

HEART HEALTHY RESOLUTIONS

DECEMBER 2023

Resolutions You Can Actually Stick to FOR A HAPPIER, HEALTHIER NEW YEAR



2023 is drawing to a close and as we get prepared for the New Year, many of us are beginning to think of healthy resolutions

The new year is a great time for a health reset. But when we set the bar too high, we inevitably blow it, blame ourselves, and go back to the status quo, says nutrition therapist Dana Sturtevant, RD, a co-owner of [*Be Nourished*](#) in Portland, Oregon.

Take fad diets like juice cleanses: We're drawn to them because they promise big results minimal time and effort, and they appear to work—but only for a while. Because of course the number on the scale is going to go down (temporarily) if you're only drinking spinach water! But as soon as you go back to [*eating real food*](#)—as humans should do—you go right back where you started, not to mention you'll feel hungry, low on energy, and bad for not being able to stick with it (even though it's not healthy or possible live

on juiced produce alone). The same goes for working out. "People exercise every day for the first two weeks of the year, then totally taper off by February," says Sturtevant. "That level of commitment just isn't feasible in the long run." In short: Skip the extremes when it comes to setting health-related goals.

To set yourself up for success, we asked experts for goals that feel so doable, you may wonder whether they're even worth aiming for. You may not be ready for the marathon or be a Zen master by tomorrow, but we promise you will make significant headway on the journey to a happier, healthier you.

[*How to Start Working Out—and Find a Fitness Routine That Sticks*](#)

01 of 8 Upgrade Your Dessert

"If you're craving something sweet after dinner, you should have it!" says Willow Jarosh, RD, a cofounder of [C&J Nutrition](#) in New York City. "But if you want to cut back on sugar and still satisfy that craving, dilute the sweet stuff with something like nuts or seeds."

Instead of reaching for chocolate bars, try chocolate-covered almonds, [chocolate-dipped frozen banana bites](#), or try chocolate chips mixed with popcorn, pistachios, or both. Besides reducing your intake of [added sugar](#)—too much of which has been linked to high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and other health concerns—you'll also get some heart-healthy fiber.

[9 Good-for-You Dessert Ingredients That Taste Sweet, Without All the Sugar](#)

02 of 8 Sit Differently

It can be hard to sit less, especially if you have a desk job. "Most people sit in a C shape, which puts pressure on your spine and can cause lower back, neck, and shoulder pain," says Jenn Sherer, the founder of the [Spinefulness](#) studio in Palo Alto, Calif. "And when we try to sit up 'properly,' we tend to suck in our stomach and stick out our chest, contracting our muscles in a way that can make us even more misaligned or stressed."

But sitting better is easy. Just pop your booty: Pretend you have a tail, and bend slightly at the hips so you aren't sitting on it. "This can help untuck your pelvis and elongate your spine so your vertebrae can stack up straight," says Sherer. Also, adjust your chair so your feet rest flat on the floor (or a footrest), and your thighs are parallel to the ground.

[Here's How to Improve Your Posture, According to Experts](#)

03 of 8 Set a Bedtime Alarm

More than a third of us regularly don't get the minimum seven hours of sleep we need. While you probably can't sleep in later, you can



go to bed earlier—and the best way to do so is by setting an alarm for 45 minutes to an hour before lights out, advises Holly Phillips, MD, the author of [The Exhaustion Breakthrough](#). Once it goes off, start your wind-down routine, whether that involves taking a shower, making your kids' lunches for the next day, or prepping [overnight oats](#).

The alarm can also serve as a reminder to turn off the TV, close your laptop, and put down your phone, since the blue light that those devices emit can delay the release of the sleep hormone melatonin, making it harder to fall asleep. If you like to read before bed, dim the brightness on your reading devices. Activate blue-light-limiting features or install dimmer bulbs in your bedroom.

[11 Healthy Habits That Can Help You Sleep Better](#)

04 of 8 Walk to Every Destination Within 1 Mile

The more [physical activity you can fit into your day](#), the better. "If something is within a one-mile radius, I try to walk instead of drive," says Michele Stanten, a walking coach and certified fitness instructor based in Coopersburg, Penn.

"Even if your neighborhood isn't walkable, you can still walk from store to store within a big shopping complex or you can park at the bank or the drug-store and walk from there to your other errands."

Walking instead of driving can help you live longer, improve your mood, and reduce your risk for heart disease, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. It also cuts down on greenhouse-gas emissions.

Another good micro-resolution: Move your feet every time your phone is in your hand. "If you're tied to a landline or need to stay put, just march in place or step side to side," says Stanten.

[6 Unexpected Health Benefits of Walking](#)



05 of 8 Check in With Yourself Mid-meal

"Dieting is unsustainable, especially when you make restrictive, unrealistic rules about what you can and can't eat," says Sturtevant. For lasting good health, learn to tune in to signs of hunger, not ignore them. Sipping water between bites can help you slow down and [eat more mindfully](#), as can pausing for a gut-check halfway through your meal to note how you're feeling physically, really taste what you're chewing on, and ground yourself within the present moment.

To do it, put down your fork, take a deep breath, and ask yourself how full you are and how much more food you think you need to be satisfied, says Sturtevant. "When we eat with awareness, we get more joy out of our food—without that joy, it's difficult to feel nourished."

06 of 8 *Designate a No-phone Zone*

Setting physical boundaries is easier than trying to limit how much time you spend scrolling through Instagram or checking your email (over and over). A study from the University of British Columbia found that diners who had their phones out during dinner enjoyed their experience less than those who put their phones away, and a separate study suggested that if your phone is within reach, it impairs cognitive performance—even if it's turned off. Keep your phone stashed in your bag or ban phones at the dinner table. If your family gives you pushback, start with a trial run.

“When you suggest doing something for just three days or even a week, it's easier to get buy-in,” says BJ Fogg, Ph.D., founder and director of the *Behavior Design Lab* at Stanford University. “Hopefully you'll have a really great discussion at dinner that gets

everyone onboard with making this a more permanent policy.”

07 of 8 *Eat Veggies at Breakfast*

Breakfast is often overlooked as an opportunity to squeeze in vegetables, which 91 percent (!) of us don't get enough of daily. Try topping your toast with mashed avocado or adding a handful of baby spinach or sautéed grated sweet potatoes to your scrambled eggs. *Your morning meal doesn't have to be savory* to include veggies; you can also stir grated zucchini into pancake batter or shredded carrots into your oatmeal.

“We have specific ideas of what breakfast foods are, when in fact breakfast is just a meal like any other,” says Sturtevant. “I love roasted vegetables with sunny-side eggs on top for breakfast, but you could even have leftover pizza with vegetables on it.”

08 of 8 *Exercise for a Few Minutes*

You're supposed to get two and a half hours of moderate-intensity physical activity each week, or about 30 minutes five days a week. But don't let those numbers intimidate you out of doing what you can. Experts say you can break down the time into 10-minute sessions without missing out on exercise's physical and mental benefits.

And research backs up the power of short workouts: One study found that 13 minutes of weight training three times a week is enough to build strength, while another showed that just five minutes a day of running is all it takes to reduce your risk of death from cardiovascular disease.

“Some studies suggest that merely standing is good for metabolic health,” says Tamara Hew-Butler, PhD, an associate professor of exercise and sports science at Wayne State University in Detroit. “The bottom line is that any exercise is better than none at all.”

Just 3 Minutes of Exercise Can Boost Your Health—Here Are 7 Mini Moves to Try Throughout the Day

