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SIMPLE RESOLUTIONS TO MAKE THIS YEAR

New Year's resolutions don't have to be painful and impossible to keep. Basic steps toward wellness—eating well, quitting smoking, getting some kind of exercise and reducing stress—can lead to a healthier year.

Resolve to eat well.

This doesn't mean swearing off sweets, counting calories or sweating over fat grams. Rather than giving up foods you enjoy in favor of a strict quick-weight-loss diet, choose a variety of foods—especially plenty of veggies, fruits and whole grains. Listen to your body's cues; eat when you're hungry and stop when you're comfortably full, but not overstuffed.

Strive for a diet that's moderate in sugar, fat, salt and alcohol—unless you have a physical condition that requires you to limit such treats, there's no reason why you shouldn't enjoy them occasionally.

If you treat food like a pleasure rather than an enemy, you're less likely to have out-of-control cravings for "forbidden" foods—because nothing is forbidden. Even better, you'll have started a plan you can stay on for life.

Resolve to quit smoking.

If you're a longtime smoker, you already may be making—and breaking—this resolution every year. Not only is nicotine physically addictive, but many smokers have made their habit so much a part of their lives that they don't know how to fill



the void when they stop.

This year, try these strategies to kick the habit once and for all:

- **Decide why you personally want to quit.** What motivates one smoker may be meaningless to another. Your personal reasons for quitting could range from reducing your cancer risk to ridding your hair and clothes of stale smoke odors to saving the money you currently spend on cigarettes.
- **Plan ahead for the times when temptation strikes.** Make a list of things you can do instead of smoking—talking to a supportive person, getting some fresh air, chewing gum or carrot sticks, so you're prepared when a strong craving hits.
- **Spend time in places where you can't smoke,** such as libraries or shopping malls.
- **Stay away from triggers.** It might be wise to avoid bars if you get an irresistible urge to light up as soon as you enter one. If you're accustomed to a mid-

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CONQUERING THE COMMON COLD

Chances are, you'll find yourself laid low this winter by a bug that's making the rounds. Follow some simple do's and don'ts to help yourself feel better until your body fights off the sickness.

Americans catch about a billion colds every year, and when winter weather chases everyone indoors, disease spreads quickly. The next time you're stuck at home with a stuffy nose and a cough, try these tips to ease your suffering:

- Don't assume your doctor will prescribe antibiotics to cure what ails you. Antibiotics fight bacteria, while colds are caused by viruses. Unfortunately, antibiotics won't help a cold, so you'll need to let the cold run its course.
- Do try the herbal supplement echinacea or zinc lozenges to reduce the length and severity of a cold. Some studies suggest that these substances may help your body recover more quickly.

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ARE PROTEIN DIETS THE ANSWER FOR WEIGHT LOSS?

Many dieters have lost weight quickly on high-protein, low-carbohydrate eating plans and claim that they feel great. But the current high-protein diet fad also brings higher health risks—and likely won't work in the long run.

It seems too good to be true—eat no-nos like bacon, hamburgers, cheese and mayonnaise and still lose weight? The new crop of protein diets claim to do just that.

While these diets recently have received a great deal of publicity, the concept is nothing new. The Atkins and Scarsdale diet crazes of the 1970s also touted the benefits of restricting carbohydrates, such as fruits, breads, pasta and cereal, in favor of meat and dairy products.

Sure, dieters on a high-protein, low-carb eating plan can lose five to seven pounds in the first few days alone. But that quick weight loss may come at the expense of your well-being.

Carbohydrates help your body perform vital tasks, such as maintaining brain function—and if you don't eat enough carbohydrates, your body must make its own. This throws your system into a state of ketosis, or a partial breakdown of body fat.

As part of this process, your body releases chemicals called ketones, which in turn cause a rapid loss of water. So when you see that initial dip on the scale, you've probably shed pounds of fluid, not fat. Over time, you may find yourself feeling dizzy, nauseous, weak or tired from the ketones your body produces.

Because these diets limit fruits, veggies and whole grains, you miss out on important disease-fighting nutrients, such as vitamin C and fiber. Eating lots of protein also can strain your kidneys because they're suddenly forced to filter the additional nitrogen that meat contains. Researchers don't know exactly what long-term effects this

may have on your system. However, they do know that a high-protein eating plan can be loaded with fatty foods, and a high-fat diet is a leading cause of heart disease.

Like any nutrient, protein has a place in your diet. But if you hope to lose weight while staying healthy, you're better off making protein part of a nutritious eating plan where all foods are permitted in moderation.

FAST FACT

On average, obese people's lives are four years shorter than their normal-weight peers, even if they're otherwise healthy.

—Duke University study

OWNING A PET CAN BE GOOD FOR YOU

A quick route to better health may come with four legs and a tail. Studies show that owning or having frequent contact with pets can be relaxing, which can help head off stress-related ailments.

If you own a pet, you probably enjoy snuggling up on the sofa with a purring cat or playing a game of fetch with your dog. But did you know that you're also improving your health while caring for Fido and Fluffy? Research shows that those who care for pets may lower their stress levels.



In a recent study at New York's University of Buffalo, a group of stockbrokers who were under a doctor's care for high blood pressure received an unusual prescription: Take home a dog or cat and care for the animal for six months. At the study's conclusion, many of the test subjects reported a significant drop in blood pressure. Lower blood pressure means lower risk of heart disease and stroke—two of the most common causes of death in this country today.

Regular contact with animals can benefit children as well. Those who grow up with pets learn at a young age to take care of other living things and develop nurturing skills that they'll carry with them into adulthood.

If allergies or other considerations prevent you from having a cat or dog in the house, take heart—studies have shown that watching fish swim through an aquarium has much the same calming effect.

Ask The Experts



Q. I've heard mothers-to-be can arrange to donate their babies' umbilical cord blood immediately after birth. How does this process work, and what are the benefits?

A. Researchers recently discovered that the blood that remains in a baby's umbilical cord after birth can help fight many life-threatening diseases. The cord's unique benefits lie in the stem cells, or blood cells that have not yet differentiated into white and red cells. These cells have many of the same benefits as bone marrow, but they're much less likely to cause rejection in their recipient when transplanted.

Cord blood has been used for research purposes and to treat ailments such as leukemia, Hodgkin's disease, lymphoma and osteoporosis. Researchers believe stem cells eventually may hold great promise for those with breast or ovarian cancer, AIDS, diabetes or other conditions.

While you need to plan ahead and let your doctor and hospital know of your donation plans before your due date, the donation process itself is simple. A health-care practitioner generally extracts the blood immediately after birth. The process, which takes no more than 10 minutes, is painless for both mother and baby and poses no health risks. Once the blood is drawn, you can donate the blood to a public bank for others to use. You also have the option of saving it for your own family, although this usually involves a storage fee.

Many hospitals in major urban areas such as New York and Chicago have begun to accept donations. While cord blood donation is becoming more common, it may not be available in all areas. If you're interested in donating, call the International Cord Blood Foundation at 1-800-747-3319 for more information.

DON'T GET CAUGHT IN THE NET OF FALSE INFORMATION

With the wealth of health-related information available on the Internet, it can be hard to tell whom to believe. Healthy skepticism and careful consideration can help you separate the quality sites from the quacks.

Nutrition tips, exercise programs, articles on illnesses, the scoop on the latest medical studies—today, this information is all available with a click of the mouse.

The Internet has become a wonderful resource for all sorts of news and advice, and health information is no exception. Search for a specific topic,

and your computer will spit out results by the hundreds.

But as the Internet grows, so does the possibility that you'll run across information that's questionable, poorly researched or just plain wrong. Remember that anyone with a computer, modem and server space can put a page on the Internet, regardless of medical expertise.

The nonprofit Health on the Net Foundation (<http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct.html>) awards its HONCode seal of approval to health-related Web pages that meet strict guidelines. Still, Web designers easily

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SIMPLE RESOLUTION *continued from page 1*

morning cigarette break at work, having a cup of coffee or glass of water instead, or take your break somewhere in the office where smoking is forbidden.

• **Seek support from family and friends.** Give them specific ways to help—reminding you of your goal or not smoking around you, for example.

• **Reward yourself along the way.** Kicking the habit is tough—be proud of every day you've gone without a cigarette.

Resolve to lead a more active life. Exercise doesn't have to be punishing and painful, involving lots of leaping about in leotards or pounding the pavement during a pre-dawn run. Taking several small "exercise breaks," as short as 10 minutes each, can be just as beneficial as working out for a half-hour straight. By breaking your workout time into small bites, you may find it easier to work exercise into your busy schedule.

Rethink your daily routine, and you'll find endless opportunities to fit activity into your schedule. Park far away from the door of your office or the mall and walk the extra distance. Take the stairs instead of the elevator at work, or walk to a co-worker's office for an in-person chat instead of using the phone.

Also, look for opportunities to add activity to your leisure time. Take up dancing or a sport with a friend, or organize family outings centered on walking, biking or even swimming. You'll soon discover plenty of

painless ways to boost your fitness level without realizing you're working out.

Resolve to relax.

While you may argue that you can't afford to take time for yourself, the truth of the matter is that you can't afford not to. The effects of stress on your body add up over time and can lead to chronic fatigue, headaches, ulcers and a weakened immune system. Even if you don't develop these problems, your body won't function at its peak if you subject it to constant stress.

If you've fallen out of the habit of relaxing, these suggestions can get you started:

• **Seek out other people's company.** People who have close relationships with others often find it easier to weather the storms of everyday life.

• **Sign up for a yoga or biofeedback class, or join a meditation group.** These techniques show you how to clear your mind and relax your muscles during stressful times.

• **Cultivate a hobby or interest that's not related to your job.**

• **Breathe deeply when faced with a stressful situation.**

• **Instead of a hurried shower, soak in a warm tub for 10 to 20 minutes.**

As simple as they sound, these resolutions add up to a healthier body and mind. If you make and keep them this year, you'll soon find yourself on the way to wellness.

SNOW SHOVELING CAN BE HAZARDOUS TO YOUR HEALTH

Each winter, emergency rooms see a surge in patients who collapse from heart attacks while shoveling snow. This wintertime chore is hard physical work, and those who lead inactive lifestyles should be careful to start slowly.

According to a recent study, people who never exercise are more than 30 times more likely to have a heart attack during sudden physical exertion than at any other time. Winter is prime time for such exertion, as homeowners in cold climates gear up for another season of shoveling.

Sudden exercise—such as lifting and tossing heavy shovels full of snow—strains your circulatory system if your body isn't accustomed to activity, and frigid temperatures put even more stress on your body. The cold can constrict blood vessels around your heart, increase blood pressure and change the way your

blood clots. All of these factors can add up to a heart attack in people who have coronary disease or are at risk of developing it.

The American Heart Association recommends that only those who are physically fit and not in danger of developing heart disease shovel snow. If you're at risk, but you're the family's designated shoveler, watch for the warning signs of a heart attack while clearing your walkways. Stop right away and seek medical help if you experience chest pains or pressure, pain that spreads to your shoulder or arm, nausea or shortness of breath.

Even if you're in great shape, remember that shoveling gives your body a real workout. As with any exercise, you should start slowly and gradually work up to more intense activity.

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can lift a logo from another page and publish it without permission. In the end, your own common sense offers the best protection against Net quackery.

Keep these questions in mind as you surf:

• **Who's running the site?** Pages developed and maintained by well-respected health authorities, such as the Mayo Clinic or the American Medical Association, likely hold more weight than those published by a person or organization with no apparent credentials.

• **Does the site promote products?**

The information may be less than objective, or even driven by advertisers who have bought space on the site.

• **Does the site charge for information?**

If so, move on. There's no reason to pay for information that you can find elsewhere for free.

• **Does the site guarantee that a treatment or product will benefit**

everyone? Our bodies are unique—only your doctor can determine exactly what will work for you.

• **Do the claims seem too good to be true?** If so, as the saying goes, they probably are.

Finally, remember that no Web page should take the place of a physician. If information you've found on the Internet worries you, ask your doctor's opinion at your next office visit.

The following well-respected Web sites can start you surfing toward better health:

- www.allhealth.com
- www.americasdoctor.com
- www.cdc.gov
- www.drkoop.com
- www.healthyideas.com
- www.intelihealth.com
- www.medicconsult.com
- www.onhealth.com
- www.planetrx.com
- www.thehealthnetwork.com
- www.thriveonline.com

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• Don't smoke while you're sick. Cigarette smoke irritates nasal and throat tissues and may slow the healing process.

• Do take over-the-counter painkillers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, to bring down a fever or relieve aching muscles.

• Don't give aspirin to a child who has a cold with a fever, as this can cause a life-threatening disease called Reye's syndrome.

• Do get lots of sleep and drink plenty of fluids, especially water. A virus has more difficulty infecting a well-hydrated body.

• Do eat nutritious foods, including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, to keep your immune system functioning at peak levels. Spicy foods may relieve your congestion.

• Don't consume dairy products if you have a stuffy nose—they may make your mucus thicker.

• Don't ignore symptoms that persist for more than 10 days. Nasal congestion that doesn't improve with time may be caused by a sinus infection or allergies. A severe sore throat may signal a strep infection, and tightness in the chest accompanied by a cough may mean your bug has progressed into bronchitis or even pneumonia. If you have more severe symptoms or your cold drags on for more than 10 days, contact your doctor—these conditions may need to be treated with medication.

While you can't cure a cold, following these tips can help you feel better fast while your immune system does its job.

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Please consult with the appropriate professional before acting on any news or advice included in this publication.

FAST FACT

Approximately 100,000 motor vehicle accidents and 1,500 fatalities are caused each year by drivers who haven't had enough sleep.

— National Highway Traffic Safety Administration