Healthy change

4 tips for the new-you revolution

Is this the year or the month—or even the day—you’ll take your first steps toward a healthier life? If so, then you’ve resolved to evolve! These four strategies can help you turn your health resolutions into a health revolution:

1. Pursue one goal at a time. It’s tough to make several changes at once. Start with one goal, like eating healthy or getting more exercise.

2. Identify mini-goals. Make a list of small, simple steps you can take right away. For example, mini-goals might be:
   • Swapping out your sugary drinks for water, or
   • Taking a 10-minute walk, or even a stroll.

3. Add to the mix. As each new behavior becomes a habit, add a new mini-goal. It will keep you moving forward—and may prevent boredom.

4. Give yourself credit. Evolving toward better health can be challenging. Pat yourself on the back each time you meet a mini-goal. When you have setbacks, don’t give up. After all, every single tomorrow is another great day for change.

Sources: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; American Psychological Association; Mental Health America

Healthy change starts with small steps.
Is gloomy weather making you sick? As many as 500,000 Americans struggle each year with a wintertime mood disorder known appropriately as SAD.

SAD stands for seasonal affective disorder. It’s marked by depression in the winter that lifts in the spring and summer. Signs may include anxiety, mood changes, sleep problems, fatigue, overeating, sexual problems, and social withdrawal.

How light affects mood

Mental health experts say SAD appears to be linked to a chemical imbalance in the brain brought on by the reduction in sunlight during winter’s shorter days. When it’s dark, the body releases more of the sleep-related hormone melatonin, which also may be tied to depression.

SAD is more likely among women, and it often starts in people between 18 and 30 years old.

Coping with SAD

Medicine and counseling are sometimes prescribed for people with SAD; however, your doctor may recommend that you try light therapy first.

Daily exposure to very bright light helps to block the brain’s output of melatonin. It’s effective in 50 to 80 percent of SAD cases, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

People with SAD are exposed to light that’s up to 10 times the intensity of normal indoor lighting. Treatments often last 30 to 90 minutes a day throughout the winter.

People with less severe symptoms may find relief by simply increasing the brightness of the lights around them. Others may want to try spending more time outdoors in the winter.

If light therapy doesn’t help, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional about other options.
Snack attacks
How to make healthy choices

Most of us love snacking. On any given day, 90 percent of us nibble between meals. That’s not necessarily a bad thing. Chosen wisely, snacks can be part of a healthy diet by:

- Taking the edge off hunger so you don’t overeat at mealtime.
- Raising your intake of fruits and vegetables.
- Contributing important vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

To make the best snacking choices, think about when and where the urge to snack usually strikes you—then plan ahead.

At home
Stock up on fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, and whole-wheat items, and try to include at least two food groups in every snack. Mix and match for small but tummy-filling servings of protein and fiber like these:

- A wedge of steamed sweet potato topped with Greek yogurt.
- Almond butter and raisins on whole-wheat toast.
- Zucchini circles, broccoli spears, or red pepper slices dipped in hummus.
- Frozen yogurt and sliced banana between two Graham crackers.

At work
Stash these in your briefcase or desk:

- Whole-grain cereal mixed with unsalted walnuts and dried apricots.
- Fat-free microwave popcorn.
- Instant oatmeal.
- Multigrain rice cakes and mini packets of peanut butter.

At play
Whether you’re a soccer fan or a golf pro, these portables can stave off hunger (and help you stay hydrated):

- A fresh pear.
- Baby carrots.
- A single-serving can of low-salt vegetable juice.
- 100% fruit juice mixed with seltzer water.

Remember: The best time to snack is when you’re actually hungry. If the notion to nibble hits when you’re bored or frustrated, seek another distraction—call a friend, take a walk, or read a magazine.

Sources: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics; American Institute for Cancer Research; Produce for Better Health Foundation

Money can’t buy the benefits of exercise.
Your primary care doctor and you

A relationship for better health

Since good health is one of your primary goals, it’s a good idea to find a primary care doctor.

Did you know that research has shown that people who have primary care doctors enjoy better health? Not only that, they spend less on their health care.

A primary care doctor acts as your partner in pursuing that healthy life. These doctors are specially trained to oversee your physical, mental, and emotional health. They can treat nearly every illness but also focus on prevention. Your primary care doctor is the one who will make sure you’re getting all the screening tests and vaccinations you need.

Best of all, your primary care doctor knows you. It’s part of the job of primary care doctors to form strong relationships with their patients. The doctor asks about your work and life situations. He or she knows your family history and may even treat other members of your family.

All that knowledge puts the primary care doctor in a good position to help you make the best decisions about your health care—and leads to your better health.

Our new online provider directory

With one of the largest provider networks in Colorado, we had to make it easy for you to find the doctors, hospitals, and other providers near you. Rocky Mountain Health Plans is excited to launch our new provider directory on rmhp.org. The new directory is simple and easy to use and includes smart search and easy filtering features to help you find the providers you need, when you need them.