



# New Year's Resolutions? Begin with Daily Intentions



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Even for a goal-directed executive like yourself, New Year's resolutions often fall away by mid-January. You are not alone. Of all New Year's resolutions, 29% have been derailed by then! It happens to us all. Whether you are newly retired or working toward retirement, the demands of life overwhelm our resolutions—like losing weight, exercising more, getting more sleep, reducing stress, or solving world hunger! New Year's resolutions fail over 81% of the time because they are too vague, or we tackle too many at once, or their benefits are not experienced until far into the future.

## So Here's a Trick

Try reframing New Year's resolutions as *intentions*. These are specific daily goals that reward you simply by doing them. Intentions should be neither too easy nor too hard. In fact, you should *expect* to fail some of the time, but you must commit to follow through on an intention the next day and the day after that.

So, if you get to your session with your trainer today, you give yourself a small reward (like watching an hour of that old

TV series you missed because you were always traveling on business). Conversely, if you sleep in one day instead of getting on your elliptical trainer for 30–45 minutes, you don't get to watch that next episode today—but you can get up and begin again tomorrow. Other rewards might be a non-fat latte, a massage, a pedicure, or treating yourself to a new book. (You get the idea!)

## Here's a Few New Year's Intentions

Try setting these intentions for yourself. Remember, you're not going to do them all! Just pick one and work on it for the next few months. It takes about six weeks for a new behavior pattern to become a habit, so keep it up for three months—allowing for those little failures along the way. You'll be well-positioned to make a meaningful *and* sustainable change in your life, and you will have beaten the odds and been successful in meeting your New Year's . . . *intentions!*

*(NOTE: Following any one of these intentions assumes that you've seen your physician recently, are in good health, and have a "green light" to exercise, change your diet, or modify your routines.)*

### 1. I intend to walk briskly 10,000 steps a day, four days a week.

Get a pedometer, Fitbit, or Jawbone, and track your steps every day. Put a little graph of how you do each day on the mirror in your bathroom. It's a great motivator!

### 2. I intend to do weight training and strengthening, three days a week.

To get started, find a trainer you like and work with him/her until you have your workout down. Then check in with your trainer every 3–4 weeks to see if your routine needs any tweaks.

### 3. I intend to set aside 45 minutes for an aerobic workout 3–4 times a week on a treadmill or elliptical trainer (it's easier on the knees!). Or, I will achieve my target heart rate for 30 minutes, and use the other 15 minutes for warmup/cool-down.

To find your target heart rate: subtract your age in years from 220 to determine maximum heart rate. Then take 70% of your maximum to find your target.

### 4. I intend to improve my flexibility by attending a yoga class three times a week.

DON'T go for the yoga class where everyone is doing headstands and advanced power poses! Start with a beginner or gentle yoga class with an instructor you like and can relate to. See if you like the experience and stick with it for three months.

There are many yoga traditions and different teaching approaches. Look at *Yoga Journal* for instructors and studios near you. (I personally enjoy the Kripalu approach to yoga, as it addresses breathing and meditation as well as yoga: [https://kripalu.org/find\\_a\\_teacher](https://kripalu.org/find_a_teacher).) *Continued*

**5. I intend to eliminate refined carbohydrates from my diet for three months.** Refined carbohydrates are foods that are predominantly “white” carbohydrates like flour, sugar, rice, pasta, cakes, cookies, bread, potatoes, and alcohol. Eliminating these from your diet should reduce your weight. If not, you’ll probably at least notice a change in your shape. These carbohydrates tend to cause fat accumulations around your middle. Substitute healthy carbohydrates like green leafy vegetables (raw or steamed) and other “colorful” vegetable carbohydrates like carrots and eggplant. Use fruits in moderation to supplement your diet.

**6. I intend to eat a high-protein diet (100 grams a day) from healthy protein sources such as eggs, yogurt, fish, lean chicken, beans, low-fat cheese, and tofu.** This diet is best combined with #5 above and assumes that you are generally healthy and don’t have chronic kidney disease. Here is an example of a good day’s nutrition on such a diet. **Breakfast:** a cup of Greek yogurt with half a banana, a handful of almonds, and a cup of coffee, black or with low-fat milk. **Lunch:** a green leafy salad with 4 ounces of broiled chicken and a tablespoon of olive oil-based salad dressing. **Dinner:** 4–6 ounces of broiled white fish, steamed broccoli, and a green salad with a tablespoon of olive oil-based salad dressing. **Snacks:** for example, a high-protein bar (over 12 grams protein) with low sugar (less than 5–6 grams). Try different brands and flavors to find ones that taste good to you.

**7. I intend to moderate my intake of alcohol.** If you drink alcoholic beverages, the current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (<http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/>) recommends not exceeding 1 drink per day for women, or 2 drinks per day for men. Even moderate alcohol

intake is associated with increased risk of breast cancer, violence, drowning, and injuries from falls and motor vehicle crashes. What exactly does “1 drink” mean? A *standard drink* contains 14.0 grams (0.6 ounces) of pure alcohol. Here are equivalent quantities of various alcoholic beverages that give you a “standard drink”: **Beer:** 12 ounces (5% alcohol content). **Malt liquor:** 8 ounces (7% alcohol). **Wine:** 5 ounces (12% alcohol). **Distilled spirits or liquor** (gin, rum, vodka, whiskey, etc.): 1.5 ounces (a shot) of 80-proof (40% alcohol).

**8. I intend to quit tobacco use.** If you smoke cigarettes, cigars, or a pipe, or chew tobacco, *stop* as soon as you can. Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances, almost as powerful as heroin for those who are susceptible to addictive behaviors. Sign up for a multimodal smoking cessation program near you. A great resource in getting ready is from the Centers for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/campaign/tips/quit-smoking/guide/index.html>. It contains valuable information on getting ready to quit and how you can get support. Your physician can also give you medications to help you quit.

**9. I intend to reduce stress in my life by continuing to observe my faith tradition and/or by starting or deepening my meditation practice.** Discover or continue a spiritual practice which has personal meaning for you. This may be by continuing an active part in your long-standing faith community, or finding a new one. In addition, developing or deepening a meditation practice will further reduce stress in your life.

A meditation practice can be associated with many faith traditions, or it may be used solely to invoke the “relaxation response” which lowers

your blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen consumption, and stress hormone levels. You can find a simple guide to eliciting relaxation responses at <http://www.relaxationresponse.org/steps/>.

Meditation is also taught in many faith traditions, and you can find local resources (Google “local resources insight meditation”). If you decide to pursue an insight or faith-based meditation practice, shop around until you find a teacher or guide whom you like and trust and with whom you feel comfortable. Also available online are resources including books, podcasts, or videos that demonstrate how to begin a meditation practice.

**10. I intend to deepen my relationship with my spouse, child, or friend.** Eighty-hour work weeks, early morning and late dinner meetings, and heavy business travel schedules can leave you depleted, lacking the energy and focus you need for close relationships. Deep and meaningful relationships and a vibrant network of social support both prolong and improve the quality of our lives. It’s important to schedule time and energy for loved ones and/or friends.

If your relationships have become frayed, consider finding a trusted counselor or pastor who can help you rebuild the connections you once enjoyed. Make dates to spend time with loved ones and friends, talk about your goals for your next season, and ask how they perceive your transition and its impact on them. Be open to listening deeply to their perspectives on how you and your life together are changing. I guarantee it’s well worth the investment in this intention.

I wish you good health as you pursue a fulfilling and happy next season!