

Well

What's Your Word of the Year?

To get the most out of 2022, try choosing a word that can help you make thoughtful decisions and nudge you toward positive change.

By Tara Parker-Pope

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Want to get more out of 2022? Start by picking one word that captures your values and intentions for the next year.

I first learned about this “word of the year” exercise from Kelly McGonigal, a health psychologist, author and lecturer at Stanford University, whose work focuses on finding hope and meaning in life’s daily challenges.

The past two years have been uniquely challenging for most people, and picking a word to guide you during the third year of the coronavirus pandemic is a good way to take back some control. The value of this word exercise is that it helps you focus on the things that are most meaningful to you and the positive changes you’d like to make in your life, no matter what 2022 has in store.

Try not to think of your word as a resolution (like “diet”) or specific goal (like “saving money”). Instead, find your word by reflecting on your favorite experiences, your hopes and dreams, and areas in your life that deserve more attention. Dr. McGonigal suggests asking yourself, “What do I want to contribute?” and “What matters most to me?”

“It’s a word that’s going to describe how I want to direct my energy,” said Dr. McGonigal, whose latest book is “The Joy of Movement: How Exercise Helps Us Find Happiness, Hope, Connection and Courage.”

Andy Milne, a health educator who writes #slowchathealth, is also a fan of the one-word exercise. “Unlike a resolution, a single word can’t be broken,” Mr. Milne writes. “I visualize this as a word that sits on my shoulder and gently nudges me toward a more improved version of myself.”

I’ll share my word of the year later in this newsletter. But first, here’s some advice for choosing yours.

Think about your values.

Value-oriented words (such as family, love, kindness, compassion, friendship, optimism, fitness, leadership) are a good place to start when choosing a word. Browse this word list of core values for inspiration.

Use the dictionary.

Dr. McGonigal said she liked to look up words and explore their varied definitions. For instance, the word “create” has several meanings, including “to bring something into existence; to cause something to happen as a result of one’s actions; to originate a character or role.”

Don’t stop at your first word.

Workshop the words that come to mind. Don’t stop with the word “happiness,” for example. Think about the times when you have felt your happiest. What were you doing? Who was with you? What did these experiences have in common? Instead of “happiness” you might discover a word that better reflects how you might achieve happiness — perhaps through friendship, dance, movement, collaboration, volunteering or kindness.

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Think about decisions you might be making this year.

A good word is one that guides you when you’re making both small and big decisions. Should I spend my time on this? Try this new thing? Quit my job? Move to a new place? Buy this item? Spend time with this person? If your word is “fearless,” you may come up with different answers to those questions than if your word is “relax.”

Find inspiration in other people’s words.

Dr. McGonigal's words for past years have included **mentor**, **community**, **vitality** and **dance**. This year her word is **“create.”**

“The past two years have felt like survival mode to me — always reacting and not feeling a lot of agency or control,” she said. “I want to focus on producing positive things through intentional effort, doing things that make a difference and that reflect who I am as a person.”

Mr. Milne's past words include **resilience**, **advocacy**, **environment**, **calm** and **listen**. This year he has chosen the word **refresh**. He plans to refresh his mornings by not checking social media and by drinking herbal tea instead of coffee. At school, he will be switching up lessons and, in his free time, exploring new foods, books and experiences. “I'm excited to see where ‘refresh’ will take me,” he wrote.

My word this year is **grow**. I first thought of it this summer when I created baskets of plants to attract hummingbirds. I was surprised at how much joy and connection I felt tending to the plants and watching them bloom all summer. I remembered that as a child in a military family that moved every few years, I often reminded myself to “bloom where I was planted.”

A few weeks ago, I was talking to a friend about the work of Carol Dweck, who coined the term “growth mind-set,” which is the belief that you can develop your innate talents and acquire new skills through hard work and input from others. That clinched it for me to choose “grow” as my word for 2022.

Share your word.

You'll get more power from your word if you share it with others.

So let's get started. Once you pick your word, I want to hear from you. Fill out this simple form below and tell me what word you picked. I'll share the most-picked words and some of the most original in next week's newsletter!

Tell me your word of the year:

Fill out this simple form to share your word.

MORE FROM THE WELL NEWSLETTER

Checking in on the Eat Well Challenge

How has your first week of the Eat Well Challenge been going? I'll be sending you a new challenge every Monday in January. This week we are focusing on quitting the dieting habit, doing a pre-meal mindful warm-up and identifying your habit loops. If you missed the first part of the challenge, you can read about it here, and then join in.

I've enjoyed hearing from everyone who has signed up for our Eat Well texting feature. The next installment of the Eat Well Challenge will arrive in your email inbox via this newsletter on Monday. You can also sign up for extra messages from me, sent by text to your phone during the week. (See the sign-up information below.)

I've received a number of questions from readers. Here are a few answers.

Q: Any tips for mindful eating when you are time constrained?

A: While it's good to slow down when we eat, mindful eating doesn't require any extra time. Mindfulness is about being present for the experience you're having now — even if it's a fast meal. Just take in the sight of your food and breathe in the aroma before you chow down. As you chew, focus on the taste and texture of the food, and even the sensation of how fast you are eating. If you barely tasted your food, note that, and try to make time in the future for slowing down, even just a little, when you eat.

Q: I have discovered that most of my meals are accompanied by either reading (breakfast and lunch) or TV (dinner). Very hard to be mindful when your mind is on something else! I suppose the choice is to stop multitasking and only eat, but right now that sounds painfully boring. Am I unusual?

A: Part of any mindfulness practice is noticing your experience without judgment. You've learned that you like to eat while doing other things. Try exploring how and why these habits started. Why do you find time spent just enjoying your food to be boring? If it's too hard to give up your reading and TV habits right away, take a small step toward more mindful eating. Start with just five mindful bites before you reach for your newspaper, phone, book or television remote. Keep practicing those five mindful bites and see what happens.

Q: During Covid, I started baking many things I never tried before: bread, scones, new muffin and cookie recipes. I really enjoyed it and gave a lot to other people but also ate a lot and gained six uncomfortable pounds.

A: When you bake, it's an opportunity to think about the family and cultural traditions behind the recipe and to be mindful of the ingredients that go into the dish. If too many baked goods in the house is a problem for you, try adopting some coping strategies rather than giving up baking entirely. I enjoy baking a few times a month, and, whenever possible, I halve the recipe. I like to ship care packages of baked goods to my daughter and her roommates. My strategy is to bake, taste, give away and freeze so I can enjoy the mindful experience of baking but don't have too many treats left over calling my name.

Sign up for the Eat Well texting feature:

Text the word “Hi” (or any other word) to 917-810-3302 for a link to join. (Some of you have had trouble signing up. If you’re on your phone, just click on the linked phone number. But if you’re reading this on your computer, you’ll need to use your phone to join. Message and data rates may apply.)

The Week in Well

Here are some stories you don’t want to miss:

- Gretchen Reynolds writes about muscle memory and fitness.
- Amelia Nierenberg has helpful tips about spotting skin cancer. It was inspired by this article about a hockey fan who noticed a strange spot on the neck of an equipment manager.
- Nicholas Bakalar suggests thinking twice before bone or joint surgery.
- And of course, we’ve got the Weekly Health Quiz.

Let’s keep the conversation going. Follow me on Facebook or Twitter for daily check-ins, or write to me at well_newsletter@nytimes.com.

Stay well!