



# 12 Chances to Have a Better New Year

Plan ahead to take care of yourself all year long. Keep this calendar handy to help you get ready for a new year and a healthier you. Researchers show us the way to make every month of the year a positive influence on our well-being.

- LISSA POIROT



## 2004's Healthier New Year Plan!

### JANUARY

**Wake up hibernating muscles** by indulging in a massage. Massage therapy helps relieve temporary and chronic pain and releases feel-good endorphins that enhance your mood, according to physical therapists at the Medical College of Georgia, Augusta.

### MAY

**Head to a park with a book of poetry.** German researchers have found that reading poetry aloud lowers the heart rate and helps you recuperate from daily stress. To celebrate nature, try e.e. cummings ("Chansons Innocentes") or William Wordsworth ("Summer Vacation").

### FEBRUARY

**Take up a new language,** learn a challenging new game or read about your favorite historical era or person. Doctors at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York say that mentally stimulating activities may help stave off cognitive decline and prevent Alzheimer's.

### JUNE

**Take up painting,** drawing or sketching. Besides being fun, art therapy is believed to aid in pain management while reducing stress and building positive coping skills, according to the University of Michigan's Ann Arbor Comprehensive Cancer Center.

### SEPTEMBER

**Laugh!** Japanese researchers found that mirthful laughter significantly reduced cytokine levels in participants with RA. High levels can increase inflammation, so a little bit of laughter can decrease inflammation and ease pain. Sounds funny, but it's true.

### OCTOBER

**Set pen to paper** - it's never too late to start a journal. Researchers at the University of Iowa, Iowa City, have discovered that journal writing can be a therapeutic tool for relieving stress.

### NOVEMBER

**Fight winter colds** with a positive attitude. A study of 300 healthy people by researchers at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, found that positive people are less likely to catch a cold than not-so-optimistic folks.

### DECEMBER

**Be happy** and ward off the flu with meditation. A University of Wisconsin, Madison, study found people who received flu vaccines and meditated an hour a day, six days a week, produced more antibodies to the vaccine than those who did not meditate.

### APRIL

**Get to know someone new.** A professor at the University of Toronto has found that the more acquaintances you have - and the more varied - the healthier you feel, and the less stressed and depressed you are.

### MARCH

**Get the luck of the Irish.** Think yourself lucky by simply noticing how things are going your way, and they will, say researchers at the University of Hertfordshire in England.

### AUGUST

**Take a dip in a non-heated pool.** The hot and sunny dog days of summer can lead to seasonal affective disorder (SAD), too, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. When you find yourself becoming irritable or lethargic, cool water will decrease your body temperature so you can feel like yourself again.

### JULY

**Fulfill yourself** while enjoying the great outdoors. Volunteer to be a guide with the National Park Service or build a house with Habitat for Humanity. A Florida State University, Tallahassee, study found that older Americans who volunteered two to three times a week improved their overall well-being.