



December

Member Newsletter



Renew Your Course for Better Health

Did you fall off the health improvement bandwagon at some point this year, or never really got in gear in the first place? Take heart. Whether your efforts were derailed due to wrong timing, competing responsibilities, or just not being the right course for you, these tips will help you get on—and stay on—the road to healthier habits.

- **Redefine why you want to reset your course.** Maybe you want to get stronger to play with your kids or exert yourself without getting winded, have your clothes fit better, lower your blood pressure, or just feel less stagnant and stuck. Identifying your “why” can lead to making a solid plan to reach your goal.
- **Look for novel ways to get active physically and mentally.** Consider a guided nature walk sponsored by your local parks and recreation department, or attend free local art workshops, cooking demos, yoga drop-ins, etc. This could be the refreshing spark to help jump-start your quest for better well-being.
- **Tackle only one healthy goal at a time, and go slow to build your habit.** Break your goal into small, manageable steps that are measurable. This might mean plotting an increasingly longer walking routine, starting with just a 10-minute jaunt around your neighborhood.
- **Forget willpower—create a routine to keep you on course!** For example, carve out a regular time for your walk around your neighborhood to occur right after your morning coffee or midday break, so it becomes a habit.
- **Create habits you can truly keep—try healthy swaps.** As an example: swap seltzer for soda, saving you over 20 grams of sugar. For more ideas, visit: <https://chear.ucsd.edu/blog/10-ways-to-make-lifestyle-changes-easy>
- **Make getting healthy enticing!** Want to start exercising? Get some snazzy sneakers and lively workout gear that make you want to move!
- **Buddy up.** Pair up with someone who is ready, willing and committed to a healthier course and can help keep you accountable.
- **Start tracking!** Whether you use a habit tracker app, a journal or make a simple mark on your calendar, it's gratifying and motivating to see your progress.



The Secrets to Sound Sleep

Sound sleep is important to your overall health and well-being. Sleep helps the body restore itself for the next day by recharging your body and your brain. When you get a good night's sleep, not only do you feel physically better, you are better at solving problems, coping with stress, controlling your emotions, and processing and retaining information. This evening while preparing for bed, consider the following secrets to sound sleep.

 **Set a sleep schedule.** Go to bed at the same time each night and wake up at the same time each morning with the goal of getting at least 7 hours of sleep. Most adults don't need more than 8 hours of sleep each night to meet sleep recommendations. Follow this pattern every day of the week. Consistency reinforces your body's sleep/wake cycle and promotes better sleep at night.

 **Create a sleep-friendly bedroom.** A sleep-friendly bedroom promotes sleep through comfort and relaxation.

 **Eat and drink smartly.** Be sure not to consume any caffeinated drinks or foods close to bedtime. Limit how much you drink before bedtime to prevent middle-of-the-night trips to the bathroom.

 **Find a bedtime routine.** By doing the same activities each night before bed, you can train your body to wind down in preparation for sleep.

 **Turn off your electronics.** The light, noise and stimulation from electronics—including TVs and cell phones—can keep you from getting a full night's rest.

 **Address your stress before bedtime** for more restful sleep. Stress from the day can become overwhelming at night if you're unable to quiet your mind.

 **Keep a sleep journal** if you're having trouble sleeping. Write down the time you go to bed each night, what time you wake up, and why you wake up during sleep, or what is causing you to stay awake and not be able to sleep. This can help you to identify any changes you may need to make to improve your sleep.

Many people occasionally have a poor night's sleep or trouble getting to sleep, but if you frequently suffer from sleep issues, contact your primary care physician. Your doctor can take steps to identify and treat underlying causes of sleep problems.

Beat the Seasonal Blues

The flurry of seasonal activities can add to the stress of everyday life. And for some people, the holiday obligations and the pressure to be merry can trigger feelings of anxiety, sadness or loneliness. Try these tips to tap into the holiday spirit in ways that can help make you feel delighted rather than drained:



- **Focus on activities that truly matter to you.** It could be the simple act of giving and receiving greetings or attending a local holiday concert with a friend versus going to lots of parties. Or, doing fun activities like seeing the lights with the kids, or volunteering at a food bank versus baking dozens of treats.
- **Appreciate the small moments of joy.** Just seeing the winter moon shining through the trees or your dog romping through the first snowfall can bring heartfelt delight.
- **Share the load.** You don't have to handle the festivities alone and it doesn't have to be perfect! Invite others to bring their favorite dish to a potluck, for example.
- **Rethink gift-buying.** Consider bypassing the frantic shopping, wrapping, shipping costs, etc., and focus instead on sharing the warmth of the season. Take grandma or your brother to brunch for some memorable one-on-one time, for example. Or, make donations to a charity in someone's name on your list.
- **Sidestep squabbles.** With more time spent indoors at family gatherings, tensions can surface.
- **Instead of reacting,** just observe what you're feeling and greet your emotions with kindness. This may help you experience better connectedness with others.
- **Block out time to slow down and recharge.** Read or listen to music by candlelight. Keep your sleep schedule on track and eat nutritious meals, avoiding filling up on holiday goodies! Plus, curb alcohol, which can affect your moods.
- **Feeling overwhelmed?** Take a break to walk outside. A walk in the fresh air, feeling your feet firmly strike the ground, can bring you back to the calmness of the moment, silencing anxious thoughts.

Don't suffer through the "seasonal blues."

Talk to your doctor about a referral to a licensed counselor, or contact a licensed counselor for help.

For more help, talk to Health Advocate, your health practitioner or a licensed counselor.

Deep Relaxation for Better Sleep

Visit [HealthAdvocate.com/members](https://www.healthadvocate.com/members) to log onto your member website and access the EAP+Work/Life homepage. [Click on Webinar.](#)

Safe Toys and Gifts Month

If you're shopping for kids' toys, make sure they are safe and the toy is right for a child's age and skill level. Read labels. Check if the toys have passed a safety inspection by "ASTM," the American Society for Testing and Materials standards. Fabric toys should be labeled flame retardant or flame resistant. Painted toys must use lead-free paint. Crayons and paints should be "non toxic." Avoid toys with ropes, sharp edges, heating elements, loud horns or noises, or that have small parts like magnets or small button batteries that can be a choking hazard, especially for children under 3.

Visit: <https://www.kidshealth.org/en/parents/safe-toys.html>