

Doctor's orders

Here's to a healthy 2021, with resolutions from heart doctors



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By Michael Merschel
American Heart Association News

Deep in their hearts, everyone has to be looking forward to a fresh start in 2021.

And who would know better about matters of the heart than a cardiologist? We asked some of the nation's best about resolutions — what they're planning for themselves, and what they wish their patients would focus on for a healthy and happy new year.

Their advice begins with a reminder that the threat of COVID-19 will not vanish at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 31.

"You need to resolve to stay healthy and safe," said Dr. Ivor Benjamin, director of the Cardiovascular Center and professor of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. "It's an ever-present challenge for everyone, independent of where they are."

In California, Dr. Robert Harrington is chair of the department of medicine at Stanford University. He's making its institutional motto a personal one as the fight against the coronavirus goes on.

Stanford Medicine tells its health care workers, researchers, staff and

students to be safe, be smart, be kind, Harrington said. "So my personal resolution is that I will work at staying safe through good public health measures of mask-wearing, frequent hand-washing and appropriate social distancing; at staying smart by keeping up to date with the latest news and research on COVID-19; and at staying kind by focusing on our extended community needs."

"Here's hoping that my patients can do the same."

Even as the pandemic is a top health concern, there's room for thinking beyond it.

"The new year is always a good time for patients to reprioritize their health," said Dr. Fatima Rodriguez, an assistant professor of cardiovascular medicine at Stanford. She'd like patients to focus on healthy eating and scheduling physical activity every day. "There are no quick fixes to optimal cardiovascular health. It takes consistency."

Dr. Rachel M. Bond, system director of women's heart health at Dignity Health in Arizona, suggests resolving to learn the art of relaxation.

"Although stress and anxiety are common — and we've had more than our fair share of both in 2020 — chronic stress and anxiety can be dangerous for our heart health." Anxiety can trigger the



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release of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which can increase heart rate and blood pressure. Women are at higher risk for stress-related heart issues, Bond said.

"Finding healthy ways to cope with this is a must," she said. She suggests meditation, exercise, listening to music, conversing with family or friends or even seeking professional help.

Relaxation was on Rodriguez's mind with her personal resolutions. She's aiming to take time to disconnect from devices — "no email, no cellphones, no social media. I'd also love to prioritize time for reading non-medical literature and journaling."

Bond said she isn't traditionally a resolution-maker. "I usually try to shy away from making yearly resolutions, as if I fail to stick to them, I feel an extreme level of guilt."

To that point, Benjamin said it's important to make resolutions that are realistic.

For example, he'd like to lower his handicap in golf. "But it's kind of hard to do that when I live in Wisconsin and there's still snow on the ground for the next four to five months."

For patients looking to make healthy changes, Benjamin offers this simple advice year-round: "I am looking for progress, and not perfection."

For example, instead of setting out to run a marathon, a good resolution for adults might be to follow the federal recommendation to get at least 150 minutes of brisk exercise every week. "I tell my patients walk 30 minutes a day and take a day or two off for good measure. Just do the math, and you're going to get there."

He and Bond both looked inward with some of their personal goals. Benjamin hopes he can spend more time in the present, "so that I can be a catalyst and, hopefully, a positive force for everything that's around me."

And Bond said "with 2020 being a year for the history books — and a chapter I am eager to close," she's focused on gratitude.

"What 2020 has taught me is that life-altering triumphs, no matter how great or small, should be celebrated, as who knows what tomorrow may bring."

HEALTH MATTERS

HEALTH STAT

300 million

According to the CDC, Operation Warp Speed's goal is to produce and deliver 300 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines with the initial doses available by January 2021.

CONDITIONS 101

What are cold sores?

Cold sores, also known as fever blisters, are a common viral infection that cause small, fluid-filled blisters to appear on and around your lips. These blisters are often grouped together in patches. When a blister breaks, a scab will form that can last for days. Cold sores usually heal in about two to three weeks. They usually do not scar.

"Cold sores spread from person to person by close contact, such as kissing," according to the Mayo Clinic. "They're usually caused by herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1), and less commonly herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2). Both of these viruses can affect your mouth or genitals and can be spread by oral sex. Cold sores are contagious even if you don't see the sores. There's no cure for cold sores, but treatment can help manage outbreaks. Prescription antiviral pills or creams can help sores heal more quickly. And they may reduce the frequency,

length and severity of future outbreaks."

The first time you have a cold sore, symptoms might not arise for up to 20 days after first being exposed to the virus. Recurrences tend to be less severe than the first outbreak. During recurrences, sores often appear at the same spot each time.

NUTRITION STATION

Can chili peppers help you live longer?

Capsaicin, the chemical compound that gives peppers their spice, has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties and, according to Well+Good, may help improve longevity.

A 2015 Chinese study concluded that, of the almost half a million participants, those who consumed more spicy foods were less likely to die of all causes (especially of cancer, heart disease and respiratory diseases) than those who never or rarely ate spicy foods. The study concluded the effect may be due to capsaicin.

"The Chinese researchers found that the benefits of capsaicin were cumulative; people who ate spicy foods six or seven times per week were least likely to die of any cause," says Well+Good. "But eating spicy meals even a couple of times a week seemed to have some benefit."

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TODAY'S WORKOUT

Pulsing deadlift strengthens lower back, glutes, hamstrings

By Marlo Alleva
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Have you ever experienced lower back pain or weakness? How about tight and tired hamstrings?

If so, there could be a multitude of reasons, from activity level to injury. But many times it is the simple fact that the muscles are untrained, unstretched and weak.

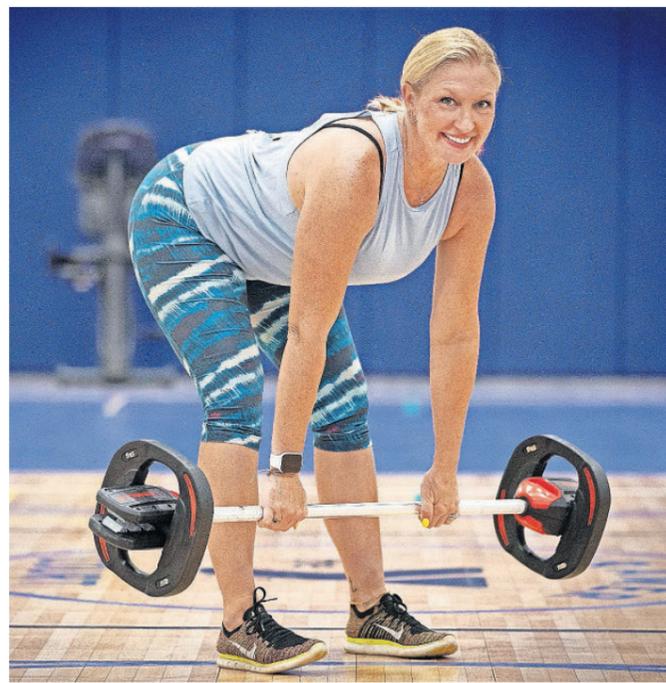
This is all a simple fix, given there are no major injuries, of course.

Our move today is a pulsing deadlift. This exercise will be toning the lower back, glutes and hamstrings. This move will also provide a good stretch to the whole backside.

You will need a weighted bar for this deadlift. If your equipment is limited, be creative and improvise with household items.

Begin this move by gripping your weighted bar. Place your hands just outside of hip width. Rolling your shoulders back and down, and holding your chest tall, engage your abdominals and place your feet hip-width apart with the toes facing forward. With the bar resting on your thighs, you are ready to start!

Keeping your chest lifted, proceed to bend in your hips, lowering the bar to at least the knees, or as low as you can efficiently bend. Once you reach your lowest



Marlo Alleva demonstrates a pulsing deadlift. [ERNST PETERS/THE LEDGER]

point, hold that position and begin to make small pulsing movements by lifting and lowering in your deepest position.

Keeping your back strong, continue this pulsing motion for either a determined count or a set time; for example, 10 seconds or 10 repetitions.

Once you reach your goal, slowly return to the start, take a small break, reposition and proceed into another set. Give yourself at least three to five sets of these pulsing deadlifts.

If you have restrictions in your back, or very tight

hamstrings, this move may be smaller in the beginning. But once your muscles release and become stronger, you will begin to get a deeper move from this exercise.

If you feel you need intensity, simply add more weight to your bar.

This exercise is great added into any lower body or leg routine!

Marlo Alleva, an instructor at Gold's Gym and group fitness coordinator at Fontaine-Gills YMCA in Lakeland, Florida, can be reached at faluvzpa@msn.com.