

5 Healthy Resolutions for 2015

With the end of another year upon us, it's likely many of you reading this have been considering making a few New Year's resolutions, resolutions that, according to the University of Scranton, likely revolve around your health.

I've revisited some of the health tips and info I've found most significant this year and compiled them into this comprehensive, resolution-minded article, one I hope will help guide you as you set personal goals for the upcoming year. Whether you want to make a dramatic change for the better, or simply stick with and sharpen your current fitness lifestyle, the following five resolutions can help make 2015 your healthiest year yet!

1. Motivate yourself every day. At the dawn of a new year, many people peruse their calendars and see if there are any weddings to slim down for, a beach trip to shape up for, or a ski trip to get fit for. One or two major events, they reason, will help motivate them to commit to a regular exercise schedule and a healthier diet. But what about after the special occasion or vacation has passed? The unfortunate truth is, most people revert back to their former workout-less, junk food-filled ways.

I love the quote from Zig Ziglar that says, "People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing, that's why we recommend it daily."

This year, let's resolve to motivate ourselves daily, not occasionally.

All of us know that being in good physical shape is important for a number of reasons that could easily compose an entire article. A few primary reasons health and fitness

professionals encourage patients and clients to exercise regularly is because doing so reduces the risk of injury in daily activities, prevents certain cancers, reduces the risk of heart disease, promotes better sleep, reduces anxiety and depression, strengthens the bones and immune system, helps with weight loss and weight control, increases energy levels, and improves confidence.

And yet, while the benefits of working out are vast and indisputable, many Americans still maintain sedentary lifestyles, inconsistent exercise routines, and frankly, apathetic attitudes and an unwillingness to change. As Christians, this is purely unacceptable as the Bible clearly commands us to honor our bodies as dwelling places of the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 10:31 says: "Therefore, whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God."

When you feel your motivation beginning to dwindle, remember that staying faithful to health and fitness not only benefits you and your loved ones, but it honors and glorifies the Lord. Let serving and pleasing Him be your chief motivation for being healthier in 2015.

2. Honor thy slumber. In case you think getting sufficient sleep isn't that important of a resolution, here are six reasons given by the Harvard Women's Health Watch explaining why you should honor thy slumber:

- **Learning and memory.** Sleep helps the brain commit new information to memory through a process called *memory consolidation*. In studies, people who'd slept after learning a task did better on tests later.
- **Metabolism and weight.** Chronic sleep deprivation may cause weight gain by affecting the way our bodies process and store carbohydrates and by altering levels of hormones that affect our appetite.

- **Safety.** Sleep debt contributes to a greater tendency to fall asleep during the daytime. These lapses may cause falls and mistakes such as medical errors, air traffic mishaps and road accidents.
- **Mood.** Sleep loss may result in irritability, impatience, inability to concentrate and moodiness. Too little sleep can also leave you too tired to do the things you like to do.
- **Cardiovascular health.** Serious sleep disorders have been linked to hypertension, increased stress hormone levels and irregular heartbeat.
- **Disease.** Sleep deprivation alters immune function, including the activity of the body's killer cells. Keeping up with sleep may also help fight cancer.

Bottom line: *Sleep should be prioritized!*

If you have trouble falling asleep, there are few things you can do. For starters, make sure it's as quiet and peaceful as possible. If you have a snoring spouse or rowdy neighbors, try tuning them out with a relaxing soundtrack and a pair of headphones. (You can find thin, pillow-friendly headphones at .)

Also, set your thermostat properly; we doze off more easily and sleep more soundly when it's cooler. Another tip I love is using lavender. Research show it helps ease insomnia and anxiety. Find a spray and spritz it onto your pillow. Finally, when you get into bed, let your mind unwind. Pray and surrender your worries and concerns to the Lord. Trust Him to watch over you and your loved ones as you sleep.

If you need to renew your mind and soothe your soul, reach for your Bible and read a passage to which the Holy Spirit directs you. Focusing on the Word and its promises will help your brain settle down and your body relax.

3. Lift heavy weights. This resolution idea will probably be

much easier for men to make, as many women fear doing so will make them “bulky” and unfeminine looking. I’ve written an entire article addressing that subject here, but suffice it to say, women have zero reason to fear resembling the Hulk ... at least not from strength training. In fact, heavy weights will help them shed unwanted fat and look leaner! Here are three reasons you should start lifting heavy first thing January 1st:

- **Raise your metabolic rate.** Your metabolism is the amount of energy your body needs to sustain itself. Because muscle requires calories (aka energy) to survive, increasing your muscle size and density will increase your metabolism. Since we work against a high degree of resistance with heavy weights, we create tiny muscular tears throughout the body. We expend a greater number of calories post-workout to repair those tiny tears, thus increasing your overall calorie requirements. Lifting weights will raise your metabolism long after you’re finished. In fact, experts estimate that your metabolism stays elevated for up to 15 hours after you train. Again, this is because lifting strains your body so much that it needs extra time to recover.
- **Achieve greater muscle definition.** The next benefit to lifting heavier weights is that you’ll see greater overall muscle definition. When you lift a light weight lots of times, as most women do—no joke, I once spotted a woman doing a 3-pound tricep kickback with one hand while chatting on her cell phone with the other for a solid two minutes—the muscles are barely challenged. As a result, your muscles won’t feel any need to adapt (grow) since they can easily handle what you throw at them.

Make sure you’re always pushing yourself and taking the weight up to the next level. That’s when you’ll see muscle definition and your form improve. If you commit to following a proper diet, heavy weights will make you look and feel beautiful

(handsome, fellas) and confident in your own skin.

- **Improve your functional strength for daily life.** The final benefit you achieve by lifting heavier weights is that you improve functional strength capabilities. Since you get *much* stronger by lifting heavier weights, everyday activities will get much easier over time. Muscularity also means a lower chance of injury if you participate in sports or other recreational activities.

If you're a beginner, I recommend starting out with two weight-training sessions a week, each one lasting no longer than 30 minutes. Don't target the same muscle group two days in a row, though you can lift weights two days in a row. For example, exercise your chest and back on Monday, then legs and abs on Tuesday. After a few weeks, add in a third or fourth day of lifting. Also, make sure the weights are challenging; the last few reps should be tough!

4. Cut out carrageenan. A few months ago, I was scanning the ingredients label on my carton of almond milk and came across a word that I still haven't the slightest clue how to pronounce: *carrageenan*. I also examined the labels of my So Delicious coconut yogurt, and my husband's Horizon chocolate milk and noticed they also contained this mysterious substance.

I figured, it's probably harmless—these products are organic!

Little did I know ...

I immediately pulled out my handy-dandy smartphone to begin investigating. It turns out carrageenan, found in many dairy and non-dairy products, deli meats, infant formulas, even flavored coconut water, has been proven to be carcinogenic. The ingredient is extracted from a red seaweed (sounds healthy so far, right?) called *Chondrus crispus*, which is popularly known as Irish moss. Companies include the extract to improve the texture of their foods. (For more about carrageenan and

why it's been allowed into our foods, check out my full article on the topic here).

If you find out that in fact your favorite milk, yogurt or ice cream features this harmful substance, you'll want to check out replacements right away. The Cornucopia Institute provides an extensive list of both carrageenan-containing foods and those that are carcinogen-free. I encourage you to visit the link and even contact the companies that are using carrageenan to see if they might be willing to change their minds for the sake of your and your family's health.

Alternatively, the Internet has some wonderful resources to teach you how to make your own dairy and non-dairy products at home, so I encourage you to do a little research and try a recipe or two.

And one more nutrition tip while I'm on the subject: If you're unfamiliar with an ingredient listed on your bottle of juice, your protein powder, your energy bar, etc., please look it up. The truth about carrageenan should serve to teach us that just because a product or company claims to be "all-natural" or "organic," that doesn't necessarily make them 100 percent healthy.

5. Say sayonara to Splenda. Splenda is just one of many artificial sweeteners found in countless "health" and diet products today, such as protein and energy bars, flavored water and even vitamin and mineral supplements. I've chosen to highlight Splenda, or sucralose, because it is an especially deceiving product because it claims to be "made from sugar," which understandably leads consumers to think it's a natural, perfectly safe product. This couldn't be further from the truth.

Splenda is a chlorocarbon, which is simply a fancy name for chlorinated sugar. To chlorinate sugar, you have to chemically alter the structure of the sugar molecule by substituting

three chlorine atoms for three hydroxyl groups in the overall sucrose (sugar) molecule. Chlorine, as it turns out, is quite an excitable element. It's used as a biocide in bleach, insecticide, disinfectants even World War I poison gas.

Chlorocarbons are neither nutritionally nor metabolically compatible in our bodies. Because we're not made to excrete the poison, the body shunts it into our *livers*, which is our detoxification organ. There, the chlorocarbons damage and destroy the liver's metabolic cells. Not so sweet-sounding, is it?

Splenda claims its product has been thoroughly researched, yet not one long-term human study has been conducted to determine any potential health risks. The FDA (Food and Drug Administration) gave Splenda the green light after reviewing only a handful of short-term tests, and each of those was conducted on animals, not humans. Oh, and they were done by a Splenda manufacturer. Maybe they were unbiased?

In test animals, Splenda produced:

- Swollen livers and kidneys (my formerly "fatty" liver fits into this category!)
- Shrunken thymus glands
- Reduced growth rates
- Decreased red blood cell count
- Hyperplasia of the pelvis
- Extension of the pregnancy period
- Aborted pregnancy
- Decreased fetal body weights and placental weights
- Diarrhea

James Turner, chairman of the national consumer education group Citizens for Health issued the following statement:

"[T]he artificial sweetener Splenda and its key component sucralose pose a threat to the people who consume the product. Hundreds of consumers have complained to us about side effects

from using Splenda, and this study ... confirms that the chemicals in the little yellow package should carry a big red warning label.”

The web site lists a variety of consumer complaints from Splenda consumption, such as:

- Blurred vision
- Gastrointestinal problems
- Migraines
- Seizures
- Dizziness
- Allergic reactions
- Blood sugar increases
- Weight gain

It is best to eliminate all artificial sweeteners completely; so bid farewell to those pretty pink, blue and yellow packets! Try to stick to natural sweeteners, such as raw honey, agave extract, maple syrup or if you’re looking for a low-calorie sugar substitute, stevia or xylitol.

I hope you’ve found these resolution tips helpful and pray you and your family have a very happy, healthy New Year.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of *Creation House’s Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman’s Guide to Total Fitness* and her latest book, *Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness*. Her popular website can be found at , and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.

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