

Nutritional new year's resolutions

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Credit: Mary LaFrance/public domain

The new year encourages creative resolutions after indulging throughout the holidays. Nutritional goals, when set in moderation, can have a lasting effect on overall physical health. A registered dietitian with Baylor College of Medicine outlines nutrition-based goals for the new year.

Dry January

Giving up alcohol for even a month can be a habit-forming, beneficial resolution.

"The point of dry January is not just to detox the body from alcohol, but to create the habit of decreasing alcohol throughout the year," said Courtney Cary, senior registered dietitian in the Department of Medicine–Gastroenterology and Hepatology at Baylor.

The body absorbs nutrients better when alcohol is not in the system. Collagen, the protein in the body that contributes to [healthy skin](#), is not broken down when drinking, so skin can appear healthier when avoiding alcohol. Try replacing alcohol with water-based beverages that will keep you better hydrated throughout the day.

Meatless January/Veganuary

The American Institute for Cancer Research states that meat and [animal products](#) are generally more carcinogenic than plant products. High fiber, plant-based foods are better for longevity, general health and digestion.

"Giving up meat or animal products for a month can have long-term benefits, because you get in the habit of building meals and snacks that are plant-based. You realize it is possible and that becomes more of a habit throughout the year," Cary said.

If you plan to try a meatless diet, you can include dairy and eggs for lean protein:

- Eggs

- Low fat cottage cheese with fruit
- Low fat yogurt with fruit
- Hard boiled egg on whole wheat toast
- Whole wheat crackers with eggs

You can still consume starch, protein and healthy fats on a vegan diet by eating snacks such as bananas or apples with peanut butter or crackers or vegetables with hummus.

Sweetless January

Cary does not recommend cutting out concentrated sweets from your diet entirely as it can lead to binging. Instead, consume them in very moderate amounts. If you frequently drink juice or soda, decrease your consumption of sweetened beverages, as they do not provide nutritive value. Switch from juice to sparkling water with a powdered beverage enhancer to get that sweet flavor without adding non-nutritive calories.

"Our bodies need carbohydrates. If you want something sweet like a cupcake or half a chocolate bar, have it. Enjoy concentrated sweets in moderation. If you cut it out for a month, it might lead to a binge the following month," Cary said.

Naturally occurring sugar found in fruit or dairy products should remain in your diet as the body needs these sugars for energy. Yogurt with semi-sweet chocolate chips or fruit is a good dessert containing naturally occurring sugars.

Juice cleanse

Cary emphasizes avoiding juice cleanses. Juice cleanses starve the body, and once you begin eating [solid food](#) again, it leads you to overeat and

gain the weight again.

"A juice cleanse does not cleanse anything. We have a liver and kidneys for that purpose," she said.

Nutrition goals

If you make nutritional goals this year, Cary recommends getting in tune with your biology cues for hunger and fullness by fueling your hunger instead of ignoring it, as well as respecting your fullness. She says to improve relationships with food while listening to your body.

Restricting specific food groups is unnecessary and bingeing is often the outcome. Putting food off-limits leads to stronger cravings.

"No food should be labeled as 'good' or 'bad.' It is just fuel—it doesn't have moral value. I don't believe in restricting food, because when you eat or drink it again, you will have an all or nothing mentality," Cary said.

"Say no to the diet mentality and start listening to hunger and satiety cues. Give your body dignity when it's full and eat when hungry. Try not to restrict too much because it leads to bingeing," she said.

Physical and nutritional wellbeing is only one category of wellbeing, so remember to focus on all facets of wellbeing, including emotional, psychological, familial and relationship wellbeing.

"New year's resolutions don't have to be about your health or what you can restrict. It's about what you can give your [body](#)," Cary said.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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