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**\*\* Video and photos available for download: <https://bit.ly/3lzlodn>\*\***

## **EXPERT SAYS: THIS NEW YEAR, RESOLVE TO GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK**

COLUMBUS, Ohio – New Year’s Day is typically a time to make resolutions, such as exercising more, eating better or losing weight. But this year, mental health experts at [The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center](#) say making such major New Year’s resolutions during these chaotic times can add more stress and be counterproductive. Instead, take some time to reset, focusing on what you can do to take better care of yourself in 2021.

“In normal times, a little bit of stress can help us find solutions and be productive. But when it’s prolonged for months on end and that stress becomes chronic, our bodies never get the message that the stress response can calm down, which can be detrimental to our physical and mental health,” said Sophie Lazarus, a clinical psychologist in the department of psychiatry and behavioral health at the Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.

This never-ending stress has many causes, stemming from all the adjustments people have made throughout the pandemic, such as helping their children navigate virtual and in-person learning, working from home, keeping their family safe and healthy or coping with economic hardships.

When it comes to making New Year’s resolutions, rather than a sweeping change that requires major adjustments to your life, Lazarus recommends making small shifts to bring greater ease into your daily life or see the positive that’s already there. One of the best ways to find these opportunities is to practice mindfulness.

Whether it’s meditation or simply bringing more awareness to nourishing activities you’re already doing, mindfulness can help you stay in the present moment, letting concerns about the past and future be held more lightly. There are plenty of apps and online resources to introduce you to different types of mindful activities. Lazarus suggests find what works for you and practice a few minutes every day to slow down and keep everything in perspective.

“Mindfulness is really stepping out of autopilot and being aware of what’s happening in the present moment. When we do that, we really have a better sense of how what we do impacts us,” Lazarus said. “Identifying sources of stress and making small, incremental changes to boost our happiness is going to be a lot more helpful than setting a really high bar, not meeting that bar and feeling discouraged.”

Lazarus suggests these three tips to clear your head and move forward with a more positive outlook in 2021:

- **Shift your perspective** – It’s easy to get caught up in what’s wrong in our lives and miss what’s positive or going well. First thing every morning, reflect on three things you’re grateful for. It can be anything — friends and family, work, health, pets, a sunny day, anything that brings you comfort or happiness. Starting your day by reminding yourself of the good things in your life can help you keep a more balanced outlook in the face of the day’s challenges.
- **Unplug** - Schedule some time to reconnect with the world around you. Taking some time away from screens can help you let go of stressors that are often in your control and put the focus back on yourself. Mindless scrolling on social media can actually increase stress and anxiety. Put the phone and computer aside and take a walk, cook a meal or ask your family about their day.
- **Be kind to yourself** – It’s hard to not be in control and, as our routines are disrupted, it’s easy to be overly critical of ourselves. This harsh stance only increases stress and makes things worse. See if you

can be a little gentler with yourself, as you might be with a beloved friend or family member. This might sound awkward, but it will ultimately make you more productive and able to tackle what's in front of you. Pause to take a deep breath, a bubble bath, a nap, whatever you need that day to help you remember that you're important too. Just take care of yourself.

Lazarus says if you find that you're having trouble taking care of yourself, performing at work or getting along with others, you should seek help from a mental health professional.

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