeless shelters, take on extra volunteers around the holidays to accommodate for larger numbers. Ask to help out – you may even find yourself making new friends. Just remember to adhere to guidelines for safe interactions during the COVID-19 outbreak.

A pet can be a great companion, especially during the holidays. If you have one, get it a special treat and enjoy its company. If you do not have a pet, the holiday season is a great time to consider getting one, if you are able to care for it.

Treat Yourself

If you are planning on spending your holiday alone at home, consider treating yourself to something special. This indulgence will give you something to look forward to and make the holiday feel unlike an ordinary day. Ideas include:

- Movie marathon with your favorite snacks
- Home spa treatments
- Stocking up on books and reading them with a hot beverage

You could also take this time to focus on self and home improvement. Why not tackle the painting project you have been putting off? Or, if you have been telling yourself you should take up a new hobby, do that now.

If you would like to venture out of the house, brainstorm some of your favorite activities. Some other activities that would get you out of the house include:

- Ice skating or skiing, where possible
- Taking a winter hike
- Going for a drive
- Dining outdoors at a favorite or special restaurant

Examine Your Feelings

Learning to cope with being alone during the holiday season can be a challenge. You might experience bouts of loneliness.

The pain of loneliness can lead to unhealthy coping skills such as overeating, abusing alcohol or overspending. Instead, try to identify healthy ways to cope with your feelings. Go for a walk, engage in a hobby, or do something kind for yourself. Limit your time on social media during the holidays if seeing photos of others enjoying the holidays deepens your sadness.

If you feel burdened by feelings of loneliness or feel them throughout the year and find it difficult to deal with, you may want to examine what's behind your feelings of loneliness, either on your own or with the help of a therapist.

Resources

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): www.samhsa.gov/

Grieving During the Holidays

The holidays can be difficult for those who have lost loved ones, especially this year, when many are also feeling overwhelmed by global and national events. There is joy to be found, but those who are grieving must make a conscious effort to find it. Most find that it helps to have a holiday plan and to adjust some of the family traditions. Here are some suggestions:

- Take care of yourself: eat right, schedule some time for exercise and get plenty of rest.
- Do your holiday shopping early to eliminate unnecessary stress.
- Decide what you can comfortably handle, and let your family, friends and relatives know your needs.
- If you find things are not going well, set limits and only do the things that are most important to you.
- Plan your holidays ahead of time. Having a schedule of activities relieves some tension and allows you to look forward to the activities.
- Do not hesitate to make changes in your holiday traditions; it can make things less painful.
- Start a new tradition: discard an old recipe and try a new one, change the time you open your presents, eat your holiday meal at someone else's home, etc.
- Try to connect with the people you enjoy being around. This year, you may opt to join them via video chat or just over a phone call, but the connection is still important.
- If you feel the need to cry, remember tears are an honest expression of love and emotion.
- If the thought of sending holiday cards is too painful, give yourself permission not to send them.
- Include the person who died in your conversations with your family and friends when you discuss past holidays.

Preventing the Holiday Blues

Many of us may be more susceptible to the Holiday Blues this year than ever. If you just feel a bit down once the holidays have come and gone, you are not alone. Thousands of people experience bouts of stress and winter depression that linger past the holiday season. Called the Holiday Blues, the condition is typically due to the letdown after all the excitement is over.

This year, however, the Holiday Blues may arrive even before the holidays do. With so many traditional celebrations curtailed or simply canceled due to the pandemic, many of us may not even get to enjoy the normal emotional boost that comes with the holiday season.

Keep in mind that if you feel more depressed than normal for an extended period of time during or, especially, after the holidays, do not be afraid to seek help from a professional. At the very least, reach out to loved ones and friends for support, and learn ways to cope with the blues you are experiencing.

Understanding the Holiday Blues

Whether your blues are of the pre- or post-holiday variety, or both, the symptoms are generally the same:

- Lack of energy
- Lack of interest in pleasurable activities
- Decreased sex drive
- Difficulty concentrating
- Increase in sleep and sleepiness
- Increased appetite or lack of interest in eating
- Social avoidance
- Substance abuse

There are many mental and physiological factors that may be causing these symptoms, including:

Unrealized expectations. It is natural to feel somewhat pressured before and during the holidays: pressure to buy the perfect gifts for others, to expect the perfect gifts for yourself, to keep family and friends entertained and to get in the spirit of the season. You also may feel pressured to make New Year's resolutions that can be difficult to keep. If you do not meet these expectations, you may feel disappointed.

Negative associations with the holidays. Many people do not look forward to the holidays because the season reminds them of something painful. Perhaps your parent, spouse or other loved one passed away recently; the holidays can be an emotional reminder of your loss. Perhaps you dread spending time with certain relatives. These negative feelings often can last beyond the holidays.

Anticlimactic feelings. It is difficult to top the warmhearted emotions we often experience during the holiday season. Once all the festivities have ended, the presents have been exchanged and your holiday time off has passed, it is easy to feel a bit melancholy. It may be a long way off until your next holiday or vacation, and the end-of-the-year holidays are another year away.

Biological reactions to seasonal changes. Research indicates that lack of sunlight, a hallmark of the winter months in many parts of the world, can disrupt brain hormones and circadian rhythms, which control your body's biological clock. Some scientists believe lack of sunlight may cause an imbalance of neurotransmitters, especially serotonin and dopamine, and that some people have reduced retinal light sensitivity in the darker months. People susceptible to these factors may develop seasonal affective disorder (SAD), a form of depression that commonly begins in early fall and subsides in early spring. Over these darker, typically colder months in which there is less sunlight, people with SAD often experience a range of symptoms that may include feelings of depression and lack of energy. SAD may be linked to hormone and biological-clock imbalances. Experts theorize that people with SAD have biological clocks that may run slower in the winter months.

Coping Tips

Try these suggestions to help manage your feelings of depression during and after the holidays:

- **Talk to a professional.** If the blues you are feeling linger for several weeks and are interfering with your ability to enjoy life and function effectively, seek help. A therapist can assist you in exploring your feelings.
- **Find support in others.** Try confiding in trusted family members and friends about how you have been feeling. Be honest with others about what you are experiencing instead of covering up your emotions. An understanding loved one can give you the strength and support you need to help cope with depressive feelings.
- **Manage your stress.** Learn effective ways to reduce your stress and anxiety, which may minimize your feelings of depression.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular fitness activities can improve your mood and boost your self-esteem. Talk to your doctor about an exercise program that is right for you. Because a lack of sunlight may be contributing to your depression, exercise outdoors for a double benefit.
- **Eat right.** Discipline yourself not to overeat. Avoid junk foods and environments that may encourage bingeing. Stick to a nutritionally balanced diet. Avoid alcohol, which is a depressant.
- **Get the proper amount of sleep.** Experts recommend at least seven to eight hours a night. Resist the urge to oversleep, and try to maintain a regular sleeping schedule.
- **Make more time for recreational, fun activities.** Try to spend more time outdoors, especially on sunny days.
- **Be more social.** Stay in touch with friends and family.
- **Consider using a light box.** These devices have been used successfully to treat SAD. Talk with your doctor or therapist about whether the increased amount of light could be helpful to you.
- **Educate yourself.** Learn all you can about depression, support groups in your area and ways to manage your feelings.

Do not let feelings of depression and sadness control your life. Get help to manage your symptoms. Learn to feel comfortable talking about your difficult emotions. Take care of your mind and body by giving it the food, rest and activity it needs. Do not be afraid to treat yourself to the things you enjoy more often. Aim to get out of the funk you may be feeling and to experience life to the fullest.

Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): www.nimh.nih.gov
- National Institutes of Health (NIH): <http://health.nih.gov>
- Mental Health America: www.nmha.org

Keeping Your Holiday Budget in Check

Holidays can be overwhelming, stressful and tough on your finances. Between gifts, decorations and entertainment, costs can add up very quickly and result in a significant amount of debt. Proper financial planning is essential to organizing your budget, keeping stress under control and reducing unnecessary spending.

Holiday Budget

Creating a holiday budget is necessary in order to set clear expectations for upcoming expenses. To avoid financial strain, it is important to approach any situation with a plan. Although it is difficult to account for holidays throughout the year, a holiday budget can be a great tool to assist you. To get started, follow these steps:

Step 1: Review last year's holiday expenses. Make a note of the types of expenses your money went towards.

Step 2: Create a budget that includes gifts, food and decorations. Add other categories as you see fit. Set limitations on how much you can spend this year based on your current financial situation and remember to be realistic about what you can afford.

Step 3: Create a detailed plan for how you will ensure that you follow the budget. For most people, this can be tricky. It is normal to have limited financial resources to work with, so it is important to identify any expenses that can be given up to allow for additional saving. Consider cutting back on non-essential expenses, selling unwanted items for extra cash, or getting a seasonal or a part-time job to increase income.

Step 4: Implement and execute your plan. Once you know how much you need to save to achieve your holiday spending goal, divide that number by 12. Then, open a savings account and set this amount aside each month.

Gifts on a Budget

There is an entire marketing industry that pressures consumers to purchase large, expensive gifts to show affection for their loved ones. However, the focus of a holiday should not be to spend money; rather, it should be about spending time with family, celebrating traditions, enjoying time off from work and participating in various activities.

Brainstorm low-cost ways to spend time together like volunteering or making homemade gifts and decorations for your loved ones and others. When shopping, keep in mind that what matters most is the thought and care put into a gift, not the size and cost of it.

Consider the following tips to help you follow your budget:

- Always give only what you can afford
- Plan for the holiday early
- Avoid impulse buys by considering all options before making a purchase
- Bring a copy of your budget with you when shopping for quick and easy reference
- Set spending limitations and ensure your spending stays within them
- Use cash instead of credit cards
- Avoid payday loans
- Create homemade gifts and baskets to reduce spending
- Re-gift if appropriate and possible

Keeping the Holidays Healthy

Worried about making it through the holidays without gaining weight? With so much stress these days, overeating may be a significant issue for many of us this holiday season. Taking a sensible, balanced approach to holiday food temptations is the best way to avoid weight gain throughout the seasons. Here are some practical ways to pass the holidays in sensible moderation:

- Eat slowly and mindfully. Enjoy every bite and resist the temptation to have a second helping.
- Make healthy dishes. Think about adding a simple fruit salad or vegetables roasted in olive oil and seasonings to your meal planning.
- Enjoy holiday treats in moderation. Take tastes of foods. Have one cookie instead of five.
- Do not eat what you do not like. Consuming food out of obligation adds to your total calorie intake.
- Go skinless: When dining on turkey, choose a four-ounce portion (about the size of your fist) without the skin. This helps cut out some fat and cholesterol.
- Pay attention to portions: It is possible to treat yourself, but choose smaller portions. Have tastes of items instead of filling up.
- Limit high fat: Avoid fried foods, cheese-covered or -filled vegetable dishes, processed meats, cream-based soups, pies and baked goods. Drink a low-fat substitute instead of traditional eggnog (with thick cream and egg yolks).
- Know your triggers. If you can't have "just one" don't start sampling.
- Drinks have calories, too. Limit alcohol. Over-indulging adds calories and can impair your judgment.

Healthy Holiday Meal Substitutes

Nothing about the holidays is more enjoyable than sitting down to a nice, warm meal with your loved ones. Unfortunately, many of the dishes that accompany the turkey or other main course are full of unnecessary saturated fat and calories. Try these healthier substitutes:

Sweet Potato Casserole

- Use egg whites or Egg Beaters® in place of whole eggs
- Reduce the amount of margarine or use light margarine
- Add some applesauce to the sweet potato mixture
- Replace canned sweet potatoes with fresh sweet potatoes
- Choose pineapple packed in its own juice, not in heavy syrup
- Add a cut up apple to the streusel topping and cut down on the pecans
- Substitute orange juice for some of the melted margarine in the streusel topping

Mashed Potatoes

- Use low-fat cream cheese or light butter
- Replace some of the potato with steamed cauliflower (it sounds odd, but it works)
- Use 2% milk or low-fat buttermilk in place of the heavy cream

Corn Bread

- Use low-fat buttermilk
- Substitute egg whites or Egg Beaters for whole eggs
- Cut down on the oil, and add an extra splash of milk or some applesauce

Stuffing

- Use low-fat margarine
- Replace whole eggs with egg whites or Egg Beaters
- Substitute chicken or turkey sausage for pork sausage
- Use fat-free, low-sodium chicken broth
- Choose whole-grain bread

Emotional Eating

People are impacted by the news of the coronavirus differently, but we know emotions can be heightened and uncertain, especially when our normal holiday celebrations are interrupted. Adding to this the fact that a large majority of people are remaining at home, constantly within steps of the refrigerator and pantry, and we have a recipe for emotional eating.

Emotional eating becomes problematic when people eat for reasons such as stress, boredom, sadness, anxiety or loneliness. Triggers for emotional eating are not always negative events. Some people find that they eat whenever they feel happy or excited.

People who eat for emotional reasons often experience feelings of disappointment, guilt or failure after overeating. Emotional eating can bring goals to maintain or lose body weight to a screeching halt. It often sets off a destructive cycle of overeating and dieting, which is detrimental to mental and physical health. The key to successful weight management lies in identifying emotional eating patterns and devising strategies to overcome trigger situations.

Identifying Patterns

The best way to identify eating for emotional reasons is to keep a food journal. In the food journal, use the "5 W's" method to help determine a pattern:

- Who you were with?
- What did you eat?
- When did you eat?
- Where did you eat?
- Why did you eat?

Be sure to note how you were feeling and how much was eaten as well.

Studies show that people who log their food habits are more successful at weight loss and weight management than those who do not keep a log. Identifying emotional eating triggers allows for the development of strategies to overcome destructive behaviors.

Tips for Overcoming Emotional Eating

- **Harness the power of self-talk:** Identify and recognize times of negative and self-defeating statements such as, "I cannot do this" or "I failed." Replace those statements with positive and goal-targeted comments such as, "This is hard but it will be worth it" and "I will learn and make a better choice next time." It is helpful to also mark these statements in a food journal.
- **Rate your hunger:** Before reaching for food, rate your hunger on a scale from 1-10, 10 being ravenous. For ratings of 5 or less, opt for an apple. If you find you are not hungry enough to eat an apple, emotions are more likely driving the urge to eat. Food will not satisfy a person eating for emotional reasons. Instead, it is important to discover other positive and productive ways to address the issues.
- **Find alternatives:** People who found comfort in food in the past are likely to turn to it again in the future. It is important to find other ways to deal with positive and negative stressors in life. Go for a walk, read a book, take a bath, listen to music or do deep breathing exercises. When you find something that works, refer to it again later.
- **Three bite rule:** Humans experience the greatest pleasure from food in the first three bites. After that, senses become dulled. Take three bites of your favorite indulgent foods and focus on fully enjoying them.
- **Practice good dental hygiene:** Chewing a strong mint gum, breath mint or brushing teeth right after a meal may deter the urge to go for seconds or dessert.
- **Progress, not perfection:** As with any new practice, there is always that initial stage of excitement and motivation to make changes. Prepare for the ups and downs and understand they are a natural process of learning and are to be expected. Stay vigilant in monitoring triggers as they change over time. The key to success is to remain focused and keep pushing forward. Celebrate every small success and find joy in achievements. Every small victory is closer to obtaining your goal.

New Year Nutrition

If better nutrition is part of your New Year's resolution, keep in mind that the way you eat can often be as important as what you eat. Eating should be natural, healthy and pleasurable. But in our diet-obsessed culture, eating is often mindless, consuming and guilt-inducing instead. The cure? Mindful eating.

Mindful eating is about experiencing food more intensely by paying attention to the colors, smells, flavors and textures. It's also about realizing what's on your mind when you are eating and eliminating the distractions that can lead to poor choices. Try some of the following tips to help create more awareness during meals:

- Before opening the fridge, ask yourself, "Am I really hungry?" Gauge whether you are indeed hungry or if something else is going on.
- Plant a garden and cook. Anything that reconnects you with the process of creating food will magnify your mindfulness.
- Set your kitchen timer to 20 minutes and take at least that much time to eat a meal.
- Focus on the food only. Save the TV, phone and any other distractions for later.
- Think about the colors, tastes, flavors, smells and texture of the food as you eat.
- Take small bites and chew patiently. Try to slow down.
- Put your fork or spoon down in between bites. Take a breath and relax.

More Healthy Eating Habits

The beginning of a new year is a great time to start fresh and to make positive changes in your life. While setting new, healthier exercise, work and bedtime routines, set some new nutrition routines, too. That way you can look forward to a whole year of healthier eating. Here's how.

- Stock your pantry and refrigerator with a wide variety of foods, such as grains, vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy products and lean meat or beans.
- Think about some healthy snacks, too. Dried fruit, low-fat yogurt and air-popped popcorn are healthy and tasty alternatives to sugary snacks.
- Limit sugar. Choose cereals with low or no added sugar. Try serving water or low-fat milk more often than sugar-sweetened sodas and fruit-flavored drinks.
- Cut down on salt. Keep the saltshaker off the table to avoid the temptation.
- Involve your children in planning and preparing meals. Children may be more willing to eat healthy dishes when they help fix them.
- Don't be too strict. In small amounts, sweets or fast food can still have a place in a healthy diet.
- Make sure to eat breakfast daily to get off to a good start and to avoid snacking.
- Take the time to enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere, such as when you are watching television, may lead to eating too many calories.
- Switch to a smaller plate, bowl and glass. Portion out foods before you eat.
- Designate one night during the week as "fruit and vegetable prep night" to clean, slice and dice fruits and vegetables. Ease of access makes it more likely that you will grab these items as a snack throughout the week.

Good Substitutes for Healthier Eating

Often the difference between a healthy meal and a not-so-healthy one is a couple of ingredients. Here are some simple ideas for making your meals more nutritious:

- Swap leaf lettuce for spinach on sandwiches and in salads.
- Instead of chips or pretzels, dip carrots, bell peppers or snap peas into hummus or low-fat ranch dressing.
- Make a hearty vegetable soup with potatoes, carrots, cabbage, mushrooms, tomatoes, celery, corn or chickpeas.
- Keep a bag of frozen vegetables in the freezer and add a handful to stir-fry and pasta dishes. Broccoli, peppers, mushrooms, cauliflower and carrots pack a lot of nutrition.
- Opt for a pizza with vegetables instead of meat toppings.

New Year, New You: Make Your Resolution a Life-changing Event

Once you have decided on a New Year's resolution, it is your job to actually implement the change into your life. While this is the most challenging part of the process, there are some things you can do to help make your resolution a reality.

Put it in writing: Writing down your goal on a piece of paper can often increase its significance. Once written down, your idea is no longer just a wish floating about in your head; it has more permanence, and you will view it as having greater value and importance. Think of it as the adult equivalent of a letter to Santa, only in this case, the "something you really want" is a gift you are going to give yourself, not something anybody else can give you.

Develop a plan for reaching your goal: It will be hard to achieve your goal if you do not develop a plan of action. Take time to write down the steps you are going to take to implement the change you want to make in your life. For example, if your resolution is to exercise more, write down exactly how you will do it. Ideas could include:

- I will bike to work two days per week.
- I will walk to the store instead of driving.
- I will walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator.
- I will work out four days per week.
- I will exercise during my lunch break three days per week.

Use notes to remind yourself: Many people find it useful to leave notes to themselves in places they commonly look to reinforce the change they want to make. A good place to leave a note would be on the refrigerator door if your goal is to eat less. Put a reminder on your alarm clock if your goal is to exercise when you wake up in the morning. If your goal is to spend less time on the Internet, put a note on your computer monitor reminding you to log off after 15 minutes. Reinforcing your resolution with small, subtle reminders will help keep your goal always within sight.

Be realistic: Do not make a resolution that is unrealistic in scope or that will cause you to experience an undue amount of difficulty, problems or pain. If your resolution is something that you could not reasonably achieve, it will be easy for you to say, "Forget it," and move on with your life without trying to change. So instead of saying, "My resolution is to run a four-minute mile," try jogging four times a week.

Plan for the entire year: Many popular resolutions (like to lose weight, exercise more and get out of debt) will not be achieved in a few days or weeks. These changes are often month-long, year-long, and sometimes even life-long transformations. They need to be planned accordingly. For example, if your resolution is to exercise more, you might work to achieve this goal by joining a gym for the winter months, jogging in the spring, swimming in the summer, and then taking up cross-country skiing next winter. Plans like these are often successful because the variety of activities helps keep people interested in the process. Also, by breaking complicated issues like getting out of debt into smaller, easier-to-handle pieces, the process will seem less like an insurmountable mountain and more like a series of rolling, yet still challenging, hills.

Allow yourself to make mistakes: Do not be too rigid in the application of your resolution. Nobody is perfect, so you have to accept that stumbles will happen in the implementation of any meaningful resolution. For example, if you decide to stop smoking, and then on January 23 you give in to temptation and have a cigarette, do not say to yourself, "Oh well, so much for quitting," and start smoking a pack a day again. Just because you have one cigarette after going 23 days without smoking does not mean your resolution was a failure. It means that what you are trying to change is a very difficult, addictive habit. Accept your misstep and get back to implementing your change.

New Year's Resolutions to Consider

The New Year brings an opportunity to take a fresh look at issues we've been wrestling with and a chance to tackle them again. Here are a few suggestions for some achievable goals for the new year:

- The No. 1 New Year's resolution in any year is getting in shape: There is no real mystery here – it all comes down to diet and exercise. It is a fact that 95 percent of those who try to crash diet the pounds off are not successful in the long run. Try simple changes to eliminate calories, like reducing your portions by just 10 percent and adding just 20 minutes of a simple exercise like walking to your daily routine.
- Get a physical examination from your doctor: Men are the worst offenders here – they are far less likely than women to have a regular physical. Even if you feel fine, silent problems like high cholesterol and high blood pressure could reduce the length and quality of your life.
- Take a look at your financial health: Now is a good time to make sure you have the right amount of life and property insurance to protect yourself or your family. Consider whether you are a candidate for long-term care insurance. Check your investments to see if they are in line with your long-term goals. Take a look at your credit history, and resolve to reduce high-interest debt.
- Get your legal affairs in order: If you have been promising to make out a will, set an appointment with an attorney today.
- Try to be a better listener: Whether at home or at work, listening is a gift you can give that costs you nothing. Listening does not involve solving the other person's dilemma – that is their job. When offering support by listening actively, you can give family and friends just what they need to approach their own concerns in a new way.
- Reach out to your elderly relatives: They may covet their independence but they still need your help. Open a conversation aimed at finding out what kinds of assistance they might need and would accept. Even simple things like help with lawn care or shoveling snow can be a good first step.
- For those with young children, try to take the words "hurry up" out of your vocabulary: Sit yourself down and strategize ways to make your morning and bedtime routines a little slower and saner. Your kids will thank you.
- Consider volunteer work: There is certainly no shortage of need in the world – resolve to do your part to make the world a better place. If you choose a volunteer activity like helping rehab a home for the homeless or coaching a baseball team, you get the benefit of adding exercise as you help the world. Just be sure to keep yourself and those around you protected from COVID.

Motivation: Keeping Your Resolutions Alive

We often jump into the New Year full of good intentions and resolutions. But sometime around February, those intentions seem to flag.

If you find your motivation waning again this year, don't let it. Motivation is essential to achieving goals and to leading a healthy lifestyle. To maintain motivation, figure out what you want, power through the challenges and start being the person you want to be.

Set SMART Goals

Setting goals is key to getting started. Setting SMART goals is key to success. What are SMART goals:

S: Specific. Be precise about what you want to achieve.

M: Measurable. Establish ways to gauge your progress.

A: Attainable. Don't set unreasonable expectations.

R: Realistic. Expect to face setbacks. Everyone does.

T: Time-bound. Set deadlines for achieving each step toward your goals.

Goals provide focus and act as a measuring tool for progress. They enhance productivity, bolster self-esteem and increase commitment so you are more likely to achieve whatever you set out to conquer. The simple fact is that when people have goals to guide them, they are happier and achieve more. Here are some other tips:

- Put your goals in writing. Be specific, use action verbs, have measurable outcomes and specify completion dates.
- Make a list of obstacles by thinking of everything that might stand in your way then decide what you can do about each obstacle. Shield yourself from distractions and temptations that may arise along the way.
- List the benefits of achieving your goal: What exactly do you hope to achieve.
- Identify sub-goals. Be specific, and make sure each step is challenging but attainable.
- Get prepared and organized. It's hard to focus when information is scattered.
- Leave some room for mistakes. Do not expect perfection.

Monitor, Feedback and Reward

Reward yourself for every successful step you take toward achieving your goal. Treat yourself to motivate yourself to continue moving forward.

Enlist others for help if you need it and try to find someone with whom you share a common goal. Also, look for someone who has already achieved the goals you seek to reach and ask them for their insight on how to accomplish them.

Practice Makes Perfect

Do not give up easily. The closer you get to accomplishing your goals, the easier it gets. Self-control functions similar to a muscle becoming stronger with use. If you keep practicing self-control, you will become better at it.

How can I make exercise work for me?

Sure, you're ready to start an exercise regimen as part of your new healthy lifestyle, but exactly how are you going to find the time? Fitness experts say that exercising for just 20 to 30 minutes three or four days a week can dramatically improve a person's weight, mental state and overall well-being. So if you think you are too busy to include exercise into your regular routine, consider the following options:

Exercise at home: There are many exercises you can do in the comfort of your own home. A few quick sets of sit-ups and push-ups each day can tone your body. Consider purchasing an inexpensive set of dumbbells and learning some simple exercises to build muscle. Exercise videos and other home exercise equipment can help you get an aerobic workout, as can walking, running, jogging or riding a bicycle. Consider taking part in outdoor activities like hiking as a way to replace sedentary indoor activities such as watching television.

Exercise on breaks from work: Try taking a 20-minute walk at a brisk pace over your lunch hour. If you have stairs in your home, consider making a couple of laps up and down them to get your heart rate up. When you drive somewhere, park in a space farthest from the door. At home or at the office, take occasional short breaks to do push-ups and stretching exercises throughout the day.

Make fitness a priority: To get the results you want from any fitness program, you need to stick with that program on a regular basis. You should not consider exercise as a chore, but as something that improves your quality of life.

Don't take on too much: Like overly restrictive diets, overly ambitious workout goals will only end in frustration and failure. Understand that you are busy and start small, adding new exercises as your fitness and motivation improve.

Winter Hurdles

As it gets colder outside and the daylight hours become shorter, it gets harder to fight the urge to just stay inside, snuggled up by a fire, watching TV or reading a book. You will feel better and have more energy, however, if you stick to your fitness goals this winter. The colder months are a perfect time to wrap up in warm clothes and find an adventure in the crisp invigorating air. Another benefit of winter workouts is greater calorie burn because your body has to work harder to stay warm.

Walking or Jogging

If you enjoy walking or jogging outside, don't allow the cold weather to stop you. Just make a few adjustments as the temperature drops.

- Dress warmly in layers, making sure to cover your head, hands and feet
- Consider wearing a base layer that wicks moisture away from your skin and an outer layer that blocks the wind, rain or snow
- Your winter running or walking wardrobe should include reflective strips or a light due to limited daylight in the winter months
- To avoid injury, do extra warm up exercises; it takes the body a little longer to warm up in the winter
- Keep in mind that streets and sidewalks will be slippery; wear shoes that provide a good grip
- Shorten your stride to provide better balance and traction on slippery pavement
- Drink extra fluids; it's easier to dehydrate in colder weather
- Start into the wind and return with the wind at your back to limit your exposure

Sometimes the hardest part of running in winter is just staying motivated, especially when you find yourself running in the dark and the cold. Try these tips to stay on track:

Set a Goal: Plan to run a 5K or half marathon once the weather warms up, or just try to reach a specific number of miles run each month.

Find a Virtual Partner or Group: Knowing that by not showing up you are letting down others can give you that little extra push you need to get out the door on those cold mornings. Keep track of each other's efforts.

Try Fun Runs: There are plenty of virtual 3K and 5K fun runs during the winter months. Knowing that you're part of a bigger group can take some of the sting out of any chilly wind.

Fun in the Snow

If you just can get motivate to run outside during the winter, you can still get your exercise in by going out to play. Enjoy the winter wonderland by starting a snowball fight, building a snowman, going sledding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, snowboarding or ice skating. The best part about these activities is that they don't feel like exercise.

Keep in mind a few tips when enjoying the wintry weather:

Embrace the snow. It will only be around for a few months, so jump right in.

Be careful. Watch out for sleet, black ice and broken concrete.

Bundle up. Wear hats, gloves and wicking materials to stay dry and prevent hypothermia and frostbite.

Moisturize. Drink plenty of water; use lotions and creams; apply sunscreen, especially if you're at high altitudes, like on the ski slopes.