

## 9 Healthy Resolutions: No Dieting Required

***Shake up your resolutions by putting healthy habits at the top of the list. By looking beyond just losing weight, you can start making some equally important healthy changes.***

By [Madeline Vann, MPH](#)

Medically reviewed by [Cynthia Haines, MD](#)

'Tis the season for new-and-improved resolutions, but if you want to benefit from really healthy changes, it's time to expand your scope. Many people make a resolution tied solely to weight loss, but that's not necessarily the best goal, says Timothy Harlan, MD, associate chief of outpatient programs at Tulane University Health Center in New Orleans and author of *Just Tell Me What to Eat*. "Make resolutions to take a particular action instead," he suggests.

Living a healthy lifestyle means focusing on your well-being with steps that go beyond starting a new diet or ramping up your exercise schedule. Here are nine healthy resolutions to try:

- 1. Start thinking "prevention."** When was the last time you saw your doctor for a preventive health visit? Or your dentist, dermatologist, and eye doctor? This could be the year to get back on track with your health checkups. Be sure to ask if you're due for any recommended health screenings, such as a mammogram or vaccinations. Once you get your doctor's input on your current health status, you can make a health management plan based on good habits.
- 2. Learn how to meditate.** There are many different styles of meditation, any of which can help reduce stress and improve your outlook on life. A research review published in the journal *Psychological Research and Behavior Management* shows that meditation can help with stress, anxiety, and depression as part of a comprehensive program. But you don't have to be struggling emotionally to benefit from meditation — a mediation practice can also help to improve your focus, according to a study published in the journal *Brain Research Bulletin*. "Meditate or pray every day," advises therapist Glenda Brooks, LCSW, of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. "By having 15 minutes of quiet time each day, you can get some mental space of your own." Brooks recommends meditation in the morning as a good way to start the day, but it could also be a good way to end your day, offering the opportunity to reflect on what went well and what didn't.
- 3. Laugh more.** "Laughter is contagious and will help connect you with others," Brooks says. If you're feeling down in the dumps, turn on a silly movie or a classic TV comedy, she suggests.
- 4. Talk to a therapist.** Whether you need a mental health professional to manage emotions or a life coach to help you achieve your goals, "seeking help from a professional is a gift to yourself in times of need, and you're definitely worth it," Brooks says. A professional can help you with many goals that further the development of healthy habits, including learning better ways to manage stress and conflict or addressing old grievances.
- 5. Plan out weekly menus.** Take an hour each weekend to plan out what you and your family will have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for the week ahead, Dr. Harlan says. This not only gives you more control over your diet, but you'll also find that you save time and money — by planning out meals, you can make the most of shopping trips and avoid last-minute runs to the market.

**6. Get more quality sleep.** A lack of sleep contributes to obesity, Harlan says, and it can add to stress, depression, irritability, and serious health conditions, such as an increased risk of heart disease. Harlan recommends the following sleep-hygiene steps: Sleep in a cool, dark bedroom and stick to a regular sleep schedule that allows you enough time for eight hours of sleep. “Many people only allot for six hours of sleep,” he says, which often isn’t enough. Cut off TV and computer time well before bedtime to give your brain plenty of time to calm down and to limit the exposure of light to your eyes before trying to sleep. If you still have problems getting the rest you need, make an appointment with your doctor to see if you might have a sleep disorder.

**7. Get organized.** To avoid making this an overwhelming goal, Harlan suggests breaking down organizational tasks instead of trying to tackle all of your clutter at once. For example, make time each week to address one issue, such as reviewing your financial papers, clearing out old clothes and books, or tidying up the garage. The outcome? You’ll feel a lot better when you have a more-organized home and are able to quickly and easily find the items you need.

**8. Get your finances in order.** Financial chaos is a common source of stress. Take these steps to get on top of your budget and other details that make up your financial health:

- Review your budget. If you don’t have one, make one. Keep track of your household’s expenditures for a month or two and then look them over. Are you spending too much on eating out and not investing as much as you’d like in your retirement? Do you want to be able to give more to charity and spend less on clothes? Now’s the time to rebalance.
- Consider a financial adviser. This specialist can help you with investments, retirement planning, and other financial issues. “The best way to find any kind of financial adviser is through referrals,” says Ivan M. Illan, CFS, a certified fund specialist and founder of Aligne Wealth Preservation & Insurance Group at MassMutual Financial Group, New York City and Los Angeles. Interview at least two financial advisers before deciding on one.
- Check on older family members’ financial plans. Illan is an advocate for financial planning for the elderly, who may be the target of financial abuse such as scams, theft, and embezzlement. If you haven’t talked to your parents and other older relatives about their finances, do so and make sure they’re working with reputable practitioners to get sound advice.
- Review your will and other documents. Make sure you’ve identified the people you want to take care of your family, finances, and health if you’re unable to do so. Also, if your financial accounts have beneficiaries, make sure these are still the people you want to inherit your assets. “I’ve seen accounts with ex-spouses still listed as beneficiaries,” Illan says.

**9. Think about your long-term goals.** It’s easy to focus on the short term, such as losing a few pounds. Expand your time horizon and consider where you want to be in five or 10 years. Then reach out to the people who can help you get there. This could be your doctor if you want to be healthier, your financial adviser if you want to be wealthier, or your human resources department if you want to find new job opportunities at work. A personal or career coach can also help if you’re unclear on your specific life goals.

As gratifying as it is to see the numbers drop on your scale, making these big-picture healthy changes can be even more rewarding.

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