

HART'S HEALTHY NEW YEAR TIPS

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By Dana Fletcher and guest author, Jodi Fletcher

Whether you make 'resolutions' or not, you can still start the New Year right with a few heart-healthy lifestyle changes. There is no better time to start making healthy lifestyle choices than right now.

Sometimes, we can feel overwhelmed by the many things we could or should do to improve our health. To combat that, try picking just ONE thing to change and stick to it. [Kirsti Dyer from Columbia College suggests](#) that making simple, reasonable goals is one way to successfully achieve them.

We challenge you to pick one small thing from the lists below and try to stick to it.

[The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute](#) suggest heart-healthy lifestyle goals should include heart-healthy eating, physical activity, stress management techniques, healthy weight goals, and quitting smoking.

Many people know they should eat better, exercise more, quit smoking, and take time to relax. But how do we start? Let's break it down into simple steps that are achievable by anyone.

Heart-healthy eating:



- Eat vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean meats, poultry, eggs, nuts, seeds, legumes, soy products. This could mean that if you eat one piece of fruit per week, try to increase that to two or switch from full-fat milk to 2% fat. Keep it simple.
- Learn what your calorie intake should be based on your sex, age, and activity level (for more information go [here](#)).
- Limit sodium, saturated and trans fats, added sugars, and alcohol. Try

drinking a glass of water in between alcoholic beverages to limit intake and the effects of alcohol and to stay hydrated.

Physical activity:



- Helps with lowering health risks, weight loss and stress management.
- Consult your doctor. This is one of the first things to do if you haven't been active previously to know if you have any limitations on your activity levels.
- A good goal is to shoot for at least 30 minutes per day, 5 days a week. If you haven't been doing that, start slow. Start with 2 or 3 days a week for 5 minutes and slowly build up your time and days over a period of months. Take the stairs instead of the elevator or park farther away from the grocery store door. Take it slow and don't try to increase too much too soon. Just try to be a [little bit more active each week](#) and it will make an impact.
- Break up sitting time. If you work at a desk, set an alarm so you [get up at least every 30 minutes](#), get up and walk around, refill your water cup, or even just stretch at your desk. Experts say you should try to break up sitting with more active tasks.

Stress management techniques:

- There are many classes, videos and audio meditations readily available. One easy way to start is just to sit for 1-5 minutes and focus on breathing deeply and slowly. You don't have to sit for an hour in deep contemplation to get benefits from meditation.



- Physical activity. [Activity](#), especially outside is a great way to de-stress.
- Relaxation therapy. This could include yoga, creative imagery,

breathwork, massage, or many other modalities to help you relax and release stress.

- Talk it out. Find a friend, family member, counselor, or group to talk through stressful situations.
- Seek professional help if you can't reduce your stress on your own.
- For more information go [here](#)

Healthy weight goals:

- A loss of just 3-5% of current body weight lowers triglycerides and glucose levels.
- Consult your doctor on any weight loss plan to make sure it is safe and appropriate for you.
- A good place to start is to review the [Body Mass Index](#) (BMI) to find out whether you need to lose weight, but remember, you can have a [BMI in the normal range and still be unhealthy](#) if you aren't active and eating healthy.
- Healthy eating habits, physical activity, and managing stress are key components of any healthy weight loss plan. Focus on improving those areas of your life, and achieving your weight goals will be much easier.



And of course, quit smoking.

Most of us know that smoking increases the [risk of heart disease](#). The [AHA recommends](#) that people seeking to stop smoking should find professional help in the form of their doctors, support groups, or other counseling services. Quitting is tough, but the first step is finding the support you need to make it happen. They also recommend:

- Set a quit date
- Choose your quit method
- Decide if you will need medicine to help you quit
- Plan your quit day
- Do not smoke starting on your quit day
- For more information go [here](#) and [here](#)

So, take our challenge and pick one thing to do in January to start down the path to a healthier heart! Let us know in the comments section what you do!

Happy New Year and have a heart-healthy 2018, and beyond!

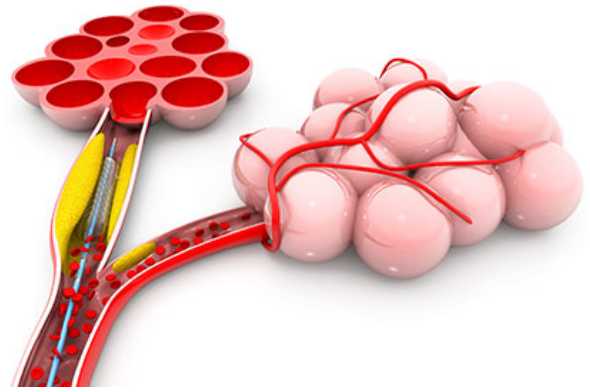
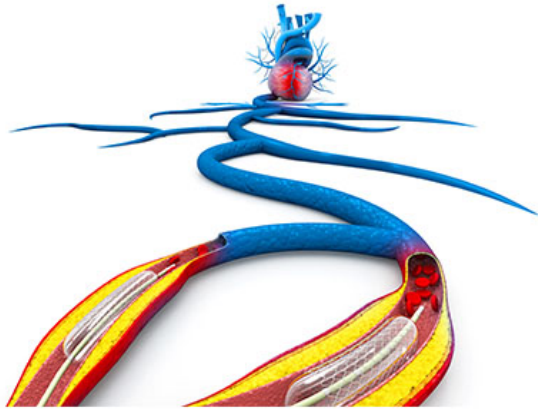
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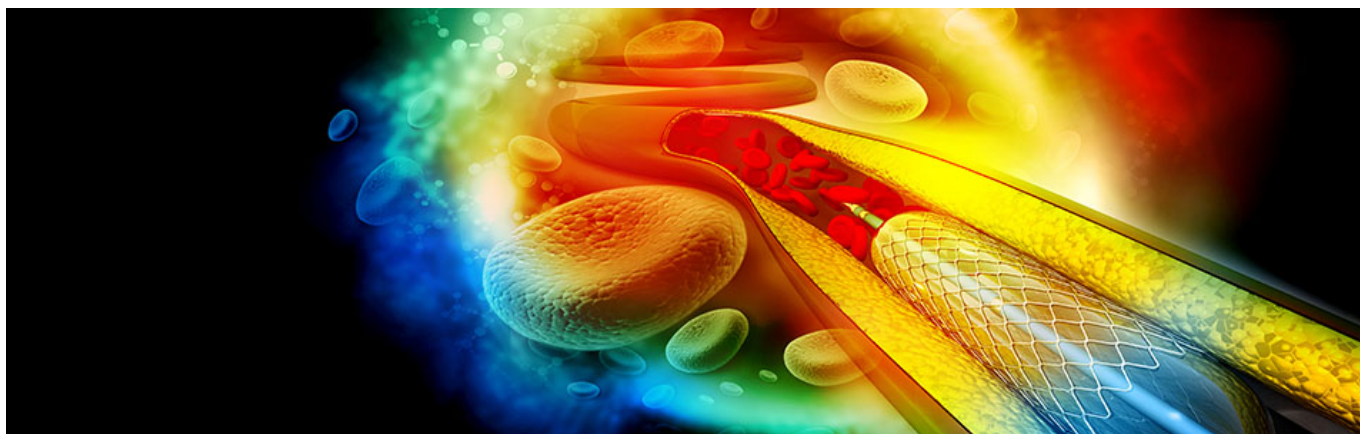
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