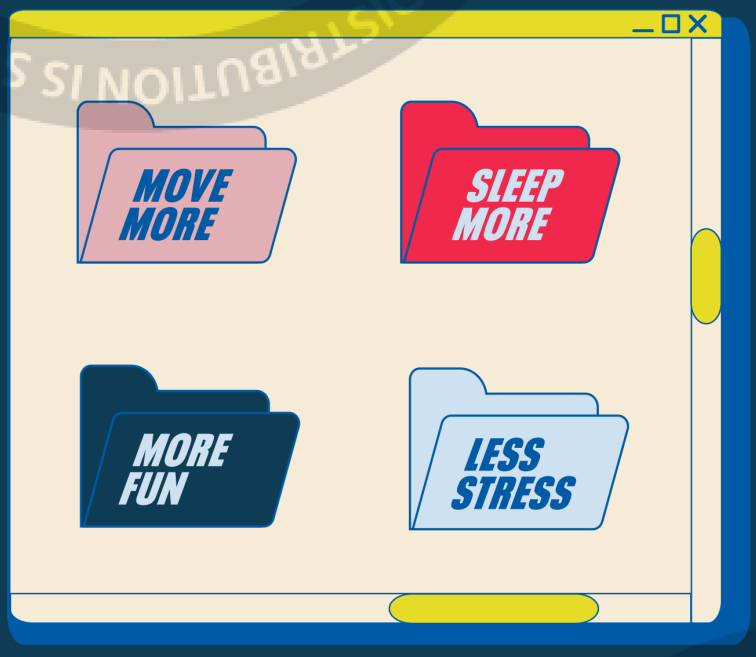
- Habit / Stress / Lifestyles

REAL STORIES AND HEALTHY LIVING IDEAS

Life + Health

Choose Your Own HEALTH ADVENTURE



File Under "Fresh Start"

OK

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Every January, most of us do some version of this search:

"How do I stick to my healthy intentions?"

"Healthy habits this year how?"

"Quit bad habits resolution"

We love the ambition!

But of the **38%** of us who make healthy resolutions, only **9%** keep them all year, according to Drive Research. So here's the plan: Read the first two sections (at right), then pick any of the others. Start with these ideas and look for much more at goodhousekeeping.com/health in January.

START HERE!

Research shows that setting goals boosts self-confidence and motivation, whether you want to cut down on scrolling or learn yoga. But the way you approach goals matters. Try these tips:

Be specific.

For example, instead of resolving to exercise more, your goal could be to walk two miles a day. That's the first step of making your goal "S.M.A.R.T." (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-Bound). Make it measurable by keeping track of your progress. To make it achievable, realistic and time-bound, set mini goals such as shaving two minutes from your two-mile time by week three. "Having a time frame in which to complete a task provides structure," says Michele Smallidge, Ed.D., R.D., program director of exercise science at the University of New Haven. As you accomplish each mini goal, aim for something else that's not a huge stretch for you. Soon your routine will be second nature.

Choose one behavior.

Don't try to overhaul your whole life, says Smallidge. Instead of "I'm going to eat healthily and exercise and sleep better this year," try something concrete like "I'll eat a serving of fresh vegetables once a day."

Know your "why."

Keeping the reason you want to make a change at the top of your mind is motivating. Do you want to get fitter to have more energy? Have you resolved to set strong boundaries to protect your mental health?

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YOUR NEXT STEP



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Now you'll want to reduce the friction between you and your goals, setting yourself up to succeed. All the motivation in the world won't matter if there are too many obstacles. These techniques will help set the stage.

"Make a compelling case that something deserves to be a priority," says Christopher Bryan, Ph.D., an associate professor of business, government and society at the University of Texas at Austin.

Break it down.

Going cold turkey for Dry January is fine, but it may mean you reach for the pinot on February 1. Breaking or forming a habit takes repetition over time. Work your goal into your life slowly and keep taking steps toward it, however small. If you want to be more social, rather than overloading your schedule, start with a dinner date, then add a biweekly girls' night. "The last thing you want to do is set something up that's not achievable or realistic so within the first couple of weeks you'll already feel defeated," says Smallidge.

Celebrate wins!

When you hit milestones, savor them. "All those small wins will add up to the big win," says Smallidge. Recognizing achievements—by taking pride in them or rewarding yourself—will remind you how great progress feels. Now keep going!

Enlist support.

Ask close family members and friends to help you meet your goals by saying something like "This is important for my health, so here's how I think you can help me," suggests Lisa Hardesty, Ph.D., a psychologist with Mayo Clinic Health System. Be as specific as possible. If you're aiming to begin meditating, you can designate someone to keep everyone out of your room during your sitting time or to remind you to do it.

Prep your environment.

What you surround yourself with matters. "If you're trying to eat better, for example, but you have candy stashed in the pantry and you see it five times a day, you're eventually going to eat it," says Hardesty.

Leverage your energy.

It might be easier to perform a difficult behavior when you're naturally more alert. For a week or two, keep a log of how you feel energy-wise throughout each day. Then schedule things like exercise or cleaning the garage when you're fully charged. If you're trying *not* to do something (say, smoke or call an ex), you may be more vulnerable when you're zonked.

Pair chores with pleasures.

Need to see a certain difficult relative more often? Commit to going to that pricey restaurant only with that person. "I've done research showing that if you combine something you find tempting with something that feels like a chore and only let yourself have that temptation simultaneously, it gets you to do more of the chore," says Katy Milkman, Ph.D., a professor of operations, information and decisions at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and the author of *How to Change*.

Use the buddy system.

You may not always feel intrinsically motivated to do something, but you can give yourself external reasons, says Tim Pychyl, Ph.D., author of *Solving the Procrastination Puzzle*. Say your goal is to exercise more: Make a pact to work out with a friend. On top of any personal reasons for exercising, you'll have the motivating factor of wanting to show up for your friend and not let them down.

Know that it's not all-or-nothing.

If you want to meditate every night before bed but end up doing it for only five nights, you can decide that this counts as a win. "It's so you can forgive yourself when something inevitably does come up and go wrong, as opposed to treating that as a disaster," says Milkman.



Ready to focus on a goal?
There's much, much more, so turn the page!

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PICK A GOAL!



OK, now you know what an achievable goal looks like and how to smooth your path, so choose something! Select just one (or two) of these categories to avoid getting overwhelmed—you can tackle more later. Begin with these tips, and watch for more at goodhousekeeping.com/adventure starting in January.

GOAL

Stay Sharp

Just as your body needs exercise to stay healthy, so does your brain, says Sandra Bond Chapman, Ph.D., chief director of the Center for BrainHealth at the University of Texas at Dallas. Because of neuroplasticity, the ability to grow new neural pathways at any age, doing things that stimulate different networks is key. Here's how to cross-train your brain.

Make real-life plans.

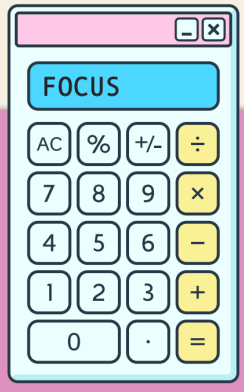
Live human interaction has multiple benefits, including preventing isolation (which carries a host of health risks). Make a date to try something new with a friend, such as taking a painting class or seeing a play. Everything from planning where and when to meet to making conversation and learning new things feeds your brain, says Agenor Limon, Ph.D., an associate professor at Mitchell Center for Neurogenerative Diseases, University of Texas Medical Branch.

Hit the dance floor.

Whether it's country-and-western line dancing or a Bollywood dance class, moving your body to choreography gives you the double benefit of aerobic exercise (which gets blood flowing to the brain) and memorizing steps (which will help keep your neurons firing).

Turn off your GPS.

Use an old-fashioned map rather than having AI direct you. You'll keep your brain flexible, and you may even find a café or art gallery you'd otherwise miss.



Test your hearing.

If you've been saying "Sorry, can you repeat that?" a lot lately, consult with an audiologist. Hearing aids are tiny and available OTC these days! A hearing boost has been shown to help keep the brain stronger as people age.

Stop multitasking.

Recent research suggests that doing several things at once may be detrimental to memory. In fact, it shows that using more than one media device at a time makes it harder to encode new memories, and that's true at all ages.

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GOAL

Stress Less

Smart goal! Research has shown that chronic stress can cause body-wide inflammation and lead to digestive problems, insomnia, low libido and difficulty concentrating.

Stre-e-e-tch.

Stretching relaxes your body, of course, but there's evidence that it can ease your mind. One study showed that 10 minutes of slow, mindful stretching could reduce anxiety. Practicing deep breathing while you're at it helps calm your nervous system. Start with a downward-facing dog pose; inhale and exhale and feel the stress ebb.

Walk outside.

Just being in fresh air relaxes the mind. Take a brisk 10-minute stroll: Research shows that it can lower anxiety and boost mood-regulating brain chemicals like serotonin, helping induce calmness.

Cancel something.

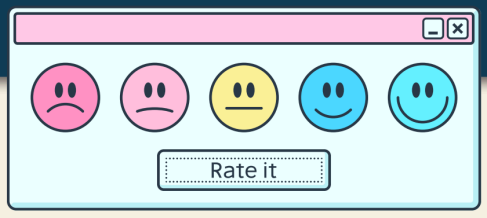
Look at your calendar and find one thing you can skip, such as an event you're not psyched about or a Zoom meeting that doesn't require your input. Bow out and replace it with...nothing!

Meditate simply.

You don't have to sit in lotus position for an hour a day—do it your way. Meditation is simply "an intentional practice of redirecting ourselves away from our thoughts," says Katie Krimer, a psychotherapist with Union Square Practice in New York City. Focus on your breath and allow your thoughts and emotions to arise, then observe them without judgment and let them go.

Inhale peace.

Research suggests that lavender can be effective in helping to ease anxiety in people with anxiety disorders. Put a few drops of the essential oil in a diffuser or on a piece of cloth, then close your eyes and inhale for the calming effects.



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GOAL

Sleep More



We love this intention—our physical and mental health depends on the repairs that take place during sleep, and sleep deficiency is linked to many chronic health problems, including heart disease, diabetes and depression.

Be in nature.

Spending at least some time in a park or garden can help you sleep better at night, says Ellen Wermter, a behavioral sleep medicine specialist with the Better Sleep Council, who points out that exposure to natural light makes your circadian rhythm more robust. Being in green spaces is also known to reduce stress and anxiety, which leads to better sleep.

Think of a ritual.

If you're lying awake, imagine yourself going through all the steps of a relaxing daily task: washing your hair, brewing coffee, feeding the dog. "As you're thinking about each step, your brain has something to chew on rather than ruminating on the problems of the day," says Wermter.

Cover your clock.

Do you need to know that it's 3:42 a.m. when your eyes pop open at night? Focusing on how much time is left until you have to get up can only add to your anxiety and make it harder to fall back to sleep, says Greg Hammer, M.D., a professor at Stanford University School of Medicine.

Get up.

It may sound counterintuitive, but if you get stressed out lying in bed at 2 a.m., get out of bed and do something you enjoy other than phone scrolling (like reading or a puzzle). When you feel truly tired, get back in bed. Your brain will then start to associate your bed with sleep, not stress.

Use two blankets.

If you're sweating while your partner is shivering (or vice versa), use separate covers that are the right weight for each of you, says Raj Dasgupta, M.D., chief medical adviser for Sleep Advisor. "It's a common practice in Scandinavian countries to help reduce the chances of sleep disturbances and improve temperature regulation throughout the night for a better-quality slumber."

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GOAL

Feel More Joy

Joy can be more than a feeling: When subjects did a "micro-act" of joy (such as cheering for someone else's happiness or making a gratitude list) daily for a week, they saw a 26% increase in their well-being, per the Big Joy Project, a program from UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center and HopeLab.

Make a joy list.

"Set a timer for five minutes and brainstorm happiness-inducing activities," says Judy Ho, Ph.D., a neuropsychologist and the author of *Stop Self-Sabotage: Six Steps to Unlock Your True Motivation*. "It's OK to include grand items—a vacation to Bali!—as well as small things like morning coffee." Then do something on that list in the next 24 hours.

Think seasonally.

Brainstorm joyful activities that can be done only at this time of year. Perhaps you can go snowshoeing or ice-skating. Then, when spring arrives, you might hit a botanical garden. Knowing you can't do these things year-round can help make them feel especially joyful.

Dance the salsa.

"Salsa dancing makes people happy," says Martha Santos, Ph.D., an associate professor of Latin American history at the University of Akron. "The music is percussive and exciting, and when you combine it with rapid movements from the various Latin American dance traditions in salsa, it's like the dance has a healing quality." Search online for a studio near you that teaches salsa.

Look at the stars.

Step outside on a dark, cloudless night and dare yourself *not* to be awed by the sky. When you're looking up and gazing at the stars, you'll often feel inspired and find some sort of creativity or deeper understanding.

Go bowling.

Bowling keeps people of all ages and skill sets in a state of hilarity. "When you're around people you care about and enjoy, I think it's great for your mental health," says Chad Murphy, executive director of the United States Bowling Congress.

GOAL

Have Fun!

You deserve pure pleasure, whether it's a delicious meal, a foot rub or sex. Engaging in pleasurable activities may boost happiness, which is linked to longer life. No guilt!

Blast beats.

There's a reason you have a favorite artist or genre: Listening to music feels nice! Numerous studies have found that music helps reduce stress and that listening with the intention of relaxing helps lower cortisol levels.

Regress.

Participating in playful activities—video games and coloring count!—has been found to lower adults' feelings of stress (along with their blood pressure). Play releases dopamine and other feel-good chemicals.

Fantasize.

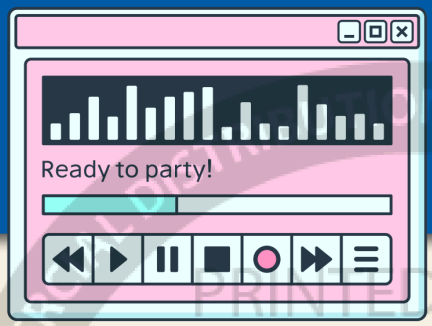
Don't be afraid to let your mind run wild. Maybe you imagine a tryst with someone from your past, that episode of *Bridgerton* (you know the one) or something kinkier. Fantasies are normal and healthy—especially if you can shed any shame—and can help prevent sexual boredom.

Bake.

What's not to love about an activity that makes your home smell great and delights everyone inside? "It appeals to the senses because you're touching soft dough and smelling amazing scents emerging from the oven, and in the end you get to eat the product you've made or share it," says Amber Eisler, director of King Arthur Baking Schools.

Plan a trip.

Start researching a pleasure-inducing getaway, whatever that means to you. Research has shown that having a vacation to look forward to can provide a happiness boost even before you sip a cocktail on the beach or ski down a slope.



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Audien Hearing



Better hearing. Better brain.

Did you know?

[1] A Johns Hopkins study found that the use of hearing aids can decrease the risk of dementia by 32%.

[2] Risk of dementia with untreated hearing loss



1. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health: New Study Links Dementia With Hearing Loss In Older Adults 2. Johns Hopkins Medicine: The Hidden Risks of Hearing Loss

GOAL

Get Moving

We know you know this: "Moving your body is essential, especially as you age. It's about maintaining vitality, protecting your bones and staying youthful and vibrant," says Latreal Mitchell, a personal trainer and founder of Fitness Bunch Foundation.

Dress the part.

"Even if you aren't planning to exercise right away, you're more likely to squeeze in a quick yoga flow, walk or stretch if you're already dressed for it," says Lindsey Benoit O'Connell, CSCS, a certified meditation teacher and trainer and founder of The LAB Wellness. "Plus, workout clothes are basically the next best thing to PJ's!"

Involve the fam.

If you have kids or a group of friends, grab a stack of index cards and write a variety of exercises on half and the numbers 6 through 20 on others, then shuffle each pile. Someone pulls a move and a number of reps, and as soon as one person starts moving, the next person pulls from the stack. "Eventually everyone should be moving," says Mitchell.

Take it easy—really!

Not all movement needs to be a formal workout. Lean into low-effort activity by adding simple exercises and stretches to your weekly routine. "They can be done anywhere and will help break up long periods of sitting to improve your overall well-being," says Vaughn Gray, NASM-CPT, a wellness expert and personal trainer. Think gentle neck stretches, shoulder rolls, wrist and finger stretches and hip and ankle rotations to keep your joints limber and pain-free.



Gamify TV night.

Write down common words or phrases from your favorite shows or sporting events, then pair each with an action or exercise, says O'Connell. For example, do squats every time there's a football fumble or jumping jacks every time Homer says "D'oh!"

Mix it up.

Switching up the types of exercise you do helps prevent boredom and keeps you motivated—and it helps prevent fitness plateaus, as your body constantly has to adapt to new stimuli, explains Gray. Check what classes are near you or explore online videos to discover fun new ways to get your sweat on.

YOU GOT THIS!



We hope our New Year's jump-start will set you up for healthy habits all year long. Scan below to find more articles on achieving your goals. We know you can do it!

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