

New year, new you

Simple ways to change your lifestyle

By [Karen Ackerman Witter](#)

Some people start the New Year with gusto, resolutions firmly planted, determined to make big changes. Often the goals relate to health and fitness. Some prevail. Many do not. If that is you, go for it. But, if New Year's resolutions aren't your thing and you aren't totally committed to what seems like a lot of sacrifice, there are still things you can do to improve your health and fitness. The most effective actions, with longer-term results, involve lifestyle changes that become a part of your daily routine.

Exercise is certainly beneficial for retaining mobility and improving overall health and wellness. But, when it comes to losing weight, what you eat has a far bigger impact than exercise. Working out for an hour a day is great, but what happens during the other 23 hours matters the most.

Drink more water.

It is important to be well hydrated, and most people don't consume enough water. A simple way to increase your intake of water is to carry a reusable water bottle and keep it at hand throughout the day. Instead of grabbing a bottle of soda or other sugary drink, have a glass of water. Start your day by drinking a glass of water when you get up in the morning.

Instead of going on a diet, make some changes to your diet.

Decreasing the amount of sugar in your diet can have a big impact.

The simplest way to do this is to *avoid processed foods*.

Just about everything in a box or a can at the grocery store has added sugar, even foods you might not expect. Take time to read the labels, and choose products without added sugar.

Better yet, *spend more time in the produce section of the grocery store*. Vegetables can be a lot more delicious than you may think possible. A simple Google search quickly provides suggestions for preparation if you aren't into cooking or following elaborate recipes. Roasting vegetables makes them flavorful by bringing out their natural sugars. The veggies I used to dislike, avoid or never eat are now among my favorites – rutabaga, Brussels sprouts, beets – when tossed with olive oil and roasted in the oven.

Experiment with flavored olive oils and balsamic vinegars.

Bottled salad dressings and sauces are loaded with added sugars or fat. Cooking with olive oil is recommended. It's also simple to make your own salad dressings by mixing flavored olive oils and balsamic vinegars. The combinations are nearly endless, with both white and traditional balsamic vinegars available. They provide a nice alternative for enhancing flavors in salads, roasted vegetables, stir-fry, etc. Try adding a splash of black mission fig balsamic vinegar to Brussels sprouts when they are hot from the oven.

Change when you eat, not just what you eat.

There are many health benefits that come from "intermittent fasting," which involves limiting the time when you eat. It's less of a diet and more of a lifestyle choice. Giving your body more time to process the food you've consumed can contribute to weight loss and other benefits. Drinking more water and eating plenty of vegetables and greens during meal times helps to control one's appetite. Work to increase the amount of time between dinner and your morning meal, and avoid eating at least a couple of hours before bedtime. Eating meals during an eight-hour period and avoiding eating for 16 hours is an especially effective strategy for weight loss.

Do simple things to get more exercise.

Going to the gym, taking an exercise class and working out with others are all excellent ways to make exercise a habit. If that isn't for you, there are simple things you can do to incorporate exercise into your daily routine, even if it's just a few minutes a day.

- *Walk more.* Take the stairs, go outside and walk around the block, choose a parking place a little farther than the front door and find other ways to add steps to your day.
- *Add intensity to your workout.* Walking or running on a treadmill, using an elliptical machine and working out in a gym are beneficial. But, if you have a routine, try mixing it up a little. Instead of running or walking the same distance at the same pace all the time, go a bit faster and a little harder for a shorter period of time. Adding intensity helps with strength and endurance.
- *A few minutes a day is better than no minutes.*

Balance, mobility and strength are important factors as we age. There are several easy things to do without going to the gym.

- *To help with balance*, alternate standing on one leg, and work to increase the amount of time. It's possible to do this as you are getting ready in the morning, checking email on your phone, cooking dinner or waiting in a checkout line. *Build core strength* by holding a plank position. Start with as many seconds as you are able, and continually increase the amount of time to a minute, two minutes or more. Another way to build core strength is to hold weights in each hand, extend your arms straight overhead and walk around your house. Use hand weights or anything heavy you can hold overhead, and increase the weight over time.
- *To help with mobility*, get down on the floor and practice getting up with one leg and then the other multiple times. All of the above can be incorporated into a 5-10-minute daily workout. By doing this in the morning you can get it out of the way, but choose a time that works best for you to make it a daily habit.

Losing weight, getting more exercise and improving one's health and fitness can be daunting. Find what works for you. Instead of short-term temporary fixes, look for lifestyle changes that you can incorporate into your daily life. It's not about being perfect, but about being better.

Karen Ackerman Witter is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Illinois Times after retiring from the State of Illinois. Since 2016 she has been going to the CrossFit Instinct Longevity program, where she has learned a lot about health and fitness.