

## Health rises to top of 2021 New Year's resolutions

K-State aging specialist encourages older adults to make yearly goals, too

It may not be a surprise in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, but Kansas State University's Erin Yelland said recent reports indicating that health is Americans' most-common New Year's resolution does go against past year's trends.

"In the past," said Yelland, an assistant professor in the Department of Applied Human Sciences, "New Year's resolutions typically were focused on money. Regarding health, people have been more focused on losing weight or eating a healthier diet."

Instead, people are now more focused on overall health, she said, including hygiene, wearing a mask, social distancing and staying free of the coronavirus.

After health, Americans' top resolutions in 2021 are self-improvement, money and family.

Many New Year's resolutions are unlikely to be fulfilled. Research in 2019 by Strava, a social network that tracks human exercise, reported that most people are likely to give up on their New Year's resolution by Jan. 19.

"Lack of self control is the most reported reason for individuals not reaching their goal," Yelland said. "About 13% of people who make New Year's resolutions go into it knowing they likely won't accomplish their goal or follow through."

To increase the chance of success, Yelland suggests approaching New Year's resolutions with three thoughts in mind:

- **Reduce the goal to something that is manageable.** As an example, if your goal is to do 100 push-ups a day – but you haven't done push-ups for years – perhaps start by doing five push-ups each day.
- **Implement a plan.** Determine when progress toward the goal can be fit into your daily life. Exercise may be easier in the morning, or perhaps during a lunch break. Find a routine and stick with it.
- **Celebrate accomplishments.** Take the time to recognize success or progress, and do something that makes you happy about what you've been doing.

Yelland, who studies aging issues for K-State Research and Extension, notes that older people are less likely to make New Year's resolutions.

“Researchers report that 89% of millennials (approximately ages 24 -39) have resolutions,” she said. “But as you get older, the research notes that only 61% of Baby Boomers (ages 56-74) have resolutions.”

Yelland said many older Americans who make yearly resolutions are more likely to follow through. Some of the resolutions that are most common include:

- **Review legal documents**, such as the Power of Attorney for health care; a Living Will; and financial documents.
- **Get up-to-date on vaccinations**, including a yearly flu shot.
- **Make an inventory of current medications**. Get rid of old medications, including expired over-the-counter medications.
- **Try or learn something new**. Technology is one option, and may allow older adults to spend more time with their children or grandchildren.
- **Get rid of clutter around the house**. Reduce your possessions so that you’re not passing that chore on to the next generation. Removing clutter also reduces the risk of falls around the house.

“Making goals throughout the year is really a smart idea because we need to remind ourselves that we can’t accomplish everything immediately,” Yelland said. “Keeping something in mind, or working toward something, can be really valuable for you and your mental health and well-being. It gives you purpose and motivation to keep doing things.”

When safe, Yelland said older adults should invite family members to help with New Year’s resolutions. “Think about how they can help you go through medications or update legal documents,” she said. “It makes those things more fun, and you can learn to play together.”