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## It's a new year. Now what?

Whether it's the start of a new year, a birthday or just the changing seasons, we humans tend to look for opportunities to wipe the proverbial slate clean and start again. No matter your age or the season, it's never too late to add healthy habits to your daily routine. For some, that may mean jump-starting an exercise regimen or eating well. For others, it may mean a commitment to spending more quality time with family and friends.



Here are seven ways you might choose to live more fully and healthily all year long.

1. **Develop an attitude of gratitude.** Studies have shown that counting your blessings not only reduces depression, stress and lowers blood pressure, but it can also slow down the effects of aging.
2. **Commit to being more physically fit.** No, that doesn't mean you have to become a world-class athlete, but do set a goal to get up and move. Perhaps it means walking around a nearby park twice a week or walking to work or to do errands. Possibly ride a bicycle instead. What's important is finding a routine that works for you and is one that you can stick to.
3. **Resolve to make quality sleep a priority.** It's hard to feel your best when you're exhausted. Getting enough quality sleep not only helps keep extra weight off, but it can reduce risk factors for hearts attacks, strokes or chronic diseases such as diabetes.
4. **Plan to strengthen social relationships.** Dozens of studies have shown that people who have satisfying relationships with family, friends and their community are happier, have fewer health problems and live longer. And, they live *better*. These relationships relieve harmful levels of stress which can adversely affect coronary arteries, gut function, insulin regulation and the human immune system.
5. **Look for ways to brighten someone else's life.** When asked what makes them feel most fulfilled, most people include "giving" in the top answers. There is no shortage of people, causes or organizations that can benefit from our time, expertise or resources. Humans are wired to share with others and, when we do, we get a "helper's high" from the release of "feel good" neurotransmitters by our brain.
6. **Make learning a life-long habit.** Is there a foreign language you've wanted to learn? Or musical instrument you always wanted to play? Perhaps now is the time take up that challenge. Studies clearly show that engaging in skills that require active engagement and high-level cognitive processes improves memory.
7. **Place a priority on maintaining your health.** It's easy to put off a medical check-up, vision or dental exam or health screening. Remember, good health is the foundation of everything we want to do in life so pause to schedule your visits with a health professional and encourage your loved ones to do the same.