What doctors want patients to know about healthy New Year's resolutions

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For many people, New Year's resolutions start and end with the usual suspects: eat better, exercise more, lose weight. But some of the most powerful changes you can make for your health rarely show up on that Jan. 1 checklist.

From addressing your hearing and vision to improving sleep, social connection and even how you use technology, there are health habits that can shape your well-being just as much as a new gym routine. They may not come with step counters or before-and-after photos, but they can affect how you feel, think and function.

Here is a list from the AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series—which gives physicians a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines and how to take charge of their health through preventive care—on some health areas patients should focus on for their New Year's resolutions.

The list features advice from physicians at organizations that are part of the AMA Health System Member Program, which provides enterprise solutions to equip leadership, physicians and care teams with resources to help drive the future of medicine.

1 Know which cold medicines work

There's a reason they call it the common cold. It happens a lot, especially in the wintertime. With runny noses, sore throats and persistent coughs, patients' demand for effective cold remedies is understandable. But does cold medicine

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help relieve symptoms of the common cold? It depends. But knowing how to find relief from the common cold and what cold medicines to use is key. Two physicians from Atlantic Health and Texas Children's Pediatrics clarify which cold medicines work and how to find relief.

2 Cut your sodium consumption

While sodium is an essential nutrient, most people consume too much and are not even aware they are doing so. The body needs a small amount of sodium to work properly, but in excess it can increase a person's risk for developing high blood pressure, which can lead to heart disease and stroke. That is why it is important to understand where most salt intake comes from and how to lower it. Two doctors, including a family physician from Baptist Health Medical Group, discuss where sodium resides and which choices to make to avoid it in excess.

3 Don't ignore seasonal affective disorder

When the days grow shorter and temperatures drop, millions of people find themselves grappling with the "winter blues." This is known as seasonal affective disorder, which is a form of depression that follows a seasonal pattern. Emerging primarily during the fall and winter months when sunlight exposure decreases and clocks fall back, seasonal affective disorder can take a toll on a person's daily life. Knowing what to keep in mind and when to seek help can make all the difference during fall and winter months. A pediatric neurointerventional psychiatrist in New York and a psychiatrist from Bayhealth share more.

4 Consider being a living kidney donor

The decision to donate a kidney is not just an act of generosity; it's a lifesaving act that provides hope for someone in need. Every year, thousands of people wait anxiously for a lifesaving transplant, their futures uncertain as they cling to the possibility of finding a match. But amid the statistics and the struggles,

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there are everyday heroes—people who step forward to share the gift of life, often with a stranger. A general and abdominal transplant surgeon with HCA Healthcare shares more about being a living kidney donor.

5 Find ways to reduce decision fatigue

From the moment we wake up, we are seemingly bombarded with choices—what to wear, what to eat, which emails to answer first. By the time we've navigated our morning routine, our mental energy has already taken a hit. And as the day wears on, the sheer weight of decision-making can start to take its toll, often without us even realizing it. Making decisions day in and day out can be exhausting and cause people to feel overwhelmed, anxious or stressed. A psychiatrist from Henry Ford Health discusses decision fatigue and how to overcome it.

6 Don't ignore joint pain and injuries

Joint injuries are a common part of life, whether the cause is sports, a fall or an awkward movement during daily activities. While some aches and pains may resolve with rest and ice, others can signal something more serious. From twisted knees on the soccer field to swollen elbows after a fall, joint injuries—which commonly affect shoulders, knees, ankles, wrists and elbows—range widely in severity. Recognizing the signs that require professional evaluation is crucial because delaying care can turn a manageable issue into a long-term problem. Learn more from an orthopaedic surgeon with Hattiesburg Clinic.

7 Start end-of-life care planning earlier

When patients take time to document their health care wishes—before a crisis—physicians and families are better equipped to honor their goals. Yet many adults have never discussed serious illness and end-of-life care planning or completed advance directives, leaving critical decisions to be made by loved

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ones in moments of stress or uncertainty. A palliative care physician from Ochsner Health explains how advance directives ensure care reflects patients' wishes and ease decision-making for loved ones.

8 Try to avoid excessive napping

Napping can be a simple and effective way to recharge—boosting mood, enhancing alertness and even supporting heart and brain health when done in moderation. For many, a brief midday rest is a healthy habit that complements a busy lifestyle. But frequent or prolonged daytime sleepiness may point to something more concerning such as sleep apnea, depression or cardiovascular issues. A sleep medicine physician from Rush University System for Health discusses what patients should know about taking naps.

9 Think twice about vitamins and supplements

While vitamins and nutritional or dietary supplements might be beneficial to your health, they can also cause health risks. Notably, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not have the authority to review dietary supplement products for safety and effectiveness before they are marketed. And with the FDA estimating that there are more than 100,000 different supplements on the market, it can be confusing to understand what is safe and what is not. Three physicians, including an internist from Sutter Health, clear things up about vitamins and supplements.

10 Practice healthy aging

We saw "Golden Girls" actress Betty White live to the age of 99 and Queen Elizabeth II reach the age of 96, serving as monarch for more than 70 years. This has a lot to do with healthy aging, which shouldn't begin as an older adult. It should be top of mind even in your college years or earlier. And while there are many factors that influence healthy aging, some of these—such as genetics—are not in our control. That is why knowing what steps to take is key.

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An internist from Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, along with three other physicians, discusses what patients need to know about maintaining physical and mental health as they age.

Rounding out your list with more familiar goals still matters too. Healthy eating and regular physical activity remain cornerstones of preventing chronic disease and feeling your best. The key is to think of your resolutions as a whole-health checklist, one that includes nutrition and movement, but also sleep, mental health, relationships and all the other "quiet" habits that can make the new year genuinely healthier, not just busier.

Learn more about increasing physical activity from three physicians, including two doctors from Northwell Health, to help reverse prediabetes, lower BP, relieve stress and help with healthy aging.

Additionally, with so many fad diets, it can be hard to navigate what to eat and what to avoid. But it is important to take steps to include healthy eating in your day-to-day life. Three physicians—including an internist from Geisinger—offer advice on healthful eating.

While healthy eating and physical activity remain fundamental pillars in weight management, there are instances when additional support becomes necessary, such as anti-obesity medications. Two obesity medicine physicians share more about GLP-1 agonists for type 2 diabetes and weight management.

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