

# New year new you

Popular New Year's resolutions include stopping smoking, losing weight and cutting back on alcohol. But don't give up on giving up – Rachel Newcombe suggests how.

**A**fter the excesses of the Christmas season, many of us aim to be healthier. Losing weight, eating a better diet, cutting back on alcohol and quitting smoking are all good aims to have – as each factor is crucially involved in good health.

Being overweight raises the risk of a whole range of diseases, including coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, some cancers and degenerative joint conditions. According to Weight Concern, 50 per cent of adults in Britain now weigh more than the medically recommended level and 15 per cent of adults are clinically obese.

Fast food, ready meals and takeaways, packed with added salt, sugar and fat, all contribute to putting on excess weight. According to the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), those of us aiming for a healthy balanced diet should, 'increase intake of fruit and vegetables, reduce intake of fat, eat wholegrain foods, reduce red meat and avoid fried foods.'

If you are looking to diet, whilst it is tempting to opt for a 'quick fix' that claims to help you shed pounds speedily, in reality it's not a good approach, advises the British Dietetic Association. In fact, they say that part of the problem with dieting is that many people view it as a short-term activity, yet in order to achieve successful weight loss – losing weight and keeping it off for at least five years – you have to make positive, sustainable changes to long-term eating habits and physical activity patterns.

'We discourage the use of nutritionally unsound diets that promise a quick fix,' says state registered dietician Dymna Pearson. 'Instead, make a commitment to eating a better range of foods and becoming more active. It may take longer

to get there but you're more likely to stay fit long-term and keep excess weight off.'

Weight Concern advocates a similar approach and suggests 'setting a realistic target goal of five to ten per cent weight loss over the next three months'. They say, 'Maintained weight loss at this level can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers, as well as making you feel better overall.' They also suggest keeping a food diary, eating regular meals, making small gradual changes (such as changing to skimmed milk) and drinking a recommended 1.5 litres of water per day.

Dr. Sarah Schenker, from the BNF, adds, 'It's important to remember that neither diet nor exercise are very effective on their own but combining the two can produce great results. Do a combination of low impact aerobic exercise such as walking, jogging, or swimming, that uses up stored fat, and resistance exercise such as pilates or yoga, to build and tone muscle.'

## REDUCING ALCOHOL

Whilst there is no harm in enjoying an occasional drink, regular excess drinking puts long-term health at risk. A spokesperson for Alcohol Concern says, 'The chronic effects of alcohol on health include cirrhosis, cancer, gastritis, high blood pressure, impotence, strokes and mental health problems.'

Alcohol Concern advises that we should stick to the recommended daily amounts

of two to three units for women and three to four units for men. One unit is the equivalent of 8g or 10ml of pure alcohol – one small glass of wine, half a pint of beer or one measure of spirits.

## QUITTING SMOKING

Every year, about 120,000 people in the UK die as a result of smoking and about half of all regular cigarette smokers will eventually be killed by their habit. Smoking causes 30 per cent of all cancer deaths, including 90 per cent of lung cancer deaths, 17 per cent of all heart disease deaths and at least 80 per cent of deaths from bronchitis and emphysema.

Smoking is one of the easiest habits to start but one of the toughest to break. But quit, and your long term-health prospects will

improve, your skin will look better and your immune system will be enhanced.

When it comes to quitting, though, experts advise against launching into it on New Year's Day. Clive Bates, director of the charity Action On Smoking and Health (ASH), says, 'Most people wake up feeling pretty rough on January 1st. Unless you've really planned for it, trying to quit on New Year's Day is like getting out of bed late and trying to nip up the north face of the Eiger in your pyjamas.'

Instead, he suggests, 'Smokers that seriously want to quit should use New Year's Day to make the resolution but only take the step of cutting out the cigarettes when they are good and ready to do it.' He adds, 'Quitting is like a siege against addiction to nicotine and you need to build up motivation, find out what will happen, get the best tips, plan some distracting social activities, talk to your doctor about drugs that might help, and make sure family and friends are onside.'

## ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

According to a survey carried out by Norwich Union Healthcare in January 2003, about 15 million people took out gym memberships, bought fitness equipment or videos after making New Year's resolutions but by February nearly half had given up. Reasons included lack

“15 per cent of British adults are clinically obese”

## TOP TIPS FOR MEETING YOUR HEALTH GOALS

- Do be realistic – don't try to do everything at once.
- Do think carefully about what you want to achieve and by when.
- Do be positive and focus on the benefits of your goal.
- Do write yourself a plan of action and try to stick to it.
- Do give yourself enjoyable rewards as you go along.
- Do get support from your family, friends or work colleagues, and team up with others to achieve similar goals.
- Do develop coping strategies to deal with any problems that may arise.



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of will power, busy lives and lack of support. So how do you maintain motivation?

Researchers from the University of Washington's Addictive Behaviors Research Center have spent over 20 years studying how to keep resolutions. 'The keys to success are a person's confidence that he or she can make the behaviour change and the commitment to making that change,' explained Dr. Alan Marlatt, director of the centre. 'You need a strong initial commitment to make a change, have coping strategies to deal with problems that arise and keep track of your progress. The more monitoring you

do and feedback you get, the better.'

If you lack support from family and friends, a life coach could be the answer. Personal life coach, Jan Scott, from Yorkshire, explains: 'Coaching is about personal development and growth, about performing at your best in all areas of your life and about achieving balance. A coach will keep you focused on your goals, challenge and support you when you doubt your own ability and encourage you on your journey of change.'

Whatever your health goals this year, be optimistic. Approach the issue positively and you are more likely to achieve your aims.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

ASH – <http://www.ash.org.uk>

British Dietetic Association – <http://www.bda.uk.com>

Weight Concern – <http://www.weightconcern.com>

NHS Smoking Helpline – 0800 169 0 169

British Nutrition Foundation – <http://www.nutrition.org.uk/>

Jan Scott

<http://www.thelifecoachforyou.co.uk>  
phone 01422 842543

## PERSONAL HEALTH MANAGER

Part of a great detox is making sure your health is well looked after – and you can get all the advice and information you need as a Norwich Union Healthcare Insurance customer.

A Private Medical Insurance Policy provides full access to Personal Health Manager – an exciting new way to assess your health, and your family's, online.

This service includes:

- **Symptom Assessment** – providing you with confidential medical advice online at any time without leaving home. It asks you a series of questions, just like a doctor would, and is also linked to a 24-hour GP Helpline through which, if you require advice, you can speak directly to a GP by telephone.
- **Health Planner** – providing a comprehensive

health and lifestyle assessment, including diet, exercise and weight, resulting in a personal action plan with lifestyle goals to help reduce health risks.

• **Medical Information** – including a Medical Encyclopaedia sourced from Dorling Kindersley's *Complete Family Health Guide*, a range of NHS Trust average waiting times compiled by Dr Foster and Stress Free Living Guide sourced from Dorling Kindersley's *Stress Free Living*.

• **Talk to the experts** – access to a GP Helpline where medical advice is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and access to a Stress Counselling Helpline to help and provide advice on combating stress

So Norwich Union Healthcare can help you when you are well and when you are ill.

For further information on the whole range of products and services offered by Norwich Union Healthcare, phone 0800 142 142\*. For a free one month trial of the Personal Health Manager visit [www.personalhealthmanager.co.uk](http://www.personalhealthmanager.co.uk), click on 'First time users' and select 'Get Free 30 Day Trial Access'\*\*\*

\* Calls may be monitored and/or recorded.

\*\* You'll be asked to register with your own personal user name and password, and to access the site you'll be asked to accept the site's terms and conditions. The GP and Stress Helplines are not available as part of any trial. Personal Health Manager is strictly for use in and by residents of the UK Channel Islands and Isle of Man only.

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