

WELL BALANCED

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IMPROVING HEALTH AND STAYING HEALTHY: TIPS THAT LAST

Improving your health doesn't have to feel overwhelming. According to the CDC, small improvements to health and well-being can yield positive results. For example, a five- to ten-pound weight loss can improve blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar. Getting enough sleep can reduce stress, improve mood, prevent illness, support weight management, and improve attention and memory.

Health outcomes are determined by a variety of factors, and lifestyle choices are a vital component. Some lifestyle behaviors that impact health include physical activity, eating habits, mental health management, sleep hygiene, and social connectedness. A commitment to making positive behavior change can improve health when the focus is on staying healthy, rather than a "quick fix." If you are working toward better health, consider the following tips to help make lasting changes and maintain well-being long term.

» Find Your Why

One of the key ingredients to successful behavior change is understanding why it matters to you. Aligning your goals to your core values can increase personal satisfaction and commitment. Establishing an emotional connection to the goal(s) you want to achieve is likely to improve your motivation because you will have a determined sense of purpose. Once you have discovered why making a change is important to you, consider creating a visual reminder by writing it somewhere you will see it each day!

Remember:

February is a great time to focus on making positive changes and building healthy habits. It's never too late to start!



Did you know that February is also American Heart Month?

» According to the CDC, heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., taking about 697,000 lives each year.

» For more information, visit the [CDC Heart Disease Resources page](#).

» Choose Goals Right for YOU

Finding your "why" is crucial, but it's just as important to set goals that align with your unique needs and values. While the start of a new month is a great time to refocus, it's easy to feel tempted by the latest trends. To stay true to yourself and avoid external pressures, consider asking yourself the following questions:

- » What are my primary health concerns right now?
- » How does my goal connect with my "why"?
- » Is this goal important to me? Or am I being influenced by outside factors such as friends, family, co-workers, or media?
- » Do I believe I can accomplish this goal?
- » Should I consult my physician about any underlying medical conditions before committing to this goal?

» Plan

Forming new habits and making lasting change takes time and commitment. Developing a plan can provide a structured approach to improve your health and well-being. A plan can be a helpful framework for your wellness vision, long-term goals, and short-term goals. It can help you identify and overcome barriers, maintain accountability, and adjust based on your experience. Set yourself up for success by making your plan SMART.

Questions to Ask Yourself to Find Your “Why”

- What are my top two core values?
- What is important to me?
- A year from now, how do I want my health to improve?
- Why do I want my health to improve?
- How will my life be different with the improvements I aim to achieve?
- What will happen if I do not make any changes?

» **Specific:** What is the outcome you want to accomplish? What behavior(s) will help you achieve it? For example, if you want to live a more active lifestyle, you might set a goal to walk for 20 minutes at least three times each week.

» **Measurable:** How will you measure your progress? What improvements do you want to see over time? In the same example, you might choose to keep an exercise log or use a wearable device to measure your progress, and you might aim to increase your walking frequency from three days a week to four within a month.

» **Achievable:** Consider using a confidence scale (e.g., 1-10) to assess whether you believe you will achieve your goal. If your confidence rating is below a 7, reevaluate the goal. What changes can you make to bring your confidence closer to a 7 or greater? Keep in mind that if you give yourself a rating of a 10, the goal may not challenge you to grow beyond your comfort zone.

» **Relevant:** How will this goal fit into your life right now? Ensure your goal is relevant to your current life. A goal that fits your priorities is more likely to succeed.

» **Time-Bound:** When do you plan to start implementing your goal? Is this a short-term or long-term goal? Hold yourself accountable by setting deadlines to aim for. Remember, it is ok to allow for flexibility when challenges or setbacks occur!

» Start Small and Be Realistic

After you have identified your plan, consider starting small. Many make the mistake of setting too many lofty goals for the new year and become frustrated or discouraged when they prove hard to achieve. To increase your likelihood of success, focus on one behavior at a time. As your confidence grows and new behaviors become habits, continue to add in other pieces of your plan. Be realistic and progress at a pace that is right for you.

» Ask for Support

Improving your health and well-being is a journey that will have moments of celebration and difficulty. Surrounding yourself with supportive people and ensuring access to wellness resources can reinforce motivation and accountability as well as strengthen your resiliency and commitment. Support can come in many forms including friends, co-workers, or family members. It can also come from professionals like counselors, physicians, or health coaches as well as employer-sponsored resources like employee assistance programs (EAPs).

» Celebrate Your Progress

Celebrate milestones, big and small! Progress toward your goals is progress toward improving your health and staying healthy. Your journey may have setbacks, and it is normal to experience challenges along the way to better health. Each opportunity is a chance to learn and grow. Celebrating your successes can increase motivation and boost confidence.

Resources

- » National Staying Healthy Month ([cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov))
- » Making Lifestyle Changes That Last ([apa.org](https://www.apa.org))
- » How to Make Lifestyle Changes Stick ([theheartfoundation.org](https://www.theheartfoundation.org))
- » Dare to Lead List of Values ([brenebrown.com](https://www.brenebrown.com))
- » Setting SMART Health Goals ([betterup.com](https://www.betterup.com))

