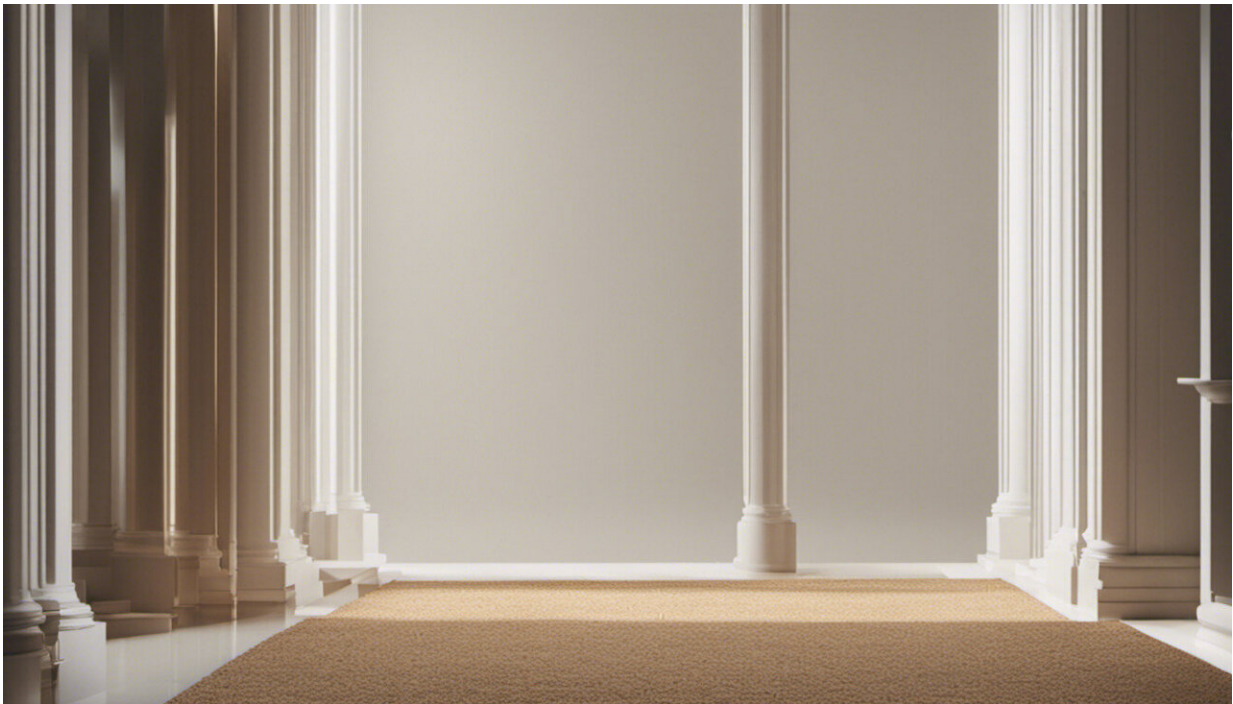


Simple steps for better nutrition and improved health in the new year

December 21 2022



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

This is the time of year we make big promises to ourselves: "I will lose weight, start exercising, eat healthier..." But creating lasting behavior change is tough. Even if your end goal is big, research shows that baby steps are more likely to lead to sustainable, manageable, long lasting behavior change that gets you the results you want. Here are some

simple, science-backed, small ways to make a big impact on your health:

Fit in Fiber: One change that will have a major positive impact on your entire dietary pattern is replacing low-fiber foods on your plate with naturally fiber-rich choices. Dietary fiber is naturally found in vegetables, fruits, [whole grains](#), beans, and nuts—plant foods that also provide vitamins, minerals, and healthful phytochemicals. A fiber-rich diet is associated with lower risk of diabetes, [heart disease](#), and colorectal cancer, as well as lower risk of dying from all causes, including heart attack and stroke. It may also help with weight loss .

The average U.S. adult gets about 15 grams of [dietary fiber](#) a day, lower than the recommended 20 grams for women and 30 grams for men. Aim to eat a variety of naturally fiber-rich foods throughout the day.

Small Change Suggestions: Put more colorful fruits and vegetables on your plate while cutting back on [white bread](#) and refined starch sides; choose whole grains and whole-grain foods over refined; snack on nuts or fruit instead of pretzels or potato chips if hunger strikes between meals; and add beans and lentils to soups, salads, and side dishes.

Take Charge

To achieve your health goals in this new year, use these well-established methods for successful [behavior change](#):

- **Set specific, realistic, short-term goals:** For example, choose one specific food or activity to increase or decrease, by a specific amount, within a certain time period. Then build on that with other similar goals.
- **Track your progress:** A written diary or [mobile app](#) are good options.
- **Engage family and friends:** Rely on people who can provide

support, encouragement, and accountability.

- **Get regular feedback:** Health care providers, family members, friends, or an app can all be helpful in reviewing your progress and telling you how you're doing.

Skip Sugary Drinks: If you can't start your day without that sugar-laden large vanilla mocha coffee confection, or you regularly drink soda, sports or [energy drinks](#), or sweetened iced tea, weaning yourself off these sugary drinks will be key to your health and weight loss resolutions. Intake of added sugars in drinks promotes weight gain and is linked to type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and gout, not to mention cavities.

Small Change Suggestions: Make a plan to cut back. Start by replacing one sweet drink a day with an unsweetened beverage. Water, seltzer, unsweetened coffee or tea, and unsweetened milk, soy, or nut drinks are the best choices. When you have adjusted to that change, cut back even further. For a pop of flavor or fizz, try a squeeze of citrus in plain water or combine sparkling water or seltzer with a splash of 100 percent fruit juice. Skip the syrups and whipped cream, and boost coffee and tea with plain milk or unsweetened milk alternatives (nut milks are naturally sweet tasting) or a dash of cinnamon. (Note: "Diet" drinks and sugar substitutes can help cut your intake of added sugars, but they will not help you tamp down your preference for sweets, so think of these as a bridge toward getting off of [sugary drinks](#), not a destination.)

Get Moving: Being active is associated with lower risk of chronic disease, as well as stronger bones and muscles, better brain health, boosted mood, improved ability to do [daily activities](#), and higher quality of life. Physical activity by itself does not help much with weight loss—changing your diet is necessary for that—but activity is helpful for maintaining [weight loss](#), and resistance exercise builds muscle mass. No matter your age, shape, size, or physical abilities, everyone can

experience health benefits from moving more.

Small Change Suggestions: Evidence shows that [physical activity](#) can be broken into increments as short as 10 minutes throughout the day and still be beneficial. Even everyday activities, such as standing, walking, or household chores count.

Swap Carbs: Americans eat way too many refined carbohydrates: refined grains, starches, and sugars. Eating refined grains (like white flour and products made from it) is associated with many negative health effects. A diet rich in minimally processed whole grains (oats, barley, quinoa, bulgur, buckwheat, wheat berries, and many more) and products made from them (whole wheat breads, steel-cut oats, and high fiber cereals, for example) is associated with better long-term health. Strive to make at least half the grains you eat whole grains. Use the Nutrition Facts label to identify products with at least one gram of fiber for every ten grams of carbohydrate per serving when buying packaged foods.

Small Change Suggestions: Swap in whole grain bread or crackers for white; cook whole grains like quinoa or barley instead of rice sides; and choose plain popcorn or nuts instead of pretzels and chips. Replacing refined carbs with naturally low-carb foods is even better: instead of cereal, enjoy a bowl of yogurt with fruit and nuts; instead of rice or bread, have a side of veggies or beans.

Resources

- [Get Adequate Sleep](#)
- [Stop Smoking](#)
- [Keep up with Health Screenings](#)
- [Get Help with Depression](#)
- [Address Alcohol Use](#)
- [Manage Stress](#)

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