



For Your Health - Five Stress-Free Health Tips for 2024

by Dr. Graham A. Colditz
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ST. LOUIS - As we make our way past the busy winter holidays, and look toward the new year, let's all remember to stop, take a breath, and enjoy the moment. It's an accomplishment to make it through another year, and now we can enjoy the promise of 2024.



For many of us, that can mean putting together some health goals for the next 12 months.

And whether those goals are big or small, learning some new, stress-free tips may just prove helpful as we work toward improving our health and lowering our risk of disease.

So, here are five tips that have resonated with me recently. Some are pretty specific; some are more general. But each can have important benefits now. And these benefits continue to grow as they're repeated and become part of our regular wellness routines.

Don't forget healthy sleep. It may not be what most people think of when they think about healthy behaviors, but getting good sleep certainly qualifies. Among other conditions, poor-quality sleep and short sleep can increase the risk of depression, weight gain, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. So, it's good to regularly get the recommended seven or more hours of sleep each night. Keeping electronics out of the bedroom, avoiding large meals and caffeine close to bedtime, and going to bed at a regular time are some strategies that can help.

Try "activity snacks." These aren't the snacks you keep in your backpack or desk drawer to fuel your physical activity. Though, those can be important as well. "Activity snacks" are short bits of physical activity – just a few minutes of walking or stretching or some other activity you enjoy. They can fit easily into our routines, and there's growing evidence that adding even small amounts of physical activity to our days can give a boost to our health and well-being. "Activity snacks" can be one easy way to do that.

Take a stand against too much sitting. It's a fact of modern life: many of us spend a lot of time sitting during the day. And, it turns out, that's just not great for our health. Being sedentary has been linked to an increased risk of many chronic diseases, even in those who exercise otherwise. So, on top of being regularly active, it's also important to break up long periods of sitting. Try standing breaks every hour or so, starting small, and then slowly building up the amount of standing.

Spend time in parks and other green spaces. Along with the recommendation to get more sleep, this may be one of the more appealing health tips for 2024. But as with sleep, there's good science behind it. Spending time in parks and other open green spaces can help with mental health and lower the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. Take some time to search out and visit parks in your area, especially when the weather turns nicer, or plan a visit to state or national parks when you have more time.

Toast to alcohol-free alternatives. Winter is big on celebrations, and that can make it a great time to try toasting with alcohol-free options. The science has shown for a while that when it comes to diseases like cancer and our overall health and well-being, zero alcohol is the healthiest choice. And the marketplace is quickly catching up, with many alcohol-free options that can taste a lot like regular drinks with alcohol. And for even healthier, lower-calorie options, there are always alternatives like fizzy water or unsweetened coffee and teas.

Here's to a healthy and happy 2024.

It's your health. Take control.

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