New decade, new you: Encourage patients to follow these 10 health tips

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Sara Berg, MS
Senior News Writer

Every new year comes with a laundry list of resolutions to “get healthier.” But it is often hard to stick to those New Year’s resolutions and goals. For 2020, the AMA has gathered some pithy advice to help physicians counsel their patients on making healthier choices.

The AMA is committed to improving the health of the nation by leading the charge to prevent and reduce the burden of chronic diseases, like cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. The AMA will continue its efforts aimed at helping the U.S. achieve no new preventable cases of type 2 diabetes and helping all adults meet their blood pressure goals to ensure patients live richer and fuller lives.

“With too many holiday sweets and not enough exercise likely in the rearview mirror, now is the perfect time to consider your personal goals and how you can make positive health choices in the coming year,” said AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA. “The good news is that there are a few easy steps you can take that will set you on the right track for a healthier 2020.”

To kick-start New Year’s resolutions, the AMA offers up these 10 recommendations for physicians to share with patients to make health a priority in 2020.

Learn your risk for type 2 diabetes. Encourage patients to take a self-screening test to determine their risk for prediabetes and type 2 diabetes. By taking steps now, it can help patients prevent or delay the onset of type 2 diabetes.

Be more physically active. According to the 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines, about 80% of U.S. adults and adolescents are insufficiently active. Each week, adults should participate in at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity. Maintaining proper amounts of physical activity can foster normal growth and development while also reducing the risk for many chronic diseases.

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Know your blood pressure numbers. Patients can visit LowerYourHBP.org to better understand their blood pressure numbers and take necessary steps to get their high blood pressure under control. This will reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke.

Reduce intake of processed foods, added sodium and sugar. When it comes to a healthy diet, patients should eat less red meat and processed meats, and add more plant-based foods, such as olive oil, nuts and seeds. Patients should also reduce their consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and drink more water instead. Drinking sugary beverages, even 100% fruit juices, is associated with a higher all-cause mortality risk, suggests a study published in JAMA Network Open.

Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed. Antibiotic resistance is a serious public health problem—more than 2.8 million antibiotic-resistant infections occur annually in the U.S. and kill more than 35,000 people each year, according to a report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Antibiotics will not make patients feel better if they have a virus, such as a cold or flu.

If consuming alcohol, do so in moderation. Women should only drink up to one drink per day while it is two drinks per day for men, as defined by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Only adults of legal drinking age should consume alcohol.

Talk about tobacco and e-cigarette use (or vaping) and how to quit. It is a wise decision for patients to declare their home and car smoke-free. This can help eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke. Patients should work with their physicians to drop the habit for good using evidence-based, Food and Drug Administration-approved cessation aids. E-cigarettes fall short as a harm-reduction tool and should not be used to help quit smoking.

Pain medication is personal. When taking prescription opioids or other medications, patients must follow their doctor’s instructions, store them safely to prevent misuse and properly dispose of any leftover medication.

Remain up to date on vaccines. This includes getting the annual influenza vaccine for everyone age six months or older. Pregnant women can receive the flu vaccine during any trimester but should receive the Tdap vaccine early in the third trimester to protect against the flu and whooping cough.

Manage stress. It is important to follow a healthy diet, get at least 7.5 hours of sleep each night, perform daily exercise and wellness activities—like yoga and meditation. These are key ingredients to maintaining and improving mental health. However, patients should not hesitate to ask for help from a mental health professional when needed.