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Modern Family
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Resolved

BY JILL LUPINE

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Dr. David Ho of Modern Family Medicine Main Line
OFFERS SAGE ADVICE TO
THOSE WHO STRUGGLE TO
MAINTAIN THE HEALTH-
FOCUSED CHANGES ADOPTED
AT THE DAWN OF A NEW YEAR.

As the winter holidays come to an end, many of us feel compelled to reflect on the past year: our accomplishments, our missteps, the ways in which we could have done better. Such moments of reflection inevitably lead many of us to reach the same conclusion: “I need to make some changes.”

“Most of my patients decide to set goals for the new year,” says David Ho, M.D., the founding physician of Modern Family Medicine Main Line in Bryn Mawr, which provides primary care for patients ages 16 years and up. “For the most part, people tend to focus on appearance, weight issues, and gym memberships, and not so

much on ‘I should get lab work or tests done’ or ‘My mental health is not OK.’”

Despite good intentions, many of us see our hopes dashed by February. We fail to achieve our goals or maintain our healthy habits even though we know they would serve us well.

Dr. Ho believes a changed mindset is needed in order to succeed where we have fallen short in years past. In other words, we each need to prioritize ourselves and not beat ourselves up for the occasional misstep or return to old habits.

“In general most people try to set unrealistic goals or resolutions, and not just focus on one attainable challenge,” he says. “Personally, I



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MODERN FAMILY MEDICINE MAIN LINE

do not like the phrase *resolution*, because it should be a challenge. Challenge yourself to do better at healthy eating or walking for 15 minutes a day. You may fail, but you can start over the next day or the next week. Enjoy and savor the little gains."

He speaks from personal experience.

"I do not have time' is a common theme that often prevents us from getting to the doctor, getting blood work, or having other tests done," he adds. "For myself, I have set the challenge to be more present when I am home and not working, to not be distracted and live in that moment with my family. I have failed from time to time, and I realize I missed out on some great moments as a result, but I continue to work on it every day."

For anyone in need of guidance in terms of focusing on healthy resolutions—or "challenges," to use Dr. Ho's term—he offers the following suggestions.

▶ **Make Sleep a Priority.** One third of American adults do not get the recommended seven hours of sleep per night, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A lack of sleep has been linked to issues such as depression and heart disease. In order to make sleep a priority, establish a consistent sleep schedule and create a bedtime routine that helps you unwind. Quality sleep is vital for overall health, cognitive function, and emotional well-being.

▶ **Commit to Quality Hydration.** "Water is your best friend," Dr. Ho says. "Hydration is essential for bodily functions. Make it a goal to drink more water throughout the day to help keep your body in peak condition." The recommended daily intake of water will vary for each person based on a number of personal factors. General recommendations, however, suggest anywhere from 11.5 to 15.5 cups of water per day, according to a recent report from Harvard Health Publishing. To help people keep track of their water intake per day, Dr. Ho suggests using

a reusable water bottle or a smartphone app. Reusable water bottles act as a constant reminder of how much water you drink per day. Smartphone apps are able to send reminders to drink water throughout the day, and some will keep track of daily water intake.

▶ **Upgrade Your Nutrition.** What we choose to put into our body has a direct impact on our long-term health. Choosing healthier foods does not necessitate an extreme, all-or-nothing crash diet. For a lot of people, focusing on healthier diet could be as straightforward as incorporating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains into meals. Making small changes in your diet *now* has the potential to snowball into positive outcomes *later*.

▶ **Be Active.** Adults need 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical

activity and two days of muscle-strengthening activity per week, according to guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. That said, people need to commit to a regular exercise routine that suits their lifestyle, be it a daily walk, a home workout, or a fitness class at a nearby gym. The good news is that consistent physical activity not only improves your physical health, but also boosts your mood and energy levels.

▶ **Practice Mindfulness and Stress Management.** Stress can wreak havoc on a person's physical and mental health, both of which are essential to overall wellness. More than half of American adults have felt depressed and anxious, according to a 2018 report from the Mental Health Foundation. Besides depression and anxiety, stress can lead to problems such as high blood pressure, weight gain, and sleep disorders. Some ways to mitigate stress include healthy diet and exercise, meditation, positive social relationships, and professional counseling services.

In his practice, Dr. Ho often reminds his patients to "take a step back" and do one thing a month to improve their personal and mental well-being. Stress-reducing activities might include taking a walk at lunchtime or after dinner, reading a book, and listening to uplifting or relaxing music. Simply stepping away from the computer or doing an activity without the distraction of a smartphone can help someone decompress and de-stress.

While it may be easy to start working toward a health-focused goal, maintaining one's commitment to achieving that goal is infinitely more difficult. Talking to a physician or other licensed healthcare professional can make all the difference between having good *intentions* and having good *outcomes*.

"I am here to help my patients, and my wish is that they utilize me," Dr. Ho says. "Any question matters when it's about making a change in your health. Do not be afraid to ask."

Dr. Ho has a few goals of his own in mind for the year ahead: "For the practice, our goal is to continue to elevate the patient experience, to continue to be progressive in technology, and to make sure the connection and human touch is always present. Above all, my wish is for the best year for everyone." ■



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