

Take these 6 overlooked steps to better health in the new year

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If living through a global pandemic has taught us anything, it's that we should not take health and well-being for granted. While some may still be feeling that ongoing pandemic fatigue, it is important to pause and reflect before ringing in the new year. But focusing on your health and well-being does not have to translate into a new diet or workout goal when choosing effective New Year's resolutions. Instead, there are some healthy habits patients may be overlooking.

The AMA's What Doctors Wish Patients Knew™ series gives physicians a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines.

Here is a list of stories from this series on what doctors wish patients knew about overlooked healthy habits to practice in the new year.

1 Catch up on family immunizations

Immunizations, or vaccinations, have prevented countless cases of disease and disability, and they save millions of lives each year. Yet there are still people who are sickened or disabled by preventable infectious diseases and families that mourn the devastating loss of loved ones from vaccine-preventable illnesses. That is why it is important to stay up to date on immunizations for the entire family, including COVID-19 vaccinations. It has taken on increased importance in light of the “tripledeemic” of influenza, COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

2 Take steps for healthy aging

We've seen actress Betty White live to the age of 99 and, more recently, Queen Elizabeth II die at 96 after a 70-year reign. This has a lot to do with healthy aging, which shouldn't

begin as an older adult—it should be top of mind even in your college years. And while there are many factors that influence healthy aging, some of these—such as genetics—are not in our control. That is why knowing what steps to take is key. This article outlines what patients can do to maintain physical and mental health as they age.

3 Schedule a colon cancer screening

Colorectal cancer—which refers to cancer of the colon or the rectum—is the second leading cause of cancer death in the U.S., and recently taking the life of former “Cheers” actor Kirstie Alley. And colon cancer doesn’t seem to have any signs of slowing—with rates of colorectal cancer rising in adults 20 through 49 years old. Yet about 30% of patients who are eligible in the United States still have not been screened for colorectal cancer. Two physicians share what to know about colon cancer screening and prevention.

4 Identify and address loneliness

Even though people are becoming more connected through social media and other outlets, the great irony is that many people still feel lonely. That loneliness, in turn, can have far-reaching implications on a person’s health and well-being. Loneliness as a public health issue has been intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two physicians discuss how to recognize loneliness and what can help patients overcome feeling lonely.

5 Get screened for breast cancer

It’s natural for women to worry about breast cancer, especially since many people know someone who was touched by the disease. While there is no foolproof way to prevent breast cancer, there are things you can do to lower your risk. Some factors you can’t change, but knowing what can help is key to lowering your risk of breast cancer. This article looks at how patients can reduce their risk of breast cancer.

6 Cut down on screen time

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for everyone, digital tools have allowed people to work remotely, participate in school from home and maintain personal connections virtually. It is understandable that people are on their devices more now than

ever before to remain connected. But spending too much time on screens can have negative health effects. That is why it is important to take proactive steps to cut down on screen time. Two AMA members share how patients can reduce screen time.

For more great advice, check out this column—“10 Health Resolutions Doctors Encourage You to Make Today”—published this month in the Hanford, California, newspaper *The Sentinel*.

As AMA President Jack Resneck Jr., MD, noted: “The good news is that small, positive health choices made right now can have long-lasting effects.”