

Breaking the Habit on Breaking New Year's Resolutions

Here's the scientific approach to getting healthy and fit in the New Year.

PRACTICAL SCIENCE WITH PHIL FRED A

If you're like me, countless New Years have come and gone, and with each one, a resolution has come and gone just as fast.

Quitting smoking (I admit that I am a smoker), working out, and eating healthy have been my collective resolution each year.

I usually succeed at one of them each year, which is usually joining a gym and working out. Unfortunately however, it doesn't last as long as I would like.

Issues pile up: mortgage, bills, school, work and life in general.

Before you know it you're sucking down a cheese steak, in front of your computer with an ashtray full of butts.

Well enough is enough!

Let's take a look at why eating right, working out and kicking a cigarette habit are in your best interest.

Smoking and dipping

Since I am a smoker, I can say this.

Smoking is, by far, the stupidest thing you can do to yourself.

According to the [National Cancer Institute](#), tobacco smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals.

Out of that 7,000, 250 are known to be harmful and/or cancer causing.

Among these chemicals are:

- [Arsenic](#) – a key ingredient in pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides
- [Benzene](#) – an aromatic organic compound that is a known carcinogenic (cancer causing agent).
- [Cadmium](#) – a toxic metallic element.
- [Formaldehyde](#) – a known human carcinogenic and an ingredient in embalming fluid.

There are actually many others. If you want to see more, check out the [National Cancer Institute link](#).

According to the [National Cancer Institute](#), smoking affects almost every organ in the body and the overall health of the individual.

Smoking is a leading cause of cancer and death from cancer. Tobacco can cause cancers of the lung, esophagus, larynx, mouth, throat, kidney, bladder, pancreas, stomach, cervix and even acute myeloid leukemia.

In addition to cancer (as if that were enough), smoking is also linked to heart disease, stroke, aortic aneurysms, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma.

Smoking is also linked to early births and low birth weights.

Tobacco exposure causes more than 440,000 premature deaths in the United States according to the [National Cancer Institute](#).

Of these 440,000 deaths, 40 % are from cancers, 35 % percent are from heart disease and strokes, and 25% are from lung diseases.

What's shocking is that those 440,000 deaths were preventable.

Those of you are smokeless tobacco user, don't think I forgot you!

Smokeless tobacco includes [chewing tobacco](#) and [snuff](#).

Smokeless tobacco can still cause heart disease, stroke, and forms of cancer.

According to the [National Cancer Institute](#), smokeless tobacco causes oral cancer, esophageal cancer, and pancreatic cancer.

In addition to heart disease, smoke, and cancer, smokeless tobacco has also been linked to gum disease, oral lesions, and leukoplakia (pre-cancerous white patches in the mouth).

I think you get the idea.

This year I am trying something different. I was a pack-a-day smoker a few weeks ago.

On the 12th of December (exactly twenty days before the New Year), I started deducing one cigarette each day.

On New Year's Eve, I was only allowed one cigarette.

As of now, I am tobacco free! It was hard, but not as hard as my previous attempts at a "cold turkey" quit. I highly suggest this approach for all of you pack-a-dayers out there.

Also, I have heard that the electronic cigarettes are also helpful.

Finally, if I didn't scare you enough with the cancer and heart disease stuff, think of all the money you will save if you quit.

Working Out

If smoking is the stupidest thing that you can do, working out is the smartest.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), there are 7 benefits of regular exercise.

1.) **Exercise controls weight** – Exercise can help maintain your body weight, or even shed some pounds. Working out burns [calories](#), which are units of chemical energy stored in your body. The more frequent and intense the physical activity, the more calories you will burn. The more calories you burn, the more your body will tap into its fat reserves. Fat contains a lot more energy per unit than does sugar. This is why our body stores fat.

2.) **Exercise helps combat diseases and other health conditions** – If you are worried about heart disease, high-blood pressure or stroke, regular exercise can help. Being active boosts the levels of [high-density lipoprotein](#) (HDL), or "good" cholesterol in the body. It also decreases the levels of [triglycerides](#). This keeps blood flowing smoothly and will help lower the risks of many cardiovascular diseases.

- 3.) **Exercise improves mood** – Physical activity stimulates the brain to produce chemicals and neurotransmitters that improve overall mood. Exercise can help you relax, make you feel happier, boost your confidence and self-esteem and even combat anxiety and depression!
- 4.) **Exercise gives you an energy boost** – Feeling kind of blah? Exercise can give you a energy boost to last through the day. This is caused by oxygen being more efficiently delivered to you tissues and muscles.
- 5.) **Exercise can get you better sleep** – As long as you do not exercise too close to bed time, regular physical activity can help you fall asleep, stay asleep, and having a deeper, more relaxing rest.
- 6.) **Exercise can improve your sex life** – Physical activity can make you feel energized, more attractive and more confident. Exercise can also lead to better arousal for women and even help men suffering from erectile dysfunction.
- 7.) **Exercise is fun** – Exercise is a great way to get in tune with yourself and others. Instead of sitting on the couch all day watching TV, work out for a while or even take a brisk walk. Physical activity is a great way to spend time with family and friends. Play a sport, take a walk, go for a bike ride or maybe join a dance or yoga class.

Eating right

No, you don't have to go on a diet.

Eating right should be a lifestyle choice in which you make changes that you can live with and enjoy for the rest of your life, not a checklist of what you can and can't eat.

Diets are temporary because you limit yourself to only a few choices. You do not have to give up anything by eating right.

Eating right is a learning process where we include more fruits and vegetables and decrease the amount of fats, salt, and sugar.

Just like working out and not smoking, a healthy diet can reduce your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and even some types of cancer.

According to [WebMD](#), there are three important things to remember when choosing to eat healthier.

- **Aim for balance** – Eat from each food group: *vegetables and fruit, grains, milk and dairy or substitutes, and meats or substitutes*. Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full. A good way to curb your intake is to eat slower. When you eat slower, you will notice that you will get full sooner and not need to eat as much.
- **Look for variety** – Try not to eat the same things every day, you will get bored. Be adventurous and try new foods in each food group. This will also help you get a more well-rounded set of nutrients.
- **Moderation is the key** – All foods, if eaten in moderation, can be part of a healthy diet. If you really want ice cream, eat some! Just try not to eat an entire pint.

Hopefully this has strengthened and inspired you.

If you are not a smoker and are trying to eat healthy and work out, remember that they can be done hand in hand.

The more you eat right, the more you will want to work out and vice versa.

If you are a smoker, try to tackle the smoking first, it may be too much to try everything at once.

Whatever the case, just remember, you can do it!

Ask a friend or family member to help you, either by joining you at a gym or at a fitness class.

Also, tell others your goals, do not be ashamed. Chances are they would love to help or even do it with you!

Think about it!

About this column: An educational, science-minded column