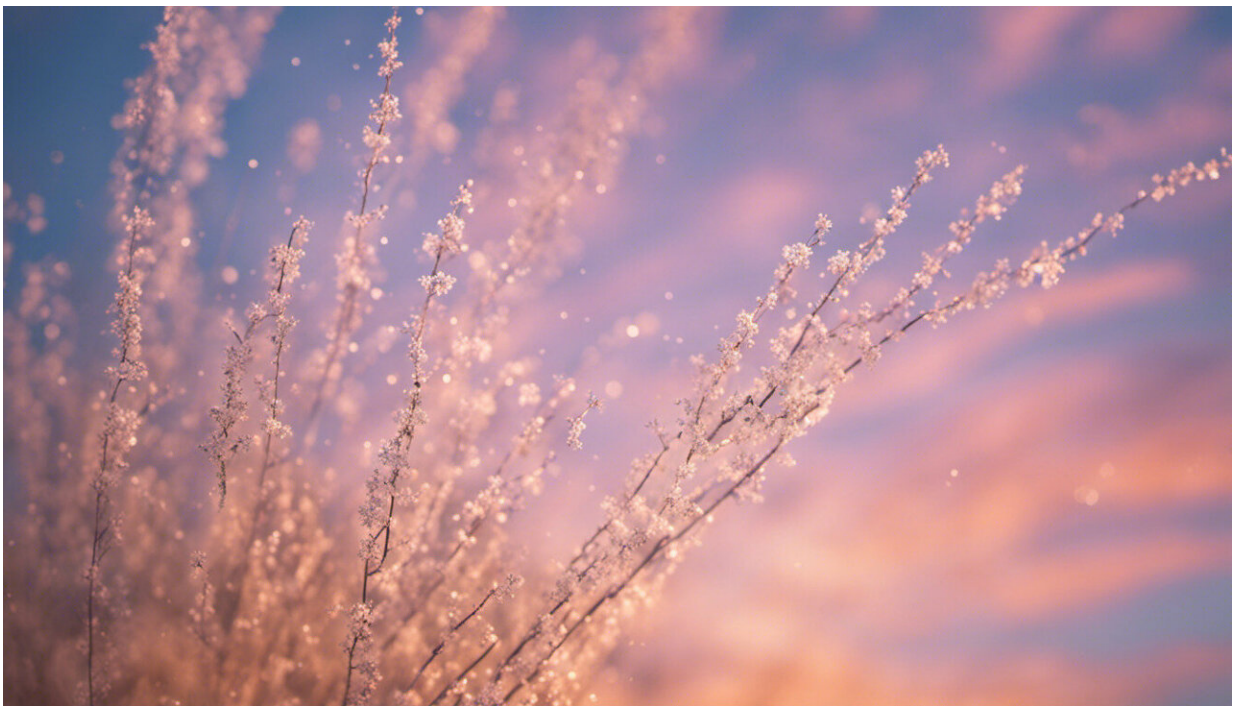


'Drained and wary of the future': Why you might feel different about New Year's resolutions this year

January 3 2022, by Jayashri Kulkarni



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

At the beginning of each year, many people make vows to either do or not do something to improve their life in some way. The fresh start of a new year is magically equated with a fresh start to life and often imbued with renewed hope that *this* year things will be better.

As we enter 2022, after two years of living with COVID-19, this hope may be stronger than usual.

The pandemic's impacts have ranged from deaths and other adverse effects on physical and [mental health](#), to huge changes in employment, income, travel, leisure and the ability to socialize. The effect on individuals has varied considerably, depending on what their life was like beforehand, how much it has affected them personally, and their own resilience.

Based on discussions with colleagues and patients, we may see resolutions driven by loss, guilt and anger, plus a rush on common types of self-improvement resolutions and a greater drive for overall life changes.

Resilience

How we respond to the shocks of the pandemic depends in part on our [resilience](#): the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. It involves "bouncing back" from difficult experiences, and it can also involve personal growth.

People who have lost loved ones to COVID may respond with New Year's resolutions, but they may take positive or negative forms.

Positive resolutions might be commitments to honor the deceased in some way, or to live well because your loved one cannot. A pact or vow made with or to a deceased loved one to "live life better" can be a powerful, positive motivator to change bad health habits such as smoking, excessive drinking or gambling, although professional help is advisable to ensure safe and lasting change.

Negative resolutions, often driven by strong feelings of anger and despair, might be vows to seek revenge or punish those who may seem responsible for the death of their relative or friend.

"Revenge resolutions" are not usually helpful adaptations and may spring from a sense of guilt arising from not being able to save their loved one or spend time with them.

People who survived a COVID infection while a loved one did not, in particular, [often experience strong feelings of guilt](#).

Guilt-driven resolutions are driven by powerful emotions. They are likely to be realized in some form throughout the year, when hopefully the driving emotions become less intense by the following year.

Personal improvement

Since the virus has posed a major health risk, it would make sense for more people than ever to choose the New Year to resolve to improve their own health.

Quitting smoking is a very common New Year's [resolution](#), and it seems even more sensible than usual amid a global pandemic of a virus that mainly attacks the respiratory system. However, as many people have found in the past, giving up cigarettes is very difficult and often requires significant planning and help to succeed.

While the pandemic may have made the desire for change stronger, it does not magically make resolutions any easier to achieve. This applies similarly to resolutions to change the use of alcohol or other drugs, which would also benefit from planning and professional help.

Weight loss is another favorite New Year's resolution. The famous

"COVID kilos" will no doubt drive more people than usual to resolve to lose weight in 2022.

Crash diets are common, but are often abandoned by February. Careful eating and an exercise plan accompanying the resolution will make it more likely to succeed.

Bigger changes

While COVID is likely to give an extra edge to common resolutions, we are also likely to see a surge in resolutions for overall "lifestyle change." Many people's attitudes to work and family have changed dramatically over the past two years, due to travel restrictions, work or study from home, and little socialization with those outside our immediate families.

This hugely significant alteration in our way of life has caused many people to reconsider their futures.

Many have found great enjoyment in spending time with family and are now rethinking their work–home balance. Discovering that working from home is possible has made many people reconsider their career options moving into 2022.

Some [experts anticipate](#) a post-pandemic work exodus, dubbed the "great resignation," in which millions of people, from frontline workers to senior executives, may resign from their jobs.

According to [recent research](#) by Microsoft, more than 40% of the global workforce are considering leaving their employers. This trend is expected to be replicated in different industries in the U.S., UK and Europe. In Australia, this trend is not evident, but nonetheless, a New Year's resolution may be to determine a different type of employment for 2022 and beyond.

Two paths for 2022

COVID-19 has left most of us drained and wary of the future. Many people believed the pandemic would end in 2020, but 2021 brought more infection, lockdowns and restrictions.

In times of trauma, when the future is uncertain, there can be a polarization of behaviors. Some [people](#) adopt a "devil may care, live for now" attitude to life, with greater risk taking. Others take the opposite attitude, and exercise extreme caution and narrow their existence further.

Both groups may well make New Year's resolutions to fit their approach to life.

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