

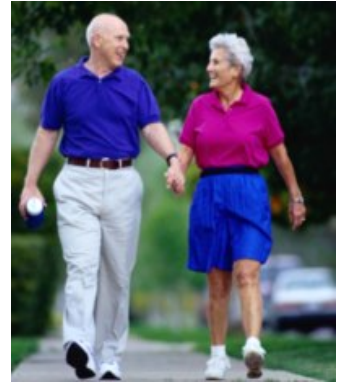
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10 Simple Things You Can Do To Help Yourself Feel Better This Year

by Chris Bynum

(TwinCities.com) Resolved to be in better health this year? Here are 10 simple things experts suggest to help you keep that resolution.



1. MONITOR YOUR INTAKE OF BAD NEWS

Let's face it: The news can be dismal these days.

"People raise their stress levels with their addictions to bad news. It's like a cobra coming out of a basket; it's so fascinating you can't avert your gaze. And this keeps our adrenal glands in an uproar.

"So choose one time each day to watch the news. It takes discipline. After 9/11, people were creating post-traumatic stress in themselves by watching replays of the towers going down 50 times. And don't watch the news just before bedtime."

— Joan Borysenko, sports psychologist and author of "Minding the Body, Mending the Mind"

2. PUT ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER

Ever wonder how many steps you take each day? Wear a pedometer, and you will be inspired to take more.

"You can invest in a pedometer for as little as \$4. Wear it for three days (two days during the week and one day on the weekend). Calculate your average step count for those three days. Then determine your fitness level according to research at americaonthemove.org. (Those in the obese range usually take between 4,600 and 6,000 steps a day, overweight people walk 6,000 to 7,000 steps a day, and those of normal weight tally 8,000 to 10,000 steps a day.)

"You want to incrementally move yourself up to the next category. If you are in the obese range, don't jump up to the 10,000 steps immediately. Rather, move up to the next category slowly over a period of weeks until you reach 10,000 steps a day.

"Walking not only improves your mental well-being and burns calories but also increases your metabolism."

— Performance expert Mackie Shilstone, director of the Fitness Principle, East Jefferson General Hospital, Metairie, La.

3. EAT MANY MINI-MEALS, NOT THREE BIG MEALS, EVERY DAY

Eat small meals every three to four hours.

"Eating small meals and snacks consistently throughout the day increases your metabolism and your energy levels, and keeps your hunger pangs at bay so you don't overeat at later meals."

— Julie Fortenberry, nutritionist for the Fitness Principle program at East Jefferson General Hospital

4. GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR FEEL-GOOD MOJO

"Increase nitric oxide levels in your body by doing something pleasurable. This feel-good molecule, which is produced in the lining of every blood vessel in the body, increases the levels of all the other 'happy molecules,' such as oxytocin, a chemical that's released when we bond with others. And like oxytocin, nitric oxide is increased by anything that brings joy into your life, but especially by pleasurable sex."

— Dr. Christine Northrup, expert on women's health issues and author of "The Secret Pleasures of Menopause"

5. GET SOME ZZZZZZZZZS

Try for six to eight hours of sleep a night. If you're not logging that amount, take a look at your environment, and make the necessary changes.

Keep the bedroom quiet, dark and on the cool side. Avoid any intense light that will reset your internal clock. Limit external stimulants, such as outside noise or the noise of a television. Just say no to caffeine after lunch or alcoholic beverages in the six hours before bedtime. Avoid rigorous exercise within six hours of bedtime.

Don't let your bed double as your desk. Don't take your worries to bed by trying to resolve issues at the end of the day. Don't go to bed hungry, but don't eat a heavy meal just before bedtime.

Look for more ways to improve your sleep at sleepeducation.com.

— Dr. Peter Olejniczak, board-certified in sleep medicine and an associate professor of neurology at Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans

6. SEE THE GLASS HALF FULL

"Start your day with a prayer of gratitude for the basics: for another day, a roof over your head, food, clothing, loved ones. The benefits? Heartfelt prayers of gratitude open the heart, liberate the spirit and engage us with the wider world. They spur us to give back when we realize how privileged we really are. Prayers of gratitude liberate optimism — and studies show optimists live longer and are healthier than pessimists.

"You don't need to be religious to offer a prayer of gratitude: Offer your prayer to the universe or whatever your conception of a higher power might be."

— Dr. Larry Dossey, author of "The Extraordinary Healing Power of Ordinary Things"

7. EMBRACE THE POWER OF PURPLE AND THE BENEFITS OF THE BLUES

Add purple-blue foods to your diet — dried plums, raisins, eggplant, acai, beans (aduki), Concord grapes, elderberries, potatoes, red cabbage. They are rich in such plant chemicals as anthocyanins and polyphenols, which have been found to aid in:

- Thinking quicker on your feet. (Purple-blue foods protect the brain from the effects of aging and help aid in memory recall.)

Preventing artery-clogging plaque from building up. Concord grape juice also has been found to reduce inflammation of the arteries; Concord grapes help raise HDL, the good cholesterol that keeps the bad cholesterol (LDL) in check.

• — David Grotto, nutritionist and registered dietitian, author of "101 Foods That Could Save Your Life"

8. SMILE AND SAY HELLO TO OTHERS

Interacting with others in a cheerful manner lifts not only your mood but also theirs by increasing serotonin and endorphins, the "feel-good" neurotransmitters.

"And it takes less muscles to smile than it does to frown. You carry the image of another's smile throughout your day."

— Dr. Carolyn Dean, medical and naturopathic doctor, wellness consultant and author of "The Magnesium Miracle"

9. TEST YOUR FITNESS LIMITS

"If you want to improve your fitness level, you have to know your limits so you can go beyond that. For instance, if you can run three miles, you will be fit for only three miles. Push beyond that to 3 1/2 miles to improve. Or if you can do 10 push-ups, aim for 20.

"People are often stronger and faster than they give themselves credit for."

— Rusty Roussel, professional fitness trainer and owner of Salvation Studio in New Orleans

10. SHUT UP AND BREATHE

Experiment with meditation.

"Think of three things you love that you would like to spend time with -- for example, your garden, your dog, a piece of music, a street that you love to walk down. Spend an extra 30 seconds thinking about that thing. We tend to move on too quickly, even from things that we love. Lingering there for just an extra 30 seconds lets your soul take refuge in what you love.

"Once you get that feeling of being nourished by the world, take a breath as if you are breathing in that quality and filling your body with delight in the world. Over time, you will learn a lot about your own personal getaways into meditation.

"The benefits of meditation are that you can physically obtain a rest deeper than deep sleep while wide awake. Meditation is an antidote to stress."

— Lorin Roche, a California-based meditation teacher for 40 years and author of five books on meditation