

A wooden table with a spiral notebook, a blue measuring tape, and a glass bowl of fresh vegetables. The notebook is open, and the measuring tape is coiled over it. The bowl contains sliced cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, and leafy greens.

HEALTHY New Year's Resolutions

Start Small

When you're just getting started, getting healthy can seem like an almost unattainable task. It often takes changes — and sometimes major changes — to everything from daily routines to eating habits.

It can seem overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be.

CHANGE THE LITTLE THINGS

Living a healthier life isn't something that just happens. It takes work, and it isn't easy, but that doesn't mean it has to be hard. Take stock of your daily routine and see what you can tweak to make it healthier.

Can you start biking or walking to work a few days a week? If not, think about other ways to be more active during the day. Are there any lunch spots within walking distance? Take off on foot instead of jumping in the car to travel those few blocks. Does your workplace have stairs? Use those a few days per week, instead of jumping on the elevator. These steps might not seem like much, but they add up over the days and weeks.

Some workplaces offer gym facilities for employees. If your employer does, take advantage of it, even if it's just walking on the treadmill for a few minutes a day.

SET ATTAINABLE GOALS

The easiest way to start being healthier is to just start, and the New Year is a great time to do it. But, you don't have to start out the year with a massive weight loss or mus-



cle mass goal weighing you down. That's the quickest way to find yourself frustrated before the calendar even flips to February. Instead, break those goals down, focus on

the steps it'll take to get there and start taking a few of those each day. Instead of coming straight off the couch and trying to run 5 miles on January 1, start with a 1- to 2- mile jog

and walk around the neighborhood. Don't try to start out bench pressing a few hundred pounds. Do a few reps that are comfortable for your level, and work up from

there. Realize it takes time for your body to adjust to a healthier lifestyle, and it could take a while depending on the point from which you're starting.

Get More Sleep

Along with exercise, sleep is one of the most important parts of a healthy lifestyle. But, it's often the last thing that comes to mind. It helps everything from your brain to your heart — and can also help regulate weight gain.

IT KEEPS YOUR BRAIN WORKING

Sleep helps your brain work properly, according to the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI). While you're sleeping, your brain is preparing for the next day by forming new pathways to help you learn and remember information. Without rest, it doesn't have time to do that daily prep work.

Studies show that a good night's sleep improves learning and can help enhance learning and problem-solving skills. Sleep also helps you be more attentive, creative and clear. Studies have shown sleep deficiency can alter activity in some parts of the brain, which can affect emotional behavior and even basic skills over time. Prolonged lack of sleep also can lead to depression.

YOUR BODY NEEDS IT

When you sleep, your body heals and repairs itself, and ongoing sleep deficiency has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and stroke.

Sleep deficiency also increases the risk of obesity. For example, one study of teenagers showed that with each hour of sleep lost, the



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odds of becoming obese increased. Similar findings extended across other demographics, as well. Sleep helps maintain a healthy balance of hormones, which is why you feel hungrier when you don't get enough sleep.

Sleep also affects how your body reacts to insulin, and sleep deficiency results in a higher-than-normal blood sugar level, which may increase your risk for diabetes. A lack of sleep also can weaken your immune system,

making you more susceptible to sicknesses.

YOU'LL LIVE LONGER

Considering how vital sleep is to keeping our bodies running, it's no surprise that getting enough sleep also can

help you live longer. In a 2010 study of women ages 50 to 79, cited by the NHLBI, more deaths occurred in women who got less than five hours or more than six and a half hours of sleep per night. The average adult needs 7 to 9 hours.

Travel

This one obviously comes down to your budget and free time, but even just a little money and a little time can open up some great (and healthy) traveling opportunities.

EXPLORE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

It's amazing how many people have never actually visited the tourist destinations in their own neighborhoods, or taken the time to check out the local park just down the block. If you don't have the time, money or interest to travel anywhere else, just travel around your neighborhood. Visit your local parks for a walk or hike, or find the central part of downtown and go for a walk and check out some local businesses. Walking is an easy, low-stress way to start living an active lifestyle. Visit your local tourist destinations, and after a day of seeing some fun things, you'll also have enjoyed a day of light physical activity.

FIND SOMEWHERE NEW TO EXPLORE

When you're in a new place, one of the most exciting things to do can be just walking down the street. If you can, try to visit new places and enjoy some old-school shoe leather exploring. Plan a hike at a nature preserve, or just stroll the streets of a new city. A trip also can be a great time to take an extra step in your quest for healthy living (such as increase your daily walking goal), as you're already out of your regular routine and can try to help establish a new one.

SNACK HEALTHY

Of course, there are some health downsides to travel, such as the shake-up to your regular eating schedule. Travel often means fast food and candy bars, but it doesn't



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Just because you're on the move doesn't mean you have to eat unhealthy food. It just takes a little planning.

have to. Before loading up for that road trip, or boarding that plane, pack some healthy snack bars, almonds, and fruits or veggies for the

trip. Just because you're on the move doesn't mean you have to eat unhealthy food. It just takes a little planning. Once you get to your desti-

nation, try to strike a balance of enjoying the local cuisine, while also choosing meals that fit within your dietary plan.

Be Active

This is the big one. All the best intentions and diets in the world won't get you anywhere if you're not being physically active. Being active is a key component in becoming a healthy.

If you think about it from a unique perspective, it doesn't have to be something terrible and daunting.

GET SOME DATA

A good place to start is with a step tracker — such as a Fitbit, JawBone, Apple Watch or Pebble — which will help hold you accountable and provide some valuable data as you move forward. The rule of thumb is to aim for 10,000 steps per day, which averages out to approximately 5 miles of walking. That might seem like a lot, but factor in all the steps around your house and workplace, and you'd be surprised how many steps you already take on an average day. That's where a step tracker comes in. This will help you figure out how many steps per day you're taking and what changes in your routine you might need to make to increase that amount.

START WALKING

Next up, you need to start increasing that step amount. Without trying, many people average around 5,000 to 6,000 steps per day, but some with more sedentary schedules could take as few as 1,000 or 2,000 steps. That's OK. Just start working to increase the number. Go for an afternoon walk around your neighborhood,



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take stairs when possible, walk your dog, park further away when going to a store, and even spend your breaks at work walking around and being active. The benefits are tremendous, and just reaching a consistent step count has been shown to keep your heart healthy, regulate cholesterol,

lower blood pressure and strengthen your bones. Not bad for something you can do for free.

GET A BIKE

Some people hang up their bicycles when they get a driver's license and never look back. But biking can be a sim-

ple and fun way to stay active — and it can provide a nice break from jogging or walking every day.

Check around your town to see if there are any bicycle clubs, or even just some bicycle lanes or parks that are designed for riders. This will provide a safe environment to go for a

ride.

Bike riding is easier on your legs, ankles and feet than going for a run. Plus, it has been proven to burn a comparable amount of calories, so there's no real drop-off. It's also fun to feel the wind on your face and feel the satisfaction of driving under your own power.



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Find a Gym That Fits

This is a big one, and not just because it can be one of the most expensive options on this list. Joining a gym gives you a wealth of options to keep your body healthy. Just be sure you pick the right gym.

DO SOME RESEARCH

There are a whole lot of gyms out there, but they're not all created equal. Some are designed for hardcore workout aficionados, others are targeted toward intermediates, and some are designed for beginners (and even offer workout planning to help get you started). There's no shame in being in any of the above camps, so just start calling around and scheduling visits to see which gym makes you feel the most comfortable. Most offer a few

free work out sessions, so you can try out the facilities and amenities before putting any money down. There is no wrong answer here, so just go with whatever feels right.

DEVELOP A WORKOUT PLAN

Take personal stock of what you want to work on, and what's important to you — then figure out how to get there. Most gyms offer specialists to help you figure out a basic workout plan, and be

sure to start at a level where you feel comfortable. Much like walking or jogging, just start with what you can do and work up from there. Not only does this help guide you in what equipment to use and how to use it, but a workout plan also gives you some structure for how often you need to visit the gym.

GET SOME FRIENDS INVOLVED

One of the best ways to remain accountable and com-

mitted to working out is to get a friend involved. Who knows, some of your friends might already be attending the same gym. Coordinate a time to work out together, and help encourage one another.

If not, many gyms offer special deals when two people signup together, so see if you can get a friend to take the plunge with you. If you're comfortable with it, you can even start up some friendly competitions between each other.

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Eating Right

We've all been there — jumping into a new diet, dropping a few pounds, then gaining them all back (and maybe a few more) a few months later.

The problem? Diets are typically a part-time solution to a full-time problem. Most diets just have you change up your eating habits for a certain period of time and might not provide any long-term instructions to keep the weight off. The answer: Stop focusing on diets and losing weight.

EASE INTO IT

You don't have to fully drop everything you love and start eating bare salads and egg

whites to “eat healthy.” Instead, start off with gradual improvements to your usual eating habits. If you're a coffee or soda junkie, start with reducing the intake instead of cutting things out cold turkey. The same with fast food: If you eat it three to four times per week, cut that down to one to two times per week. You can still splurge and enjoy that Whopper or Big Mac (or espresso), but not as often. A good rule of thumb: If it's something you do a lot, start

by cutting it in half. You'll still get enough to fulfill the urge, but it'll be a good way to start weaning your body off some of your less healthy habits.

CHANGE YOUR HABITS FOR GOOD

From there, keep working yourself into better eating habits. Do some research and choose meals that are both healthy and fit what you actually like to eat. It's not all about counting calories, but it's not a bad idea to start

keeping an eye on how much unhealthy food you take in. By permanently changing your eating habits, you can not only lose (and keep off) weight, but also provide stable nutrition for your body.

MODERATION, MODERATION, MODERATION

Oftentimes, it's just as much about how much you eat as what you eat. For example, sodas can contain a lot of empty calories and sugar, so

one wise approach to healthy eating is to reduce your soda intake. You don't have to quit them for good, but make an effort to moderate your intake. The same applies to food (of all types). Eat enough to fill you up, then stop. Don't pack your plate. Instead, start with smaller-than-usual portions and see how you feel after cleaning the plate. You may find that less food can be just as filling, if you take your time eating.

Cut Out the Stress

Along with everything from exercise to eating right, reducing stress is a critical factor in starting off the New Year on the right foot.

IMPACT OF STRESS

There is some research being done into the positive impacts of stress, though for the most part, stress is typically a bad thing. Here's what Stanford Medicine's Firdaus Dhabhar had to say about the impact stress can have on the body and mind:

"Chronic stress has been associated with increased biological aging, suppression or abnormal regulation of immune function, impairment of brain structure and function, increased susceptibility to some types of infection and worsening of conditions like depression, heart disease and some types of cancer."

Needless to say, stress can have a profound impact on your health.

REDUCE YOUR STRESS LEVEL

We're all going to have to deal with some stress in life, but there are often ways to reduce our stress. We just have to work to find them. Here are some tips from the National Institute of Mental Health on how to reduce your stress level:

- Stay in touch with people who can provide emotional and other support. Ask for help from friends, family and community or religious organizations to reduce stress due to work burdens or family issues, such as caring for a loved one.

- Recognize signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed and low energy levels.

- Set priorities. Decide what must get

done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.

- Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.

- Avoid dwelling on problems. If you

can't do this on your own, seek help from a qualified mental health professional who can guide you.

GET CREATIVE

One outside-the-box approach to reducing stress is to seek a creative out-

let, such as writing or music, to give your mind and body something unique to focus on outside the typical daily grind. Beyond that, perhaps also consider getting a pet to take care of, or take up a hobby, such as gardening or volunteer work, to provide some relief.



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