

10 Healthy Habits for the New Year

Is your New Year's resolution to live healthier in 2015? Me too! Studies show health-related resolutions top the list.

However, it's important to know that research also shows that the more specific you can be, the more likely you will reach your goal.

Here are the Top 10 Healthy Habits for the new year:

1. Exercise. Exercising has both short-term and long-term benefits. Right away, it can improve your mood, reduce stress, and even make your brain work better. Over time, exercise can prevent health problems ranging from obesity and diabetes to heart disease and even cancer.

This is a result of what exercise does inside your body, according to Dr. Harry Lodge, author of the bestseller, *Younger Next Year*.

"It turns out that your cells really don't age," he said. "They either grow or decay."

"And if you do things in your life that trigger growth in the cells, then your body gets stronger, younger, fitter, healthier, better able to resist disease," he continued. "And you live life as functionally a younger man or woman until very late in the game."

Even with all these benefits, some 60 percent of Americans stay on the couch.

If you'd like to be in the 40 percent of regular exercisers, psychologists say to focus on the first three weeks. Be encouraged that it will get easier! Studies have shown that any activity repeated daily becomes a habit after three weeks.

2. Eat a healthy breakfast. Remember, a healthy breakfast contains protein. Eat within 90 minutes of waking-up. This starts your metabolism for the day and also prevents you from getting too hungry and overeating later in the day.

3. Eat five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Make sure you don't eat just fruit. Even though fruit contains natural sugar, too much of it can raise your blood sugar levels too high.

To avoid this, stick to eating berries, which are low in sugar and high in antioxidants. Instead of fruit, focus on trying to consume more vegetables, especially leafy green ones. A good plan is to eat a salad every day (with olive oil dressing!)

4. Avoid trans fats. Trans fats are found mostly in processed foods, so if the list of ingredients includes the word, "hydrogenated," stay away.

Ironically, trans fats prolong a food's shelf life, but they have the opposite effect on our bodies, according to Dr. Michael Aziz, author of *The Perfect 10 Diet*.

"Trans fats are really like plastic," he said. "And when we eat them they incorporate in our cells and the cells cannot communicate or talk to one another."

"In turn, hormones are disturbed, weight gain follows. But more troubling, the risk for heart disease, cancer, stroke, infertility goes up," he added.

5. Eat good fats. Omega-3s are found in foods like fish, especially salmon, sardines, and fish oil supplements. Other choices include walnuts, almonds, and flaxseed. These have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, improve your immunity, and reduce inflammation.

Coconut oil helps ward-off colds and flu because of its

natural anti-microbial properties. Olive oil and avocados are also good-for-you fats.

6. Avoid sugar. This is one of the toughest. Its negative laundry list runs from obesity to diabetes to heart disease and cancer. The average American consumes 135 pounds of sugar a year, compared with 109 pounds 20 years ago and only five pounds in the late 1800s!

This includes hidden sugars like corn syrup, sucrose, glucose, and lactose. Celebrity diet coach Joy Bauer, author of *The 90/10 Weight Loss Plan*, says start by going cold turkey.

“The first seven days I eliminate all sugars, both real and artificial,” she said. “Because when you remove the taste of sweet from your mind and your taste buds, eventually it gets much easier and you stop craving it.”

“And so many people, when you start week two and you’re allowed to have sugar, they don’t even want it because they feel great without it,” she continued.

7. Cleanse your hands often. Eating right and exercising aren’t the only habits that keep you healthy. Did you know the best way to avoid getting sick is to keep your hands clean?

When using hand sanitizer, make sure it’s at least 60 percent alcohol, get in all those nooks and crannies, and rub your hands until they’re dry. When using soap and water, lather-up for a full 20 seconds.

8. Practice good dental health. Believe it or not, periodontal infection contributes to heart disease, diabetes, and even premature, underweight births.

9. Get regular screening. The type of screenings you need depend on your age and gender, so consult with your doctor about which ones you need.

Some of the most important ones include an annual physical,

blood pressure, and cholesterol test, colonoscopy, mammogram, pap test, and prostate and skin cancer screening.

10. Get enough sleep. According to Dr. James Maas, author of *Sleep For Success*, if you don't get your ZZZs, you're setting yourself up for a whole host of health problems.

"You're going to be irritable, anxious, depressed," he said. "You're going to gain weight, you have a greater risk for hypertension, that's heart attacks and strokes, type 2 diabetes, obesity, skin problems, and cancer."

"And your cognitive performance slows down," he continued. "You can't think, you can't remember, you're not creative, you can't think critically, it affects how long you're going to live. And if you're an athlete, it just ruins your motor coordination and your reaction time."

So at this time of year, when many of us vow to start afresh, take note of these habits to make 2015 your healthiest year yet.

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