

Balanced Living

January 2024



Better Choices for a Healthier Lifestyle

Have you been hesitant to try to break your bad health habits because you thought the task would be too difficult? Then get ready for some good news.

"Every day, new research indicates that Americans can take control of their own health by making simple and realistic lifestyle changes," says Lawrence Stifler, Ph.D., a behavioral psychologist and president of Health Management Resources in Boston. "By modifying a few of their unhealthy behaviors, people can actually lengthen and improve the quality of their lives. A small commitment of a few hours a week could add eight to ten quality years to a person's life."

How healthy you'll be in coming years can be predicted by your number of risk factors for disease. Having one risk factor doesn't necessarily doom you to poor health, but your odds increase dramatically when several risks are combined. For example, high cholesterol increases the likelihood of developing heart disease. People who smoke, have high cholesterol and high blood pressure dramatically increase their risk for heart attack.

Your disease risk is determined by factors that fall into these three categories:

- **Medical indicators**: high cholesterol, elevated blood pressure, high blood sugar, a previous or on-going major medical problem, and a family history of genetic or biological problems.
- **Lifestyle behaviors**: obesity and being overweight, smoking, a high-fat, high-cholesterol diet low in fiber, fruit, and vegetables, excessive alcohol consumption, drug use, and a sedentary lifestyle.
- **Environmental conditions**: exposure to secondhand smoke, failure to use seat belts, and prolonged exposure to sun and radon.

No matter how many years you've practiced bad habits and no matter your age, you can make a fresh start and improve your health.

Be a role model

Your children and other family members are likely to develop lifestyle habits based on what they see you do.

Get out and walk

Exercise is probably the single most important thing you can do for your health. Regular physical activity — 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week — can reduce your risk for heart disease, hypertension, obesity, stress, and osteoporosis. If you don't like walking or running, consider bicycling, swimming, or aerobic dancing.

Eat your veggies

Eating 2-1/2 cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit every day displaces some of the fat in your diet and may lower your risk for heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes. Avoid smothering the fruits and vegetables in high-fat, high-sugar creams and sauces, cheese, butter, or chocolate.

Use seat belts

Wearing a seat belt reduces your risk of dying in an automobile accident by almost 60 percent. To be effective, seat belts must be worn 100 percent of the time.

Wear sunscreen

Protect your skin from the sun by wearing sunscreen or sun block, protective clothing, and a hat. In order to get enough vitamin D, however, expose your face, arms, hands, or back (without sunscreen) to the sun for 10 to 15 minutes at least two times per week. More exposure than this to the sun is a primary cause of skin cancer. Limit your time in the sun, even if you take these measures.

Quit smoking

Even if you can't kick the habit completely, you still can lower your health risk by reducing the number of cigarettes you smoke.

Avoid secondhand smoke

Government figures estimate smoke accounts for 25,000 to 50,000 deaths in this country every year. It clearly affects lung function, and probably contributes to deaths from heart attack and lung cancer. Try eliminating it from your home and workplace — the two places you probably spend the most time.

Reduce the fat in your diet

Avoid fried foods and reduce the amount of saturated and trans fats that you consume.

Eat fish twice a week

People who regularly eat baked, grilled, or broiled fish have significantly lower levels of heart disease. If you are pregnant or breast-feeding, limit your fish intake to no more than 12 ounces of fish per week, according to the Food and Drug Administration.

Be radon aware

Test your house for radon if this carcinogen is known to pose a threat in your area.

Less Is More: How to Simplify Your Life

Life today is complicated. Most Americans are pulled in multiple directions every day by commitments to their families, workplaces and communities.

Many people have responded to the pressures of modern life by seeking ways to consciously simplify their routines and attitudes at home and work.

"The goal of living a more simple life isn't to arrive at a static point in your life but to become skilled at balancing your personal relationships, workplace issues, finances and other demands," says Heather G. Mitchener, coauthor of *The 50 Best Ways to Simplify Your Life*.

Being in the moment

One way to simplify your life is to practice mindfulness -- to slow down and recognize and appreciate the simple things in life. To be mindful instead of mindless, stay in the moment and be conscious of what you're doing. Don't think ahead or look back.

"When we look ahead constantly, we not only rush through the less pleasant tasks, we also tend to hurry through the things we love to do, because we're always thinking or worrying about what we have to do next," says Ms. Mitchener.

A good way to practice being in the moment is to follow your breath, a technique that doesn't require any special training or self-consciousness. To breathe mindfully, take notice of your breaths and try to make them as calm and even as possible. Your breaths should be long and slow and should come from your diaphragm rather than your upper chest. Pay attention to each breath, letting thoughts fall away.

"You can do this exercise any time you think of it," says Ms. Mitchener. "Make it a goal to be mindful, in general, but also set aside short periods to practice. This will improve your ability to make mindfulness a habit. As you learn to live this way, you'll feel more centered."

Slow down

If you feel like you have too much information in your life, stop subscriptions to magazines, newspapers or e-mail newsletters you rarely have time to read. Leave the radio and TV off unless you're really listening to something that matters to you. Turn off your cell phone unless you're making a call or waiting for one that's important.

To reduce the amount of "stuff" in your home, ask yourself these questions before you buy something: Do I really need it? How often will I wear or use it? Where will I store it? Is there a reason why I must buy it?

Get organized

Begin by sizing up the problem areas in your home or workplace and making a plan of attack. If you're easily discouraged, start with a small, confined area, such as a single drawer. Otherwise, target an area that gives you the most grief. Your goal should be to clear out clutter that causes you to waste time -- a hall closet that has become a catchall for everything from clothes to sports equipment.

Learn to focus at work

Multitasking can be an asset, but often the lack of focus it requires means you actually get less done in a day, or less done well. To increase your focus and break free from distractions:

- Begin each day by setting priorities on what you want to accomplish.
- Check e-mail at set times, rather than letting each new message interrupt you.
- Set aside a time to retrieve voice mail and return calls.
- Keep a calendar of your deadlines and obligations.

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Being Mindful of Your Physical Health

As the new year begins, make a plan to put thought into your physical health. Use these strategies to help you become more mindful of your physical health.

Schedule your yearly wellness visit.

Make sure you have a primary care physician and schedule a wellness evaluation. Your doctor can check your bloodwork, which provides insight into your overall health and can help detect various conditions. You can also find out if you're deficient in any vitamins or minerals, such as vitamin D or iron.

Don't skimp on your dental health.

It's also important to keep up with dental cleanings at least once per year. Some colleges with dental programs also offer cleanings for a reduced rate. Your dental health can affect the rest of your body and lead to other diseases, so make sure you're doing your part at home too by brushing twice per day and flossing daily.

Take advantage of campus resources.

Check out any wellness events on your college campus, which could connect you to various resources. Some resources offer free biometric screenings, which check things like blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol.

Make exercise a habit.

Though it can be hard to find time, make sure that exercise is a part of your routine on most days. There are numerous benefits to physical activity, including improved brain health, reduced risk of diseases and cancers, weight management and bone and muscle strengthening. Plus, exercise can improve your mood and make you feel good.

Prioritize sleep.

Don't deprive yourself of sleep, which is vital for your body and mind. The National Sleep Foundation recommends 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night for most adults.

Focus on nutrition.

Try to eat more whole foods and fewer processed foods. Make sure you're getting enough protein, vegetables, and fruits in your diet. Also, carry a water bottle with you to stay hydrated throughout the day.

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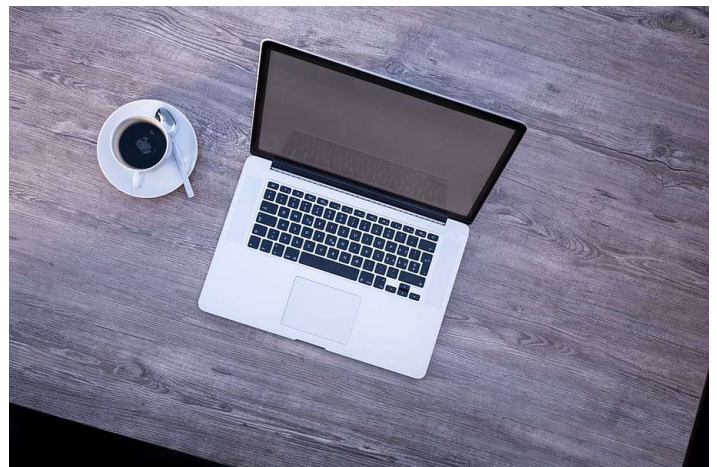
Preparing to age healthy starts at a young age. The recent view on aging has become "it's a matter of mind" and it's all about how you feel! With longevity, we are seeing more chronic disease and conditions. Naturally, genetic makeup plays a part in the aging process too. However, adopting healthy habits and behaviors will contribute to a productive and meaningful life as you age. Learn how perception, nutrition and lifestyle play key roles in healthy aging. The goal is to enjoy the golden years, start here when you participate in this session.

[Log-in](#) any time this month to watch the webinar!

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Navigating Winter: How to Eat In-Season During Colder Months

Eating seasonally in the summer seems to come naturally to most people – melons, berries, and leafy greens typically come to mind and can be put together in various ways. However, winter brings a distinct set of challenges for maintaining a diet that prioritizes fresh, in-season produce. While it may become more difficult, some nutritionists believe that eating seasonally can help provide you with the nutrients you need during that time of year.

How to Eat In-Season During the Colder Months

Focus on Root Vegetables. Some root vegetables like sweet potatoes, carrots, and parsnips thrive during the colder months. Roasting these vegetables enhances their flavors, while incorporating them into hearty stews provides essential sustenance. Cruciferous vegetables, including Brussels sprouts and cauliflower, also thrive in colder temperatures, contributing depth and nutrition to winter salads or side dishes.

Boost Your Vitamin C. Citrus fruits offer a vital source of immune-boosting vitamin C. Oranges, grapefruits, and mandarins can be integrated into snacks, salads, or freshly squeezed juices, providing a refreshing and healthy element to winter dining.

Incorporate Squash. Not just a fun sport - winter squash varieties, such as butternut and acorn squash, bring a sweet and nutty complexity to dishes, making them ideal for soups, casseroles, or even just roasted.

Selecting in-season fruits and vegetables is a health-conscious approach to nutrition and supports local agriculture. This winter, try leaning into the fruits and vegetables made to support you during the colder months.

Source: [How to Eat Seasonally During the Winter Months \(health.com\)](https://www.health.com/seasonal-eating)



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Integrative Health

January is Integrative Health Month. In a world where health and wellbeing are paramount, integrative health has emerged as a holistic approach that seeks to harmonize the mind, body, and spirit. Unlike conventional medicine, that often focuses solely on treating symptoms, integrative health combines traditional medical practices with complementary therapies, recognizing the interconnectedness of various aspects of one's health.

Integrative health emphasizes the importance of treating the whole person, considering not just physical ailments but also mental, emotional, and social factors. This approach encourages individuals to participate in their wellbeing, fostering empowerment and self-awareness actively.

Incorporating integrative health into your lifestyle involves a multifaceted approach. To nurture mental and emotional resilience, begin by cultivating mindfulness through meditation, yoga, or tai chi. Adopting a balanced and nutritious diet rich in whole foods can positively impact physical health. Explore alternative therapies like acupuncture, massage, or herbal remedies to complement conventional treatments.

Moreover, building a solid support network and fostering positive relationships contribute significantly to overall wellbeing. Prioritize quality sleep, regular physical activity, and stress management through relaxation techniques. Integrative health is about creating a personalized roadmap to wellness that aligns with individual needs and values, promoting harmony in pursuing a healthier, more fulfilling life.

Source: [Complementary, Alternative, or Integrative Health: What's In a Name? | NCCIH \(nih.gov\)](#)

We know it is not always easy to juggle everything & realize simple tips can help provide a different approach.
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Embracing Holistic Goals: A Journey Beyond Weight Loss

As we usher in another New Year, the tradition of setting resolutions is upon us. For many, the default resolution tends to revolve around shedding those extra pounds, but what if we shifted our focus towards a more holistic approach?

Holistic resolutions delve into the essence of wellbeing, encouraging us to view our aspirations through a broader lens. It's about embracing a lifestyle that promotes overall wellness, nourishing not just our bodies but our minds, hearts, and spirits. Instead of fixating on a specific weight target, consider holistic resolutions that encompass various facets of your life. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Mindful Living:** Cultivate mindfulness in your daily routine. Practice being present in each moment, savoring the richness of life. This could involve mindful breathing exercises, meditation, or simply taking time each day to appreciate the beauty around you.
- **Emotional Wellbeing:** Prioritize your mental and emotional health. Set goals that focus on building resilience, fostering positive relationships, and finding healthy outlets for stress relief. Consider activities like journaling, therapy, or regular check-ins with loved ones.
- **Skill Development:** Instead of a rigid weight loss plan, aim to enhance your intellectual growth. Learn a new skill, take up a hobby, or enroll in a course that piques your interest. Engaging your mind in continuous learning contributes to a sense of fulfillment and personal growth.
- **Connection and Community:** Foster meaningful social connections. Whether it's strengthening existing relationships or branching out to make new friends, building a supportive community contributes significantly to overall wellbeing.
- **Financial Wellness:** Set realistic financial goals that align with your values. This could involve creating a budget, saving for a future endeavor, or investing in experiences that bring you joy.
- **Environmental Consciousness:** Consider resolutions that promote environmental awareness. Small changes in your daily habits, such as reducing waste or choosing sustainable products, contribute to a healthier planet and, in turn, a healthier you.

By embracing holistic New Year's resolutions, we shift the focus from a narrow, weight-centric perspective to a more comprehensive approach to wellbeing. This year, prioritize self-love, personal growth, and a balanced life. Here's to a New Year filled with holistic transformations that go beyond the scale!

Source: [Letter of Recommendation: Make New Year's Resolutions That Have Nothing to Do With Weight Loss | SELF](#)



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Easy Vegetarian Taco Salad

Ingredients

- 4 ounces frozen tofu or black bean crumbles, such as Morning Star Farms® or Wildwood® brands
- 3 cups shredded romaine lettuce
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped tomatoes
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup canned no-salt-added black beans, rinsed and drained
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup shredded reduced-fat cheddar cheese (1 ounce)
- 8 lime or cheddar-flavored tortilla chips, such as Food Should Taste Good® brand
- 2 tablespoons light sour cream
- 1 tablespoon salsa

Directions

1. Prepare tofu or bean product according to package directions.
2. Divide romaine lettuce between two plates or large salad bowls.
3. Top with heated tofu or bean product.
4. Top with tomatoes, beans, cheese, and chips.
5. Serve with sour cream and salsa.

Nutrition

Per Serving

Calories: 325 | Protein: 29g | Carbohydrates: 4g | Dietary Fiber: 1g | Fat: 20g | Saturated Fat: 8g | Calcium: 28mg | Magnesium: 13mg | Potassium: 286mg | Sodium: 329mg

Source: [Easy Vegetarian Taco Salad \(eatingwell.com\)](https://eatingwell.com/recipes/easy-vegetarian-taco-salad/)

Would You Use a Self-help Group?

A self-help group is a gathering of individuals with a shared concern who provide mutual support, encouragement, and guidance to one another. Would you resist using a self-help group? These common myths typically hold people back. Myth: Only people with late-stage problems join self-help groups. Fact: Self-help groups include individuals at all stages. Myth: You will be judged. Fact: Self-help members foster acceptance and support, not judgment. Myth: A self-help group is a cult. Fact: Self-help groups prioritize personal choice and support, not control. Myth: Individual counseling is better. Fact: Individual counseling and self-help groups have different purposes; a self-help group may facilitate change in ways not possible via individual counseling.

Master Persistence and Stick with Your Resolutions

Persistence—who can deny its essential role in the success of any endeavor? Persistence is your ability to continue to strive toward your goal, completing tasks and overcoming obstacles. Motivation is not the same as persistence. Motivation refers to the inner desire, and it is what fuels persistence. To experience more success, foster persistence. 1) Be very clear about your goal so persistence has a vision and target. 2) Make your goal achievable, not overwhelming. 3) Do not delay tasks needed to accomplish your goal. Delay slows progress, and experiencing slowness can undermine one's desire to persist. 4) Avoid negative self-talk, self-doubt, and fear of failure. They too can sabotage your persistence. To fuel persistence, in 2024 laugh in the face of setbacks and embrace mistakes as challenges.

The 101% Mindset: Elevating Your Career

A 101% mindset means consistently striving to deliver exceptional performance and exceeding expectations at work. It's easier than you think, and it doesn't mean piling on a lot of extra work for yourself. But it can lead to reduced stress and big returns. Demonstrating the ability to consistently deliver 101% can indicate strong leadership potential. So, employees who show initiative, take ownership of tasks, and exceed expectations typically are considered for leadership roles or given increased responsibilities and recognition. Develop this habit: When given an assignment, identify the acceptable results desired. Then, identify the critical areas where a small extra effort can have a substantial impact on the project's success. Apply this "101% formula" consistently and watch how increased high regard for your work produces ripple effects for your career.

Embracing Diversity to Enhance Workplace Wellness

Embracing diversity can contribute to a healthier work environment, not just increased productivity. When all employees feel included and valued for their diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and identities, they grow to feel a sense of belonging. What follows is a psychologically safe workplace. It all starts here. This reduces stress, anxiety, and isolation. This, in turn, helps promote better mental health and well-being. What then follows includes reduced conflicts and misunderstandings, improved communication, and increased creativity. Hint: The best thing you can do to create a workplace that feels psychologically safe is to demonstrate "empathetic listening." This means acknowledging and validating the experiences, perspectives, and feelings of others without judgment, and being there to offer support at stressful times. Learn more by reading "The Inclusion Dividend: Why Investing in Diversity & Inclusion Pays Off" by Kaplan and Donovan.

Overcoming an Unwanted Habit

Well-researched strategies exist for overcoming unwanted habits (procrastination, nail biting, poor eating habits, spending, negative thinking, etc.). When you logically combine various techniques, you increase your odds of success. 1) Understand your triggers—realize what prompts you to engage in your unwanted habit. Keep a diary for a few days. Note what happens the moment before the behavior happens. 2) Your goal is to interrupt and replace this trigger-response dynamic. Do so by substituting the unwanted habit with a healthier, more positive behavior as quickly as possible (e.g., put your running shoes on the sofa cushion where you normally sit after arriving home to remind you that going for a run is a better choice than engaging in your habit. 3) Track your progress and do it in writing. This “action” sustains motivation. 4) Define your goal. What will success look like, and how will you behave when you overcome the habit? 5) Use mindfulness techniques, like meditation, to heighten self-awareness. This trains your brain, enabling you to spot triggers and patterns associated with the unwanted habit. 6) Can you find a support group where you can share your experiences and gain strength and hope? If so, this is one of the greatest strategies to help you be successful. 7) Employ external influences to help break the habit. For example, if your goal is to reduce “screen time with your computer,” use apps or tools to control access to the device. 8) Be kind to yourself if setbacks occur—keep going. 9) Consider professional counseling to achieve your goal, which includes your EAP. Caution: A substance use disorder is not considered a habit by the medical experts but instead a disease process for which appropriate treatment is recommended. Learn more by searching: scholar.google.com, “overcoming unwanted habits.”

Could You Benefit from a Stand-up Desk?

Could a stand-up desk be a good thing for you? By using a stand-up desk, you enjoy numerous benefits, including decreasing the amount of time sitting while warding off the related adverse health effects, improving posture, reducing strain and pain, remaining more alert, and burning more calories while working, as well as increased energy and higher productivity. Benefits vary among individuals, and some jobs are more suitable than others to the implementation of stand-up desks. Learn more: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8582919/.

Conduct a Workday Stress Audit

Small stressors can add up. Regularly assess your workday to identify stressors and make “mini-interventions” to manage them. Start by gaining awareness. Over the next few days, pinpoint demanding tasks, conflicts with colleagues, excessive workloads, tight deadlines, poor time management behaviors, lack of resources, noises, examples of poor communication, and desk clutter that inhibits workflow. Then, consider how these stressors affect you. Now, find solutions to mitigate their impact. For instance, if excessive workload is a stress factor, consider delegating. Noise? Try headphones. An unresolved conflict with a coworker—iron it out. These stressors might seem minor on their own, but when experienced repeatedly, they can impact overall well-being and productivity. By efficiently managing stress with this strategy, you will experience an improved well-being and a bit more joy at work.

Get a Post-holiday Financial Rehab Strategy

Rather than experience the dread that comes with knowing bills are coming due soon, get proactive with a post-holiday financial rehab strategy plan. Take charge now to regain control over your finances and set a positive tone for the year ahead. Focus on creating a realistic budget, track expenses, and decide on financial goals. Get debt repayment strategies, if needed, from online or community resources like the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, where lots of resources have recently been established online to help you. And don't forget to ask your EAP how they can help! Learn more at nfcc.org.

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