

Ring in new year with AMA's 10 tips for your patients' health

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As 2019 gets underway, patients and physicians are thinking about those often difficult-to-keep resolutions. Now the AMA is offering up some pithy advice to help physicians counsel patients on making healthier choices for themselves and their loved ones.

“This is the perfect time of year for each of us to consider our personal goals, and how we can make positive health choices in the coming year,” said AMA President Barbara L. McAneny, MD. “We encourage everyone to prioritize their long-term health by making small lifestyle changes now that can have a lasting effect in improving their health.”

To help make health a priority in 2019, the AMA offers up these 10 recommendations for physicians to share with patients.

Learn your risk for type 2 diabetes. Maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly and losing between 5 and 7 percent of one's body weight can help prevent type 2 diabetes. Patients can take a self-screening test to determine their risk and speak with a physician to find out about widely available, evidence-based lifestyle change programs that can help. Participation in a lifestyle change program can lower the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by more than 50 percent.

Increase physical activity. About 80 percent of U.S. adults and adolescents are insufficiently active, according to the 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines. Physical activity fosters normal growth and development. It can also make people feel, function, and sleep better, while reducing the risk of many chronic diseases. Adults should do at least 150 minutes a week of moderate-intensity activity, or 75 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity activity.

Know your blood pressure numbers. Visit [LowerYourHBP.org](https://www.loweryourhbp.org) to better understand your numbers and take necessary steps to get your high blood pressure under control. Doing so will reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.

Avoid processed foods, added sodium and sugar. Packaged foods such as meat, poultry, seafood, pasta, dressings, bread, sauces or soups are unhealthy choices. Consulting a nutrition label can help, but an easy route to take is opting for fresh, frozen or canned foods without added sauces or seasonings. This can help control how much sodium is used. And don't forget to reduce your consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Instead, drink more water.

Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed by your physician. Antibiotic resistance is a serious public health problem. However, if a patient has a virus, such as the cold or flu, antibiotics will not make them feel better.

If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For women that should be up to one drink per day and two drinks per day for men, as defined by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Adults of legal drinking age should also be the only ones drinking alcohol—if at all.

Talk with your doctor about tobacco use and quit. Work with your physician to drop the habit for good using evidence-based, Food and Drug Administration-approved cessation aids. Electronic cigarettes fall short as a harm-reduction tool and should not be used to help quit smoking.

A wise move to make: Declare your home and car smoke-free. This can help eliminate your exposure—and the exposure of loved ones—to secondhand smoke.

Properly store and dispose of pain medication. If you are taking prescription opioids, follow your physician's instructions and safely store them to prevent diversion or misuse. Here are five tips to help patients safely store opioids at home.

And, if any unused medication remains, make sure you properly dispose of it. Use this U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration search tool to locate nearby public drug-disposal locations.

Make sure your family is up-to-date on vaccinations. Immunization is one of the most effective interventions for improving public health. This also includes getting the annual influenza vaccine for everyone age six months or older.

Work with your physician to ensure that you are all following the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

Manage stress. A good diet and daily exercise are key ingredients to maintaining and improving your mental health. But it is also important to ask for help from a friend or mental health professional when you need it. Don't avoid stress. Instead, properly manage it by participating in physical activity, socializing or eating balanced meals.