



Building resiliency for the year ahead

The New Year is a great time for a fresh start and for many of us that means making resolutions to lead healthier lives. However, keeping those resolutions can be challenging. This year, try something different. Concentrate on building resilience – the ability to calmly deal with difficult situations and recover from setbacks. By doing so, you'll not only be healthier but ready to deal with anything life throws your way. And it only takes a few small adjustments in your day to day life to get started.

Feeding your body

A nutritious diet is the key to good physical health. But it's also the key to regulating our moods, enhancing mental clarity, and coping with stress. Fortunately, it's not hard to improve your diet. Try these tips:

- **Eat more superfoods.** These are nutritionally rich foods full of antioxidants, substances thought to prevent or slow down cellular damage and thus help protect us against developing certain cancers, heart disease and other chronic diseases. They are basically any brightly coloured fruit and vegetables, nuts, lentils, and fatty fish (such as salmon).

One of the most popular superfoods is blueberries. They're packed with vitamins A, C, E and B complex, magnesium and copper which may help prevent some cancers. Studies have found that blueberries also have anti-inflammatory and blood sugar-lowering properties. And they're delicious!

More good news. The list of superfoods includes dark chocolate! Dark chocolate (at least 65 percent cacao) also contains compounds that help regulate blood pressure, LDL cholesterol and hormone levels. Other examples of superfoods include:

- Garlic
- Green tea
- Honey
- Olives and olive oil
- Whole wheats

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- **Eat breakfast.** Mom was right. Breakfast is the most important meal. Your body and brain needs energy to kick-start the day. Make it a balanced meal with complex carbohydrates, such as whole grain toast, lean protein and a fruit.
- **Eat small, frequent meals.** Your brain requires a steady supply of nutrients so it's better to eat a meal or snack every few hours than three large meals. For a snack, a piece of fruit or a few nuts will suffice.

Feeding your mind

Again, a few adjustments can make a big difference to helping you mentally weather life's storms.

- **Practice mindfulness.** Mindfulness means living in and appreciating the moment. That's easier said than done when most of us are so busy juggling the many demands of work and home. But there are some simple ways to become more mindful, including meditating, praying, listening to music, practicing yoga or tai chi or just taking five minutes to quietly sit and rest. Many people find it helpful to practice gratitude by writing down a certain number of things they are thankful for every day. This helps bring our minds to the present moment and the things that are important in our lives.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Resilience doesn't mean you have a positive feeling about every negative situation. It means that despite something going wrong you believe you can and will do your best to deal with the situation and move forward.
- **Connecting with others.** Having people around you with whom you can share feelings, discuss problems and receive advice is an essential part of weathering life's storms. It's also important to reach out for help when you feel overwhelmed by a situation. Contact your family doctor or Employee and Family Assistance Program and ask to speak to a counsellor.

With just a few small adjustments to your life, you can help your mind and body prepare for all the excitement and challenges the year ahead has in store!

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Stronger and smarter: Fitness at work

There are many benefits of an active lifestyle: decreased risks of cardiovascular disease; decreased risk of many cancers and other chronic illnesses; stronger immune systems; less stress and anxiety and more energy. Exercise also helps our brains work better, making us more productive at work and at home. But for those of us who mostly sit all day, even doing the recommended 30 minutes of vigorous exercise five times a week may not undo the health risks of our mostly sedentary life.

Try incorporating physical activity into your workday with short bouts of aerobics, strength exercises and stretches. For example:

- If you take public transit, get off a couple of stops early and walk the rest of the way. If you drive to work, park as far away from your building's entrance as you can.
- If you're fortunate to work close to a gym, try to use your lunch break to fit in a workout. Many large organizations subsidize their employee's fitness fees and large gyms often offer corporate memberships.
- Ignore the elevators and take the stairs. Don't let working on the 24th floor discourage you. Take the elevator to the 20th floor and walk the last four. Slowly increase the number of floors and your speed without stopping to catch your breath.
- Use your breaks to exercise:
 - Walk or run up and down several flights of stairs. Slowly increase the number of floors and your pace.
 - Jog one or two laps around your building.
 - Get a few colleagues together and play hockey, soccer or basketball in the parking lot (clear it with HR first). Or simply go for walk.
 - Do some yoga stretches, squats, lunges or wall sits in your cubicle. If this isn't possible, use the large stall in the washroom. If no one is around, do pushups using the sink counter!
 - Keep some light dumbbells and a resistance band in your desk and do some strength training exercises every time your eyes need a quick break from the computer screen.
- Sit up straight. Good posture reduces fatigue and strain on your ligaments, muscles, tendons and joints. Watching your posture can also alleviate neck and back pain as well as give your lungs the room to work efficiently – and provide your brain with more oxygen.
- Replace your chair with a stability ball. You'll strengthen your abdominal muscles and improve your posture while working.
- Join or contact, your workplace health and wellness committee and organize lunch time yoga or stretch classes for all employees.

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- If your employer offers standing desks, request one. Standing rather than sitting all day burns more calories, lowers blood sugar, reduces fatigue and, for many people, helps reduce upper back and neck pain.
- When waiting for that big print job to be completed or the boss to arrive, do some calf raises. Standing with feet shoulder-width apart, press up onto your tip toes, pause, and then lower back down. Repeat.
- Instead of calling or emailing a co-worker down the hall, walk to their desk.

Stay alert and focused

Study after study has shown that work performance is consistently higher after exercising – even a few minutes of yoga or a brisk walk does the trick. So protect your greatest asset – your brain – by incorporating movement into every aspect of your work day.

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