

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.astate.edu/conhp](http://www.astate.edu/conhp)



## Healthy Habits

### Introduction

Did you make a New Year's resolution? Have you maintained progress toward your goal? The Huffington Post recently cited a statistic stating that only 8% of people stick to their resolution. In an effort to help maintain our resolutions and meet our goals, this newsletter will discuss various aspects of selecting and maintaining those aspirations. Discussion of what it means to become healthier are included as well to guide goal formation.

### Forming Healthy Habits

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary, a habit is "an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary." When we make resolutions each year to eat healthier, drink more water, or exercise, we tend to lose sight of that goal shortly after the new year. In order to stick to our resolutions, it is necessary to understand how to form and maintain healthy habits that can become long-term behavioral changes. The British Journal of General Practice suggests that easier goals become habits more quickly than more complicated behaviors. For example, a simple habit such as drinking more water may only take around twenty days, while habitually performing fifty sit-ups each morning can take up to 100 days or more. The British Journal of General Practice has some suggestions for forming new healthy habits:

1. Decide on a goal.
2. Select a simple action that will help you reach that goal that can be repeated daily.
3. Plan when and where to do this action and make sure to be consistent.
4. Every time you are in that "when and where," do the action you have chosen.
5. It will get easier as time goes on. Within about 10 weeks it should become more automatic.

Also, continue making goals. Make small, continuous goals to reach larger goals throughout the year. By the end of the year, you will have made a habit out of making, striving for, and reaching goals!

### Deciding on a Goal

More than likely, you have already made your New Year's resolution. However, if you need ideas, here are the top 5 resolutions made this year according to statista.com:

1. Eat healthier
2. Exercise more
3. Save money
4. Focus on self-care
5. Read more

In order to reach a goal, it needs to be attainable, personal, and positive. When deciding on a goal, ask yourself if you can see yourself actually doing it. Do you really want this? Would the change have a

positive impact on your life? Is it a reasonable goal? Once you decide, begin the habit forming process.

### One Step at a Time

The next step to develop the healthy habit of your choice is to identify where to begin and how to progress toward it. Small steps that help you reach your ultimate goal should be chosen. This makes you more likely to be successful. For example, if the overall goal is to eat healthier, do not skip right to a 1,000 calorie per day, no carbohydrate diet. A good initial step may be to eat more vegetables. An even better one would be as specific as possible: I will eat one serving of vegetables at lunch in the breakroom every day. The point of the specificity is to eventually be reminded to perform the activity just because you are, say, eating lunch in the breakroom. Eventually, time and place will remind you, even subconsciously, to perform the action.

After selecting the first step, consider how you might progress while incorporating it into the overall goal. For our example, the next step might be to begin a food journal and to write in it each night after dinner while at the dining table. Then, you may want to do things like pack a lunch each day, eat more lean meat, cook dinner rather than eat out, etc. Each of these goals become more complicated until ultimately, you are eating healthier.

### Eat Healthy

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020 recommends:

1. Following a healthy eating pattern over time.
2. Focusing on variety, nutrient density, and amount.
  - a. Eat a variety of food from all five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy
  - b. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables
  - c. Make half your grains whole grains
3. Limit calories from added sugars, saturated and trans fats, and sodium.
  - a. Soda and fast food are of concern, among others
4. Shift to healthier food and beverage choices.
5. Support healthy eating patterns for all.

Following a healthy eating pattern over time includes following the guidelines and maintaining healthy eating habits. What do we mean when we say a variety of foods from each group? A variety of vegetables would include all of the subgroups (red/orange, dark green, legumes, starchy, and other). A variety of proteins include seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes, nuts, seeds, and soy products. Dairy is recommended to be fat-free or low fat. Fruits are recommended to be whole.

Itemized food group recommendations per day are as follows:

- 2 ½ cups of vegetables
- 2 cups of fruits
- 6 oz. of grains
- 3 cups of dairy
- 5 ½ oz. of proteins
- 27 g (just over a Tb.) oils

The above recommendations are based on a 2,000 calorie diet and are meant to be guidelines. Meal ideas, tip sheets, detailed

descriptions of the food groups, and more can be found at <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/MyPlate>.

### Exercise

A very common resolution is to exercise more. To create goals to become more active, we need to first know what amount of exercise is recommended and the benefits of it. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) guidelines recommend:

- 30-60 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise, 5 days per week OR
- 20-60 minutes of vigorous-intensity exercise three days per week.

In order to achieve these recommendations, take advantage of your membership at the Red Wolf Center. The Red Wolf Center offers a variety of exercise classes, weight machines, basketball courts, a track, and more. Also, setting aside time on a regular schedule to exercise will help develop this healthy habit. Finding the time can be hard but even doing several ten minute sessions throughout the day can benefit your health.

Also, joining a group can help you stick to your plan. Exercise classes or clubs are good examples. Exercise is Medicine (EIM) is a Registered Student Organization here on campus. EIM aspires to promote exercise and healthy behaviors as an alternative for medicine on the campus of A-State. For more information, contact Dr. Shawn Drake ([sdrake@state.edu](mailto:sdrake@state.edu)). This organization is open to all majors.

### Other Resolutions

Some other resolutions to consider are saving money, focusing on self-care, reading more, sleeping more, and improving time management skills.

To save money, consider grocery shopping and cooking rather than eating out, tracking monthly spending to see where your money goes, or giving yourself an allowance for non-necessity items each month.

Focusing on self-care can include many things. You might want to take a set amount of time each day to do what you need to do. This could be relaxing, unwinding, meditating, or anything else that allows you to focus on your wellness. Getting more sleep can be included in this and a regular sleep schedule is crucial to wellness.

Lastly, your resolution or goal habit may be to just pick up or make more time for a hobby. Whether you like to read, draw, play an instrument, or do puzzles, making time for that can make a difference in the way you feel. Set aside time and form a habit to ensure you keep it up throughout the year.

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### Other News:

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).  
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The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Katie Sellers, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.