

# Forging Healthy Habits

**If you rang in the new year with big wellness resolutions, congrats!** The first step to a better, healthier life is to set the goal. Sometimes, though, our goals are too big or too unfocused to be sustained. If we take on too much at once, we can become overwhelmed by our ambitions and give up. While there's nothing wrong with slipping up, not following through on personal goals can make us feel defeated and affect our confidence.

What if, instead of pushing ourselves to the limit, we focused on adding small healthy habits to our routine? Small changes can lead to big results and adding them over time can help ensure our success.

Here are some healthy habits you can try that nourish your mind and your body:

- **Eat more vegetables and fruit.** According to the CDC, only one in 10 Americans eat enough vegetables and fruit. Produce is a great source of fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients – all of which are essential in preventing chronic disease. Aim for two cups of fruit and three cups of vegetables daily.
- **Grocery shop weekly.** Having a stocked pantry and fridge is the first step to improving your eating habits. Try shopping on the same day each week to form a habit. Shop mostly on the perimeter of the store to ensure you are choosing mostly whole foods like lean protein, fresh produce, dairy and whole grains. If you can't get to a store, try ordering for delivery online. Once you invest the time into that first order, future orders will mostly entail minor tweaks to your list.
- **Discover mindful exercise.** The CDC and American Heart Association recommend 150 minutes of moderate exercise weekly. If you're new to fitness, start small by adding movement to regular daily activities: Take a few extra laps around the grocery store or stretch while brushing your teeth. Finding activities you are excited about and that make you feel good can also help you stick with it.
- **Drink an extra glass of water.** Water makes up more than 60% of our body, making it essential for our internal systems to function properly. Your daily hydration goal should be to drink approximately half your body weight in ounces: If you're 200 pounds, for example, you should aim for 100 ounces of water. Sound daunting? Start by adding 16 ounces – just one standard water bottle – every day.
- **Evaluate your sleep hygiene.** Many of us do not put enough emphasis on a good night's sleep, and we often pay the price in low energy, poor mood, increased hunger and cravings for foods high in fat and sugar. Going to bed and waking up at the same time on a regular basis is a good start. Blue light from TVs, cellphones and computer screens can make it harder to fall asleep, so try going screen-free at least an hour before bed. Keep the lights low and do calm activities to help settle in for the night. Aim to snooze for seven to nine hours each night.
- **Practice self-care every day.** Taking care of yourself isn't only good for you, it may be the best gift you give to your loved ones as well! Activities like listening to (or making) music, reading a book, going for a walk or just being in nature can help you de-stress and recharge. Just a few minutes each day can boost your mood and improve your well-being.
- **Work with a health coach.** As an Ochsner Concierge Health member, you have your own personal health coach to lean on! Health coaches work with you to develop your personal vision, set specific goals and maximize your personal strengths through coaching and accountability. Get started with coaching by contacting Maria Cabrera at 504-842-0156 or [Maria.Cabrera@ochsner.org](mailto:Maria.Cabrera@ochsner.org)

Remember, it can take at least three weeks to initiate and sustain a new habit, so patience is key. Once you master the first mini goal, move on to the next! But even if you adopt only one of these, you are well on your way to a healthier 2023.