

The

Liker Health Report



Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Spring 2021

Health Goals Double as COVID-19 Protective Actions

Meeting the Pandemic's Health Challenges with Re-Commitment to Healthy Resolutions

If you skipped making health resolutions this New Year's, it's not too late to do so. Furthermore, it's a very good idea while the pandemic remains, particularly since many people found themselves reverting to bad health habits during the course of the last year. Prioritizing one's health during a time of great change or upheaval is challenging, yet we know that good nutrition, physical activity and a healthy body weight offer protection against COVID-19. Committing to health-related goals may also help reduce the emotional stress created by social isolation, concern for loved ones, personal loss, and grief.

The probability of attaining success can be greatly improved by keeping it simple. The fact that willpower is finite means that setting too many simultaneous goals (over-commitment) increases the chance of failure and disappointment. Instead, small changes can yield a big impact. For example: if your goal is to lose weight, choose one or two small health behaviors to focus on that will lead you in the right direction; give up the sodas or cut your weekly Starbucks' visits in half. Being successful at the "small stuff" will move you closer to the bigger goal and you'll feel empowered to do more. Avoid self-shaming if you falter; it only serves to sabotage your goals.

Set S.M.A.R.T. goals, ones that adhere to these key features: **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based.** It's much easier to focus on a behavior (increasing physical activity) than a specific outcome (losing 20 pounds) because you can control whether or not you exercise. You have less control over the rate at which the pounds drop off. For example: instead of saying "I will loose 20 pounds," say "I will take a brisk walk for 45 minutes every other day of the week before I eat lunch."



Effective Weight Loss Strategies

Staying up late encourages eating. Hunger peaks around 8pm and decreases during sleep. Have a small protein snack rather than give-in to carbs or sweets.

"Binge" on raw veggies (not chips) while bingeing your favorite Netflix series.

Get at least 7 hours of sleep nightly to keep your hunger hormones in check.

Turn off all screens at least 60 minutes before bedtime.

RESEARCH PEARLS: Alcohol and Atrial Fibrillation

Researchers at UC San Francisco report that drinking alcohol induces an immediate effect on the hearts of people who already have atrial fibrillation (AFib). This is the first study to identify a potential mechanism in which a lifestyle behavior (having an alcoholic drink) can immediately alter the heart's electrical activity, thereby increasing the chance that the individual will experience an arrhythmia. Some heart muscle cells do not have sufficient time to recover between being electrically activated and then being ready to be activated again; alcohol exacerbates the problem. AFib is already the most common life-threatening heart-rhythm disorder with 12 million Americans having the condition, contributing to more than 450,000 hospitalizations and 150,000 deaths annually. It's also a leading cause of stroke and commonly causes fatigue, weakness, lightheadedness, breathing difficulties, and chest pain.

JACC: Clinical Electrophysiology 2021 Jan 27:S2405-500X(20)31301-3.

Human Resiliency

Personal Growth Comes from Adversity

The well-known, somewhat crude saying, that if something doesn't kill you, it'll make you stronger, may have some truth to it -- or at least the possibility that it can be empowering. Psychologists Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun put forth the idea that individuals who have undergone significant adversity or trauma can also experience greater appreciation for life and more resilience which in turn, allows them to flourish in life. They coined the term "post-traumatic growth" (PTG) to describe this concept of positive psychological change in the face of great emotional stress.

Dr. Tedeschi and Dr. Calhoun's research on PTG suggests that the emotional distress caused by a painful experience can in fact, be more empowering to the individual than self-debilitating or self-limiting. This is not to say that an individual no longer feels grief or sadness, but that he/she is also not stuck in the past; PTG allows him/her to look forward and move forward in life. Beyond just acceptance, the once life-altering trauma becomes the transformational and favorable change by which the world is now perceived and understood.

Many people experience some type of positive change in the way they view life, personal relationships, their own health, and success -- whether financial or otherwise. Dr. Tedeschi and Dr. Calhoun identified seven areas that are common with PTG (see below) and are key to reducing emotional distress. These involve higher-order thoughts, beliefs, and actions. The good news according to studies is that nearly 90% of people gain a positive experience after enduring a negative one. Also, those who experienced demonstrable PTG did not suffer grief or anxiety for 12 months or more following their transformation.

- Greater appreciation of life
- Greater appreciation and strengthening of close personal relationships
- Increased compassion and altruism
- Identification of new possibilities or a purpose in life
- Greater awareness and utilization of personal strengths
- Enhanced spiritual development
- Creative growth

When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.

Viktor Frankl

Dear Dr. Liker...

Should I increase my vitamin D intake as a precaution against COVID-19?



Vitamin D has emerged as a potential player in the prevention of COVID-19 because of research that shows vitamin D deficiency in nearly 60% of COVID-19 patients as they were admitted to the hospital. Other research found a possible link between disease severity and vitamin D deficiency. As news of this research spread, people began turning to supplements to help protect themselves. Since an already large percentage of the population is low in vitamin D, increasing one's intake may be a good idea overall.

Vitamin D plays a role in general health, not just bone density, due to its involvement in a multitude of physiological reactions. It assists the absorption of calcium, magnesium, and phosphate in the intestines; strengthens the immune system; and helps regulate cell growth. Low vitamin D levels have been linked to diabetes, heart disease, memory loss, depression, fatigue, and stymied wound healing.

Vitamin D levels can be modulated through diet, supplements, and moderate sunlight exposure (15-30 minutes daily). Vitamin D-rich food sources include egg yolks, dairy foods, fatty fish (wild salmon and mackerel, canned tuna, sardines), beef or calf liver, and fortified cereals, bread, or orange juice. If blood tests show low Vitamin D levels, supplementation is often recommended.

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