

FIVE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS TO BOOST YOUR HEART HEALTH



Want to make your New Year's resolutions really count *this year*? Then think about how some of the vows you make — to lose weight, reduce stress, quit smoking, exercise more — really get to the heart of the matter.

If you stick to these goals, you may just sail into next year with a healthier heart.

“Both men and women should get annual physicals to better focus on heart-health risk modification...”

Cardiologist **Leslie Cho, MD**, says common resolutions often come down to boosting heart health — even though that's not necessarily the initial intention.

She recommends these five heart-healthy resolutions that will serve you well all year.





1. Resolve to lose weight

“The No. 1 goal for most Americans is to lose weight — and often that resolution is one of the first they break,” Dr. Cho says.

But think of the benefits you’d reap if you could make steady progress in that area of your life.

When you’re overweight or obese, you increase your risk of:

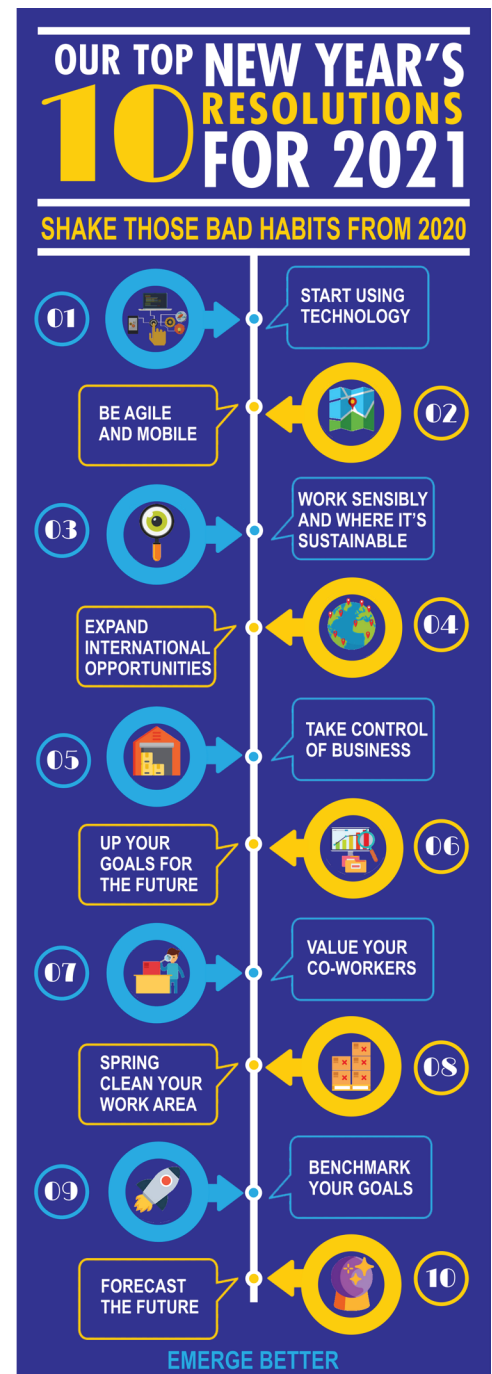
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- High cholesterol and triglycerides
- Blood clots

To help you keep your resolution, Dr. Cho recommends focusing on lifestyle modification instead of “**dieting**.” If you set a goal of healthy eating and regular exercise, losing weight is often a natural by product. Or you can use our **activity calculator** to determine how much — and what type — of activity you need to reach your goals.

There are many apps for your phone or tablet that can help you track your food intake and exercise. And it helps to understand your triggers so you can avoid them, she says. (Do you eat more when you’re stressed, bored or in a social setting?)

2. Resolve to get an annual physical

“Getting a checkup is a good thing,” says Dr. Cho, who sees many patients who haven’t been to a doctor in years.



Aside from ensuring that you have no major health problems, a **physical** allows your doctor to keep tabs on your blood pressure and glucose levels.

He or she will also likely discuss physical activity, and drinking, smoking and eating habits — they all affect your heart health, of course.

A yearly checkup is particularly important for all women. They are more likely to experience **less-obvious symptoms** of heart disease, Dr. Cho says. Yet many of her female patients only get “bikini medicine,” meaning they pay

attention to breast and gynecologic issues but neglect the rest of their bodies.

3. Resolve to reduce stress in your life

“Reducing **stress** should be a goal for the whole country,” Dr. Cho says. “Highly anxious people tend to have more heart attacks and strokes.”

Make time in your day to do things that help you relax. Try meditation, talking with friends, getting outside for a walk, reading a book or exercising.

And while the internet can sometimes increase your stress levels, it also has potential to be a tool for good. There are many web sites and apps that will help you calm yourself or embrace reflection and relaxation. They can walk you through simple breathing exercises or facilitate meditation.

4. Resolve to get more sleep

“Shorting yourself on **sleep** can lead to overeating, heart failure, hypertension and atrial fibrillation, Dr. Cho says.

“Having less sleep consistently can increase blood pressure and cause inflammation,” she adds. “That part of the brain that activates during sleep deprivation is near the part where hunger is, so we know that if you **don’t sleep**, you eat more.”

Tips for success: To get more **ZZZs**, Dr. Cho recommends that you:

- Put your phone away long before bedtime
- Cut back on caffeine
- Sleep in a **cool, dark room**

5. Resolve to stop smoking and/or reduce alcohol and caffeine intake

Drinking in moderation is OK. But don’t start now if you don’t drink (even though you’ve heard red wine is good for you). If you do drink, Dr. Cho recommends no more than 6 to 8 ounces a day.

Drinking less alcohol and caffeinated beverages will help you sleep better and reduce stress. It may even help you lose weight, by reducing the empty calories you consume, she says.

And smoking cessation is great for your heart — it can significantly lower your blood pressure and heart rate.

If you resolve to make yourself healthier this year, talk to your doctor about ways to trim down, be more active and relax. You know in your heart those are all resolutions you can live (longer) with.

