

A Year of Resolutions in Bite Size Pieces

Try Monthly Resolutions if a Year is Too Much

*Many people make New Year's resolutions, but sometimes the idea of committing to a full year of doing something – or not doing something – can be daunting. For these people, **monthly resolutions building on an annual theme could be the answer.***

Health service company, CIGNA, is offering suggestions for a year's worth of health-improvement resolutions to be taken on one month at a time. CIGNA will post podcasts each month to help people stick with the plan.

Studies are mixed on how long it takes to develop or kick a habit. Some say it can take as little as three weeks. However, most say success is very dependent on the individual and the behavior they are trying to change. It is unlikely that all 12 monthly resolutions will last, but “trying out” a new resolution each month offers a great way for people to find the best fit in terms of choosing and sticking with a life improvement.

“As they move from month to month and resolution to resolution, people can see for themselves where they have the most success,” said Jodi Prohofsky, CIGNA's senior vice president for health management operations. “Some people will change their behavior for a whole month and realize that if they could do it for that long, why not keep going? Those people will have changed their behavior long term, but without the psychological barriers that often get in the way of making long-term behavior changes.”

Here are CIGNA's suggestions for how to get healthy throughout a full year, but in smaller, manageable doses.



January: Boycott the candy machine

If there is a candy machine at work or a candy dish at home, resolve to cut down, and eventually avoid them entirely. For instance, if you have a candy bar each day, cut down to three a week for the first week of the month. Then cut back to two the second week, and so on until you have gotten down to no candy bars the final week of the month.

- A regular-sized candy bar averages around 220 calories.
- For a 150-pound person, it would take 20 minutes of running six M.P.H. or 45 minutes of walking three M.P.H. to burn off those calories.
- If candy bars are a daily treat, you will save 6,600 calories over the month. That's almost two pounds a month, or **24 pounds a year**.
- Apply the same technique if a daily coffee beverage is your source of added calories.

Source for calories burned: <http://www.healthstatus.com/cgi-bin/calc/calculator.cgi>

February: National children's dental health month

Concentrate on taking better care of your teeth and helping your kids take care of theirs. Start by gradually increasing the number of days you floss your teeth each week until you're flossing every day.

- Maybe you floss the night before visiting the dentist, but many people don't do it regularly. Resolve to increase your flossing.
- Start by flossing at least three times a week the first week of the month then increase to five times the second week, and then every day the third and final weeks.
- If you have young children, review the basics of oral care. [Download CIGNA's guide](#).
- Take [CIGNA's quiz on oral health](#).
- You can get more ideas for oral health, such as a dental tracker and coloring pages, at CIGNA's online [Dental Toolkit for Parents and Children](#).

March: Eat a healthy breakfast every day

When can eating help you lose weight? Every morning. Studies show that people who don't eat breakfast are more likely to be overweight. That's because your hunger clock doesn't get off to the right start and you will likely end up snacking throughout the day.

- Start by committing 15 minutes of time for breakfast.
- A balanced breakfast can be any combination of choices from at least three food groups. (dairy, meat/beans/poultry, fruit, vegetable and grains.)
- If you are pressed for time in the morning, get your breakfast organized and set the table the night before.
- Post a list of healthy breakfast ideas on the fridge to remind you of your options.

- Where you can, incorporate Superfoods such as oatmeal, blueberries and cranberries.

Here's a [downloadable PDF from CIGNA](#) with more ideas on how to make sure you eat breakfast every day.

April: Add superfoods to your diet

Certain foods have tremendous health benefits. Start by adding three Superfoods a week. By the end of the month, strive to eat a Superfood each day.

- Almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts may reduce your risk of heart disease.
- Oatmeal and oat bran offer much needed fiber, which the CDC says decreases bad cholesterol.
- Fish and omega-3 fatty acids have many proven benefits.
- Olive oil contains antioxidants that improve your cholesterol levels.
- Antioxidant-rich foods include blueberries, cranberries, beans, and many other fruits and vegetables that can help fight disease.

For more, read this related article: 10 Great Health Foods for Eating Well <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/health-foods/NU00632>, and visit www.dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov.

Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cholesterol/CL00002>

May: Work it out

It's getting warmer out. Go for a walk or work out at the gym for at least 20 minutes three times a week. As the month goes on, add an extra five or ten minutes or extra days until you are walking at least 10,000 steps a day.

- One pound of fat equals 3,500 calories.
- Pace: Pay attention to your breathing. You should be able to carry on a conversation.
- To figure out how many calories you burn while walking, use this simple equation: your weight x distance walked = calories burned. Or let [CIGNA's calorie calculator](#) do the math for you. It also includes data for other types of exercise.
- Check out your insurer's discount program, such as CIGNA's Healthy Rewards®. *You may be eligible for discounts on gym memberships and health-related items.
- A pedometer that counts your steps can be helpful. Aim for at least 10,000 steps a day. It sounds like a lot, but you may be surprised at how quickly the steps add up.

Here's a blueprint for beginning and sticking with a walking program: <http://www.cigna.com/healthinfo/tp23026.html>.

*Some Healthy Rewards programs are not available in all states. If your CIGNA plan includes coverage for any of these services, this program is in addition to, not instead of, your plan coverage. A discount program is NOT insurance, and you must pay the entire discounted charge.

June: Drink the good stuff

Determine how much fluid you need to drink each day and make sure you get it. If you don't tend to drink much water, start by increasing your intake by two glasses a week until the end of the month when you will be up to eight a day.

- Drinking eight eight-ounce glasses of fluid each day is a general guideline.
- The Institute of Medicine advises that men consume roughly three liters (about 13 cups) of total beverages a day and women consume 2.2 liters (about nine cups) of total beverages a day.
- Find a way to count them down. You can use hash marks on a piece of paper, a golf shot counter, anything that helps you to know if you need to drink more.

While you are at it, help other people get the water they need by playing CIGNA's [Why Water](#) game, part of CIGNA's Learn4YourHealth initiative.

July: Take care of your overall financial health

If you're in control of your finances, you will probably be less stressed and healthier. The key is to find out where you spend your money, make a budget and stick to it. To ease into taking control, you can concentrate on one or more of these tips each week.

- For the first two weeks, write down every penny you spend.
- Use that information to identify places where you can cut back.
- Make and stick to a budget.
- Evaluate your retirement options and make sure your retirement account is on track.
- Review your life insurance and make sure your family will have enough if the worst happens.
- Thirty percent of workers will experience an accident or illness that keeps them out of work for three months or longer. Consider disability insurance. Here's a [calculator](#) to help you determine the amount of income you would need if you became disabled and could not work.

August: Support your community:

Many studies have linked how participating in one's community can help individuals be healthier people. "The advantage isn't just in improving their communities. It's also in the sense of emotional well-being people get by participating and contributing to their neighbors and the towns and cities in which they live," said CIGNA medical director and psychiatrist, Dr. Tony Massey.

Do at least three things on this list at least once this month:

- Attend a town- or city-sponsored event, such as a concert or an art show.
- Take a walk in your local park or walk the track at a local school. It's a low-cost, healthy activity, plus you can meet people.
- Support your local grocer and make efforts to eat local food that doesn't need to be shipped from afar.
- Donate food or money to a local food pantry.

- Next time you dine out, try a locally owned restaurant.
- Attend a town meeting, such as the city or town council or board of education.
- Volunteering is a way you can help yourself while you help others.
 - A 2009 study found that retirees 65 and older who volunteered had half the mortality risk than their non-volunteering peers.

Source: Dr. Sei Lee, assistant professor of geriatrics at the University of California, San Francisco, and the San Francisco VA Medical Center. <http://www.healthfinder.gov/news/newsstory.aspx?docid=626809>

September: Double up on the veggies

Make sure your dinner includes two vegetable servings every night this month.

OR

Try a vegetarian or vegan meal as a way to try out new and unfamiliar vegetables.

Beans and legumes are an inexpensive source of healthy protein. You can build an entire meal around them.

- A serving consists of one half of a cup of cooked or raw of vegetables, or a full cup of leafy vegetables.

[More about the benefits of fruits and vegetables.](#)

[Healthy recipes featuring fruits and vegetables.](#)

[Strategies to help incorporate more fruits and vegetables into your diet.](#)

Source for serving size: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/content/PED_3_2X_Hints_for_Eating_Smart_with_Fruits_and_Vegetables.asp

October: Take your medicine the right way

It's easy to forget to take a pill, but this month resolve to take your medication appropriately.

Week 1: Check your medications

- Check dosages and instructions to make sure you are taking your medication as prescribed.
- Check expiration dates of any prescription and over-the-counter medications. Some can lose their effectiveness or become harmful over time.
- Go over your list of medications with your pharmacist to make sure there are no potential negative interactions.
- Ask your doctor to review all of the medications you are taking to make sure they are still appropriate for you.

Week 2: Organize your medications

- Use a chart with spaces for check marks to help you know when to take which medication. Check them off as you go.

- Pick up a pill box organizer. Sometimes they are available free or at a low cost from pharmacies. You can have weekly or monthly organizers, or even ones that break your pills down by time of day.

Week 3: See if you can save money on your medications.

- Home delivery pharmacies can save time and money. They are designed especially for individuals who take prescription medications on a regular basis. Ninety-day supplies of medication can be delivered right to a person's door, often costing people less money. Check with your insurer to see if a home delivery pharmacy, such as CIGNA's Home Delivery Pharmacy, is available.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you can use generic medications. They are available for many prescriptions at a fraction of the cost of name-brand drugs. Each generic prescription can save, on average, \$200 a year.

Week 4: Explore other options to make sure you remember to take your medications

- Some health plans have programs in which you can sign up to receive text messages or email reminders to take your medications on time and keep appointments for doctor visits and lab tests. See if your health plan offers that service.
- Develop a buddy system. Ask a friend or relative to give you gentle reminders to take your medicine.
- If you do something everyday, such as driving to an activity or work, or going for a walk, put your prescription bottle by your car keys or coat.

November: Sleep it off

Adults need seven to eight hours of sleep per night. This month, work toward that goal and see if it makes you feel better during the day. Choose from these rules to snooze by and add another one or two to your sleep regimen each week of the month.

- Go bed at the same time each night.
- Save bed for sleep and romance, not for reading, TV watching or eating.
- Make sure your bedroom is dark, quiet and slightly cool.
- Limit caffeine (coffee, tea, caffeinated sodas) during the day, and don't have any for at least four to six hours before bedtime.
- Don't drink alcohol late in the evening.
- Avoid heavy meals close to bedtime.
- Sleep close to the same number of hours every night.
- Get regular exercise, but don't exercise within three to four hours of bedtime. The activity can get you too revved up to sleep.
- Use white noise to block out other sounds and to lull yourself into relaxation. A fan on slow speed or a radio tuned to static should help.
- Don't lie in bed awake for too long. If you can't fall asleep or if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep within 15 minutes or so, get out of bed and go to another room until you feel sleepy.

- If you still have trouble sleeping, ask your doctor about taking melatonin supplements in the evening to help you get to sleep.
- Log your progress along with how you feel the day after. This can show you what a difference a good night's sleep makes.
- If you continue to have difficulty sleeping, consult your doctor for treating a possible sleep disorder.

[More information on sleep.](#)

December: De-stress yourself

Along with the holidays come family, food, shopping and stress. Take 10 to 15 minutes each day to de-stress. As the weeks pass, add another five or ten minutes until you have a half hour stress-reducing break each day.

- **BREATHE:** People tend to breathe shallowly when they are stressed. That, in turn, leads to more stress. Re-set your system with three slow, deep breaths – in through your nose and out through the mouth.
- Stick with the things you learned all year – a good diet, exercise and a good night's sleep go a long way to helping people handle stress successfully.
- Desk yoga at work: neck rolls, back stretches, gently twisting your spine and wrists can give you a little lift during the work day. Here's more on yoga in general: <http://www.cigna.com/healthinfo/uz2286.html>.
- If you haven't laughed yet today, fake it. Look in the mirror and give yourself your loudest, heartiest laugh. It will be so silly, you'll probably make yourself laugh.
- Meditate. Here's how: <http://www.cigna.com/healthinfo/uz2240.html>.

For more help, use CIGNA's "[10 Keys to Creating Healthy Holidays](#)" workbook and "[Tips for Healthy and Happy Holidays in Tough Economic Times.](#)"



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