



## Eight New Year's Resolutions for Mental Health You Can Actually Keep

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When putting together a New Year's resolutions list, most people focus on weight loss, financial gains, physical health and relationships. But with depression, anxiety and addiction rates at alarming highs, aspiring to good mental health should top nearly everyone's list in 2019. It's in that light that I share the top things you can do to foster better mental health in the New Year.



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Scientists disagree, [citing numerous studies](#) that conclude quitting smoking produces a significant decrease in anxiety, depression and stress.

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- 2. Take time to talk:** Talking with a therapist can be an effective means of improving your mental health. For the New Year, don't view this as a long-term commitment (even if it evolves into one); rather, simply commit to making an appointment to speak with a professional counselor, someone who can provide non-biased, non-judgmental analysis.
- 3. Look within:** Self-reflection is difficult. There's a natural temptation to look to others to assess blame or deny a problem altogether, which hinders self-improvement. In the New Year, strive for thoughtful introspection to discover thoughts and emotions that may help you achieve a healthier emotional balance.
- 4. Seek new perspectives:** A recent Acadia patient entered treatment demonstrating signs of severe emotional abuse. The patient suffered trauma for several years, only entering

treatment at the urging of a work supervisor. When asked why it took her so long to seek support, her answer was illuminating: “I thought that’s just how everyone feels.” Our worlds are unique, and everyone has different perspectives on feelings, interactions and behaviors. Many people ignore their triggers because they view themselves as typical, with issues that are not problematic, or they assume other people’s problems are much bigger than theirs. Just because you’re not “extreme” doesn’t mean you won’t benefit from mental health treatment. Accept that everyone’s frame of reference is different, talk to a trusted friend or family member and consider seeking professional help.

5. **Help end mental health stigma:** Those suffering from mental health issues are frequently stigmatized, even by themselves. And stigma is not always readily apparent. If you know someone dealing with mental health challenges — and *we all do* — talk to and support them in a non-judgmental way that eliminates stigma. The National Alliance on Mental Illness offers a quick, [self-assessment quiz](#), “[Do You Have Stigma?](#)” Take the test. Understand the signs.
6. **Read up:** If a friend or a loved one has been diagnosed with a mental health illness, learn as much as you can about the condition, referencing professional resources. I offer this point with a caveat: do not self-educate through unchecked, online sources. Proper education helps you make informed, intelligent choices when talking with healthcare professionals.
7. **Reclaim your personal space:** While it’s important to have a support network, don’t be afraid to say, “No,” establishing well-marked boundaries among family, friends and co-workers that help you better control your life. That means no more taking responsibility for others’ problems while respecting your own limits. For guidance, check out the book “[Boundaries](#)” by Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend.
8. **Shape up:** Exercise stimulates internal hormones and produces an overall calming effect to the body, which helps stabilize moods. [Studies have shown](#) that even moderate exercise can prevent depression, while [more regular regimens can improve memory and thinking](#). Of course, none of this should serve as a replacement for treatment (when appropriate), but it will serve to complement reductions in depression, anxiety and stress.

While mental health challenges are unique to each individual, their collective impact casts a wide net on family and friends, depending on the severity. Taking proactive steps to improve your mental health helps everyone, no matter what kind of commitment you make.

As we begin 2019, adopt a fresh, proactive approach to pursuing good mental health. It will pay dividends for you and your loved ones well into the New Year and beyond.

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Happy New Year.  
Sending blessings,  
Debbie

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