

Looking Forward in 2023 — and Beyond

Do you know why we ring in the New Year on January 1? It's an old story. Most historians credit Julius Caesar with developing the Julian calendar more than 2,000 years ago, designating January 1 as the start of a new year. The Gregorian calendar, which many nations use today, started in 1582 when Pope Gregory XIII aligned the calendar with the earth's rotation around the sun — marking 365 days.



The new year has taken on a lot of meaning since then. And a good thing about entering a new year each January? It offers us new perspectives and options for living, working and enjoying life.

What are you most hoping for in the New Year? Will it begin with a hangover or hope and gratitude for greeting a new year filled with promise? Or somewhere in between?

At least 50% of us make resolutions for each new year, and the most popular personal goals: resolving to lose weight, eat healthier and exercise more. To get started, identify the personal activities that you hope to explore to achieve better health, well-being and pleasure. For example:

- create a comfortable start-of-day routine.
- Walk regularly with your kids or a friend.
- unplug from screen time more often to relax.
- Learn how to meditate to promote tranquility.
- Plan for pleasant activities in your new year.

Take action: It's common for New Year's resolutions to fade away in the hustle and bustle of daily life. Revisit your health goals frequently.



Nutrition: Sleep on It

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

It's well known that eating a balanced diet can help combat heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some types of cancer. But did you know that the same nutritious diet can also help improve sleep?

Studies show that a Mediterranean-style diet — one that's filled with vegetables, fruit, beans, grains, fish and olive oil — can help improve sleep quality.

Overall, research shows diets that are high in protein, fiber-rich carbohydrates and healthier fats can help people wake less during the night, have deeper sleep, and take less time to fall asleep.

The carbs you choose make a big difference. High-fiber carbs, such as whole grains, vegetables and beans, are associated with deep sleep, while sugary carbs are tied to lighter sleep. A dietary pattern that's loaded with soft drinks, pastries and candy can actually reduce sleep quality. Studies show that people who sleep for a shorter duration also tend to eat more calories and consume more fatty foods in total than people who sleep longer.

Eating patterns that are plentiful in fruits, vegetables, grains, seeds, and legumes contain more melatonin, which is a hormone that helps regulate our internal body clock and helps ensure better sleep.

Beverages can impact sleep, too, especially caffeinated beverages, such as coffee and tea, as well as energy drinks and some soft drinks. Too much caffeine can harm sleep, since it stimulates the central nervous system and boosts energy levels. Aim to have no more than 400 milligrams of caffeine (about four small cups of coffee) per day and consume it in the morning rather than close to bedtime, to minimize sleep disruption. And even moderate amounts of alcohol (two drinks) can decrease sleep quality by 24%.

The Jolly (or Not) Holidays

Many folks find their mental health takes a nose dive during the wintry holidays. With extra demands on your time and energy, the added effort can bring on added fatigue — enough to deflate your spirits.

Feeling down during the holidays is a common syndrome, and you're likely to have plenty of company in this regard. The American Psychological Association recently reported that 38% of people said their stress increased during the holidays, and only 8% of people said they felt happier.

Can you identify with these reasons for feeling blue at holiday time?

- **Recent loss of a loved one** may leave you feeling socially isolated. However, withdrawing can often worsen loneliness and depression.
- **Added anxiety during the holiday months** may cause even those who are generally content to experience loneliness.
- **Less daylight in winter** can contribute to seasonal affective disorder, a form of depression triggered by the change of seasons and reduced daylight.



Exercising your body can help offset the blues. Include some form of daily physical activity — as simple as taking a daily walk outdoors, building a snow fort with your children or meeting friends for a day of cross-country skiing. Or try swimming indoors regularly to boost your mood and energy despite the chilly climate.

Feel aches and pains all over when winter rolls around?

You aren't alone. Although the cold can aggravate arthritis pain, others without that condition can feel more aches when it's chilly. That's because barometric pressure changes in cold weather, causing muscles, tendons and ligaments to expand, and that results in discomfort in some people. Staying active in the winter can help reduce the discomfort. When the weather feels too cold, consider exercising in an indoor gym or at home.



Aspirin 101

Aspirin was invented more than a century ago.

While this famous drug derived from willow bark has been replaced by acetaminophen and other medications as the preferred treatment for pain and inflammation, it remains the most widely used drug globally.

Because aspirin thins blood, a low-dose (81 milligrams) can help prevent strokes and heart attacks by stopping blood clots from forming in blood vessels damaged and narrowed by plaque.

Low-dose aspirin, as directed by your health care provider, may be taken for preventing cardiovascular disease, but only if you have a history of heart attack, atrial fibrillation, stroke or vascular stenting. Low-dose aspirin isn't recommended for those with no history of heart disease or stroke.

Because of certain risks, aspirin isn't for everyone. Regular use can raise the risk for a hemorrhagic stroke (caused by bleeding in the brain). Also, if you have a history of gastritis or stomach ulcers, which can cause internal bleeding, don't take aspirin without your provider's approval. Aspirin can also interact with many other medications. *Always get your provider's okay before taking aspirin.*

However, middle-aged adults, with their provider's approval, may benefit from regular low-dose aspirin if they are at high risk for a first heart attack or stroke due to risk factors, such as smoking, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high LDL (bad) cholesterol or a strong family history of heart disease.

Bottom line: Follow your provider's advice about whether you should take low-dose aspirin for your heart, use it to relieve aches and pain or avoid it altogether. Read labels and never take more aspirin than is recommended. If you use aspirin, report unusual bruising or bleeding immediately to your provider.



Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit coronavirus.gov.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Volunteering? Good for You!**, is at personalbest.com/extras/22V12tools.

