

# Here's to a healthy 2021, with resolutions from heart doctors

December 29 2020, by Michael Merschel

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Deep in their hearts, everyone has to be looking forward to a fresh start

in 2021.

And who would know better about matters of the [heart](#) than a cardiologist? We asked some of the nation's best about resolutions—what they're planning for themselves, and what they wish their patients would focus on for a healthy and happy new year.

Their advice begins with a reminder that the threat of COVID-19 will not vanish at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 31.

"You need to resolve to stay healthy and safe," said Dr. Ivor Benjamin, director of the Cardiovascular Center and professor of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. "It's an ever-present challenge for everyone, independent of where they are."

In California, Dr. Robert Harrington is chair of the department of medicine at Stanford University. He's making its institutional motto a personal one as the fight against the coronavirus goes on.

Stanford Medicine tells its [health care workers](#), researchers, staff and students to be safe, be smart, be kind, said Harrington, a past president of the American Heart Association. "So my personal resolution is that I will work at staying safe through good public health measures of mask-wearing, frequent hand-washing and appropriate social distancing; at staying smart by keeping up to date with the latest news and research on COVID-19; and at staying kind by focusing on our extended community needs.

"Here's hoping that my patients can do the same."

Even as the pandemic is a top health concern, there's room for thinking beyond it.

"The new year is always a good time for patients to reprioritize their health," said Dr. Fatima Rodriguez, an assistant professor of cardiovascular medicine at Stanford. She'd like patients to focus on [healthy eating](#) and scheduling physical activity every day. "There are no quick fixes to optimal cardiovascular health. It takes consistency."

Dr. Rachel M. Bond, system director of women's heart health at Dignity Health in Arizona, suggests resolving to learn the art of relaxation.

"Although stress and anxiety are common—and we've had more than our fair share of both in 2020—[chronic stress](#) and anxiety can be dangerous for our heart [health](#)." Anxiety can trigger the release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which can increase heart rate and blood pressure. Women are at higher risk for stress-related heart issues, Bond said.

"Finding healthy ways to cope with this is a must," she said. She suggests meditation, exercise, listening to music, conversing with family or friends or even seeking professional help.

Relaxation was on Rodriguez's mind with her personal resolutions. She's aiming to take time to disconnect from devices—"no email, no cellphones, no social media. I'd also love to prioritize time for reading non-medical literature and journaling."

Bond said she isn't traditionally a resolution-maker. "I usually try to shy away from making yearly resolutions, as if I fail to stick to them, I feel an extreme level of guilt."

To that point—Benjamin, a past president of the AHA, said it's important to make resolutions that are realistic.

For example, he'd like to lower his handicap in golf. "But it's kind of

hard to do that when I live in Wisconsin and there's still snow on the ground for the next four to five months."

For patients looking to make healthy changes, Benjamin offers this simple advice year-round: "I am looking for progress, and not perfection."

For example, instead of setting out to run a marathon, a good resolution for adults might be to follow the federal recommendation to get at least 150 minutes of brisk exercise every week. "I tell my patients walk 30 minutes a day and take a day or two off for good measure. Just do the math, and you're going to get there."

He and Bond both looked inward with some of their personal goals. Benjamin hopes he can spend more time in the present, "so that I can be a catalyst and, hopefully, a positive force for everything that's around me."

And Bond said "with 2020 being a year for the history books—and a chapter I am eager to close," she's focused on gratitude.

"What 2020 has taught me is that life-altering triumphs, no matter how great or small, should be celebrated, as who knows what tomorrow may bring. ... I choose to take an initiative to ensure I am thankful for all the small mercies I've experienced and will continue to experience in my life."

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