

8 Health Resolutions You'll Actually Keep

Think getting healthy requires a lifestyle makeover? Think again! These small, simple changes will help you pave the path to wellness.

by NEA Member Benefits

Improving your new year's wellness plan doesn't have to mean completely overhauling your routine. In fact, experts claim small, simple changes are more likely to stick.

These eight easy-to-implement ideas can get you started:

1. Practice gratitude

Taking stock of the riches in your life—both big and small—can go a long way toward boosting health and wellness. Research confirms that counting your blessings rather than fixating on what's missing enhances wellbeing, especially if you put it in writing. A study published in the *Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* earlier this year showed that women who wrote in a gratitude diary four times a week were happier—and less stressed and depressed—than those who didn't. Sure, you may not have everything you want, but you'll benefit from wanting what you already have. Maybe you stared at a star-filled sky, soaked in a soothing bath, or savored a chocolate truffle. The key, says Paula Dowd, M.A., C.C., mind/body clinician in Redondo Beach, California, is finding pleasure in the simple things that make up your every day.

2. Break out the coloring books

Once a playful childhood pursuit, coloring books have adult benefits, too. Coloring activates the same pathways in the brain as meditation and has even been found to change heart rates and brain waves. "It isn't quite art therapy, but it mimics some of the best features of mindfulness practices," says Caroline Miller, MAPP, professional coach and author of "Creating Your Best Life: The Ultimate Life List Guide," who recommends adult coloring books to clients as a way to replace negative thoughts with positive images, unlock creativity, and allow a person to focus intently on choosing colors to make something beautiful.

3. Delegate

Whether at home or in the classroom, asking for help is key to preserving sanity. The key, say experts, is to capitalize on people's strengths. Is your teacher's assistant a pro at organization? Have her file your students' homework. Does your daughter love to cook? Ask her to make dinner twice a week. "Resilient people know how and when to tap into helpful resources," says Miller.

4. Go high tech

Whether your goal is to eat a healthful diet, stick to an exercise routine or get more sleep, a new crop of "apps" can help you achieve your objectives. Americans are increasingly relying on technology to achieve health objectives with a whopping 34 percent reporting they plan to use smartphone apps to support their weight loss objectives. Experts agree the accountability and visual progress report with

health and fitness apps help motivate behavior change. [MyFitnessPal](#), [Cyclemeter](#) and [SworkItPro](#) are just a few examples.

5. Create more rituals

Research shows rituals not only anchor you in the moment providing comfort and stability during times of chaos they also enhance your pleasure of positive experiences—even something as simple as eating chocolate. A 2013 study published in the Association for Psychological Science found that people who ritualized eating a chocolate bar rated the experience as more flavorful, valuable and worthy of savoring than those who chowed down sans fanfare. Researchers say it doesn't matter which set of behaviors you perform as part of a ritual. You don't even have to believe in the ritual to reap the benefits. You just have to refer to the specific set of actions as a “ritual” and participate.

6. Wear supportive shoes

Educators are on their feet nearly all day, which can cause foot, leg and back pain. But what if a simple switch—from women's high heels or men's pointy dress shoes to supportive shoes like Danskos—could transform your barking dogs into happy feet? Shoes that transfer weight toward the toe dramatically shift your gait and impact your balance. Instead, Karen Jacobs, Ed.D., OTR/L, clinical professor at Boston University College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, suggests selecting comfortable shoes that support your feet. For extra cushioning, add insoles.

Look for deals on foot-friendly brands through [NEA Discount Marketplace](#).

7. Breathe deeply

No matter where you are in your life or your workday, there's one powerful stress buster always at the ready: your breath. Diaphragmatic breathing—inhaling so deeply that your diaphragm moves downward, your lungs inflate fully and your belly expands—can short-circuit the physiological reaction to stress. “Even one deep breath can change the way you feel,” says Dowd. Sit tall, rest a hand on your lower belly, and feel your belly rise away from your spine as you inhale. As you exhale, your belly will fall as you release the air (and any toxins) from your lungs, then your rib cage and then your belly.

8. Laugh

Laughter, or even anticipating a laugh (by, say, waiting for a punch line), may not only make you happier, but healthier as well. Researchers at Loma Linda University Medical Center found that joyous laughter can increase endorphins (those feel-good chemicals responsible for the runner's high), reduce stress hormone levels and boost your immune system.

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