

A year of good health

Every January, gyms get a little more crowded and carrot sticks return to the refrigerator, replacing the eggnog and general excess of the holiday season. By

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spring, many of our New Year's resolutions seem to fade, despite our good intentions. As a family physician, I sometimes tell my patients to buy a stack of calendars and put a different January on the wall every month, as reminders of the resolve and commitment to be healthier. To save you from calendar confusion, I'd like to offer a more realistic prescription for a year that leads to better health and wellbeing, instead of guiltily discarded resolutions.

My prescription would include not only the healthier habits I've listed below, but also establishing a relationship with a primary care physician. A

partnership between patient and doctor is essential to receiving the preventive care and screenings needed to maintain good health - and this ongoing care is unlikely to happen in an urgent care or emergency room setting, where the focus is on your acute problem and not your long-term health. With that in mind, I encourage everyone to seek out a regular source of care.

To find a local primary care provider

Call the local Medical Society for referrals at 831-479-7226.

Visit the Santa Cruz Library's community web page at www.santacruzpl.org/cid/public and search for 'clinic' for a listing of community health centers that offer sliding fee scales.

When individuals maintain healthier habits and have consistent access to quality care, we can affect health trends and costs in our county for diseases like diabetes. That's a goal I share with other physicians and health care organizations that have joined forces on the Santa Cruz County Health Improvement Partnership (HIP), where we work together on solving problems like increasing health care coverage for the uninsured. While we're working on this and other issues to improve the health of all Santa Cruz County residents, here are some suggestions for a few healthy New Year's resolutions:

■ Give it a rest. Many of us don't get enough sleep and never quite catch up once we get behind. I recommend that my patients try to get 8 or 9 hours of sleep. Think of getting enough rest as a health issue; a well-rested body is better able to fight off diseases and recover faster.

■ Get moving. For weight loss and mental wellbeing, daily activity is best, preferably 30 minutes at a time. For overall cardiovascular health, you may be able to get away with 30 minutes of exercise three or four times a week. If you can't do that, remember that everything counts. Park a little farther away; take the stairs; walk around the block.

■ Eat right - or at least better. There's a lot of confusing dietary advice out there, but don't let it stop you from improving your diet. If you gradually increase your consumption of fruits, vegetables, and grains, while decreasing your consumption of trans fats (especially red meat), you'll be doing your body a huge favor.

■ Don't smoke. For those of you who have quit smoking, congratulations - keep up the good work (and help others follow your example). For those of you who haven't quit yet, keep trying. Many who have successfully quit smoking did so after several attempts. If you haven't tried to quit in a while, there are lots of new and effective methods. And if you don't smoke, don't start.

Start with a small goal - for example, not the 20 pounds you may want to lose, but the first 5 or 10. Add a new vegetable to your dinner line-up. Every small step will add up and get you closer to your goal, and you'll be more likely to keep your new habit well into 2008.

Future HIP columns will offer additional solutions to improving the health of Santa Cruzans as well as building a stronger local delivery system. Meanwhile, here's to a healthy, happy year of Januaries. Good luck!

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