

Health FRESH START

January is an ideal time to look ahead to great health in 2017 and beyond, writes *Paula Goodyer*.



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A new year is the perfect time to ask whether your lifestyle needs a reset, and to safeguard your future wellness in the process.

Some of the most common chronic health problems managed by GPs, including high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and arthritis, don't happen overnight but sneak up over time. Yet they're often preventable. The same changes that lower the risk of one may lower the chances of developing others. Maintain a healthy weight and down comes the risk of high blood pressure, osteoarthritis and type 2 diabetes, for instance. Healthy cholesterol levels are more likely when you eat a diet high in fibre-rich plant foods, which also helps keep weight off.

Here's how to invest in your future health, starting now: **Get fresh** An abundance of convenience food and infrequent home cooking is a recipe for chronic disease, says Sydney accredited practising dietitian Sue Radd, author of *Food as Medicine*. Her advice? Eat more fresh, minimally processed foods, including plenty of veggies, legumes and fruit, plus nuts, seeds and extra-virgin olive oil.

GET MOVING

Be mindful about movement.

With regular exercise comes a lower risk of high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and osteoarthritis, says Dr David Katz.

- ✦ Focus on how much stronger you feel after sticking with regular exercise.
- ✦ Pay attention to how refreshed you are after a brisk walk or a yoga class.
- ✦ Feel grateful to your body for allowing you to be physically active. "We should all count our blessings if our limbs are working well and we're ready for action," says Dr Katz.

"A high intake of plant compounds helps quell the low-level inflammation linked to many chronic diseases," says Radd. "Increased potassium, magnesium and calcium, together with less added salt, helps keep blood pressure healthy. Meanwhile, prebiotic fibres in vegetables and legumes help friendly gut microbes to thrive."

Take healthy shortcuts The path to good, fast weeknight dinners starts at the weekend, says Radd. Devote a few hours to cooking up vegetable mixtures to use as bases for soups or sauces. Make extra servings to freeze. Wash and prep vegetables (rounding out dinner with a salad nightly is an easy way to boost veggie intake). **Tune your tastebuds** Part of the trouble with highly processed and fast foods is that their more-ish flavours make it easy to overeat. Your tastebuds then get hooked on added sugar and salt, says Dr David Katz, director of Yale University's Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Centre and author of *Disease Proof*. Shift to more wholefoods (DIY salad dressing or pasta sauce is a good start) and your tastebuds will come to prefer less salty and sugary flavours.

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