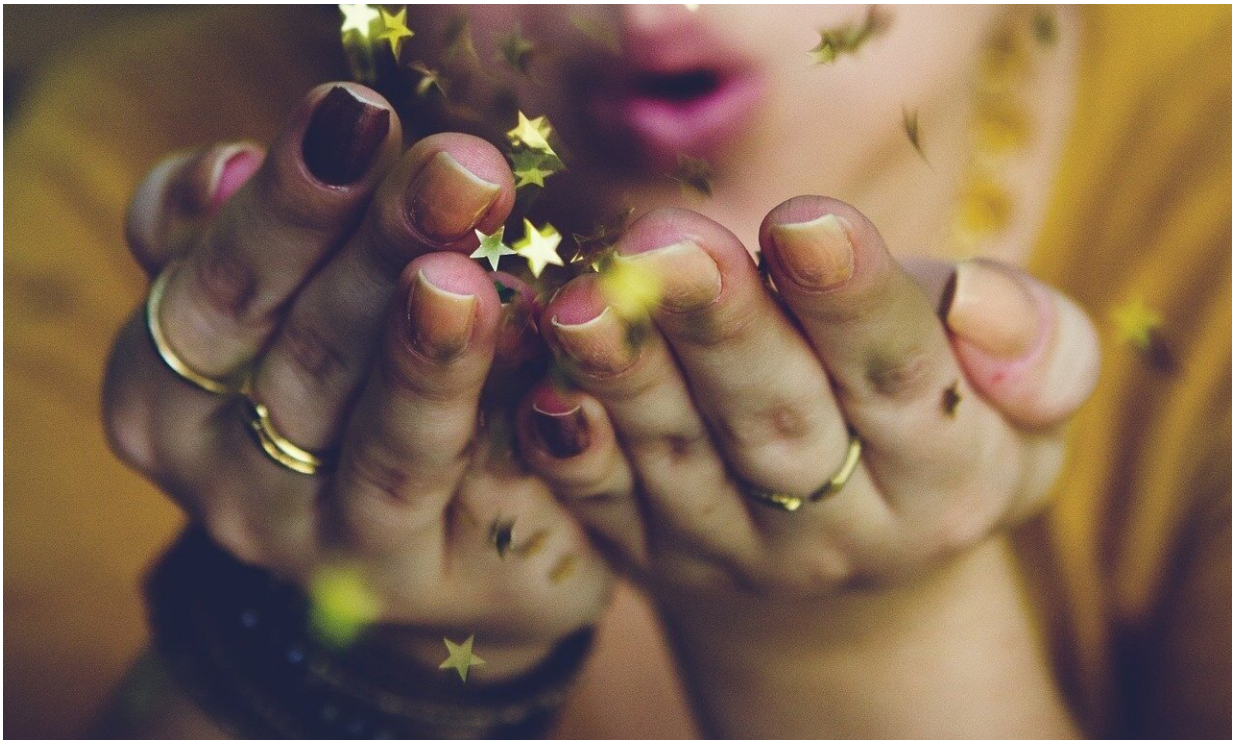


# Why your New Year's resolution should be self-acceptance

December 17 2019, by Kristen Mitchell

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A new year brings a season of change and the opportunity to focus on goals for the future. For many people, however, resolutions about weight loss and eating can often reinforce negative messages about bodies and prop up unrealistic stereotypes.

Kavita Daiya, a professor in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences and director of the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, said the most successful New Year's resolutions focus on self-acceptance and achieving specific active goals—not vague platitudes about weight loss.

Read what Dr. Daiya had to say about body positivity ahead of the [holiday season](#):

**Q: There is a lot of talk about bodies and food around the holidays. What impact does that have on how we see ourselves?**

A: Yes, the holidays are so much about enjoying food, family and celebration together, and about New Year's resolutions. Media representations of the holidays and New Year's resolutions can often reinforce negative and unrealistic body stereotypes, especially in advertising. As we discussed in my Gender and Media course this fall, a lot of media content is shaped by advertisers, and advertising aims to get us to buy stuff and buy into stuff: hence, for example, the recent [Peloton controversy](#). Being surrounded by these [negative messages](#) that there's something wrong with how we are right now, and that we need to change or remake ourselves and our bodies to fit an unreal, photoshopped image can be very stressful, to say the least.

**Q: How should we reframe the way we think about holiday eating and New Year's resolutions?**

A: First, as we discussed in our class, this reframing is much needed in our society: it begin with an acceptance of self that says, "How I am, and how we are, is fine." We're bombarded by images of super-skinny women in our media, when the reality is that nearly 70% of American

women wear plus size clothes. Second, we need to understand that holiday eating is a very, very small percentage of our annual calendar. We should focus on bigger values such as gratitude and family, and enjoying the season. I believe that New Year's resolutions should be positive, and I really don't think they should ever be about your health because it suggests that you can only start in the [new year](#). There is always room for treats in life! Instead of worrying about holiday treats, I prioritize sleep, balance, movement (dancing, running), and fueling my body. I don't believe in binging for the holidays with a plan to 'detox' for the new year—I believe in enjoying the holidays.

The research shows that resolutions about [holiday](#) eating will work only if they include self-acceptance. Any resolution in life will work if it's about achieving a particular active [goal](#): I do better when I aim for being able to run two miles in 20 minutes, than in trying to get to some abstract weight goal. The former is inspiring and satisfying when you get there—the latter sends me a negative message about where I am now. So, in a way, it's false advertising too.

## **Q: How can individuals who want to pursue fitness or weight loss goals in 2020 approach pursuing those goals in a healthy way?**

A: As I said above, the best way to pursue fitness goals is to actually get rid of the [weight loss](#) goals. We must begin with accepting and celebrating our body diversity, the diversity of our skin colors, our embodiments. This is us! We discussed the Hulu show [Shrill](#) in our course, and we all loved how Annie challenges the obsession with women's bodies and the pressures on women to look a certain way or be a certain size. Any goal, whether it is to write a book or to learn how to bench-press 200 pounds (as one of my students can), will succeed if underneath, there's something positive driving it—an aspiration to grow

a strength, experience something new or share an idea. That's how I approach it: defining goals in terms of expanding one's capacities, skills and experiences is likely to be more motivating.

**Q: What are some things people can do to begin cultivating better body positivity this holiday season?**

A: First, let's accept and embrace ourselves and others. As the graphic artist and NPR editor Malaka Gharib said to my students when she visited on the last day of class: "You are complete." I often see women judging other women, commenting on how they look in negative ways, etc. We need to stop that and call out folks who do that. This might also involve switching off media that reinforces negative body stereotypes and supporting shows that are more thoughtful and progressive about embodiment and diversity.

**Q: How should people respond when a friend or relative makes negative comments about another person's body or food choices during the holidays?**

A: This is a tough one. I would say: use a combination of humor and distance. Do your best to find the funny in things. Grandma's cookies only come around once a year! Distance yourself from the negative people in your social circles and gravitate toward the positive ones. With persistently tone-deaf people you can't shake, it is possible to say, "What do you mean by that?" or "Why would you say/think that?" A question like that invites people to self-reflect. If all else fails, one has to say, "When you said that, it was very hurtful to me. Please don't make comments like that to me again." I've had to say that a couple of times in my life. I see it as being an act of what author Kim Scott calls "[radical candor](#)." You're actually doing them a favor by letting them know the impact of their words. If they're smart, they won't repeat that mistake in

the future, and you'll have helped them have better relationships with friends and family. Happy holidays!

Provided by George Washington University

Citation: Why your New Year's resolution should be self-acceptance (2019, December 17)  
retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-12-year-resolution-self-acceptance.html>

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