

# 11 Resolutions For a Better You—Proven by Science

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*“Good habits make all the difference.”* —Aristotle

It is wise for each of us, from time to time, to stop and evaluate our lives as we seek to make the most of them.

The start of a calendar year provides an opportunity to look back at the decisions that shaped our lives during the past year and gives us an extra push to make adjustments for the next one. Every new January represents a natural opportunity to evaluate the direction of our lives, adjust course if necessary, adopt new habits, or make healthy changes. Birthdays can often serve the same purpose.

Regardless of the time of year, self-reflection is important. **Consider then, these 11 resolutions for a better you—proven by science.** It is, after all, our habits that determine the course of our lives.

**1. Exercise.** Most of us recognize the benefits of physical exercise: healthy bodies, healthy minds, and **healthy confidence**. Some **studies** indicate exercise contributes to a positive body image even prior to any body weight or shape change—with as little as two weeks of regular exercise. And with increasing study centered around the effectiveness of **minimalist workouts**, each of us should be able to find the time to get started.

**2. Less television.** Those seeking intentionality realize the negative influence television has on their mind: it impacts our worldview, encourages consumerism, oversimplifies life, and results in less life satisfaction. Even more drastic, scientists are beginning to discover the habit of watching too-much television may be negatively impacting our life expectancy as well. Nobody is telling you to throw your television in the nearest dumpster, but deciding to cut back in the next year may be one of the best decisions you could ever make.

**3. Go outside.** According to recent studies published in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, simply spending time outside with nature contributes to increased energy, wards off feelings of exhaustion, and results in a heightened sense of well-being. Of course, simply walking from your front door to the car door doesn't count. So make a point this coming year to find an excuse to be outside—you can always start with a simple walk around the block each evening.

**4. Read fiction.** Recently, researchers have begun studying the physical impact reading stories has on our brain. As you might expect, they are discovering reading results in heightened connectivity and brain activity—sometimes, even up to 5 days after the book has been completed. If you read fiction, you already know this to be true. If you don't, this could be your year to start. You may enjoy beginning with *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent*.

**5. Give.** Numerous studies show charitable giving boosts happiness and reduces stress—especially when the generosity promotes positive social connection. If you don't already, find a cause or person you believe in and offer them consistent monthly support. They will benefit. You will benefit. And the world will be a better place.

**6. Serve.** Volunteering provides great value for our lives and the lives of those we choose to enrich. One study from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard Business School, and the Yale School of Management found that when a person volunteers his or her time, they begin to feel like they have more time and are more efficient. Additionally, volunteers feel better about themselves, experience lower stress levels, and develop a deeper connection with others. The golden number appears to be 100 hours per year (2 hours/week).

**7. Buy less stuff and more experiences.** In studies presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, researchers suggest that buying life experiences rather than material possessions leads to greater happiness for both the consumer and those around them. Decide today to spend less money this year on possessions and more money on

meaningful, memorable experiences. You'll be glad you did in **more ways than one**.

**8. Display gratitude.** Psychologists have **scientifically proven** that one of the greatest contributing factors to overall happiness in your life is how much gratitude you show. And it can be experienced with as little as three expressions each day ("Thank you for..."). Getting started is so easy and beneficial. It could be the easiest decision you make all year.

**9. Practice smiling.** In a fascinating study conducted at the Michigan State Business School, customer service professionals who fake a smile throughout the day worsen their mood. But people who smile as a result of cultivating positive thoughts **improve their mood** and withdraw less. Simply put, one easy way to improve your mood throughout the next year is to intentionally recall pleasant memories or think more positively about your current situation—and then smile because of it.

**10. Stop and just play.** Our world is becoming increasingly **busy** and the temptation to measure our worth by external factors continues to grow. As a result, taking time to slow down and just play is becoming increasingly rare. But play is fun and enjoyable. Play enriches the **lives of children** by exercising their mind and body. And it has the same positive effect on adults. So make an extra point to just slow down and play constructively with your friends or kids.

**11. Determine to be happy.** Two **experimental studies** published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology* this past year offer ground-breaking research on the cultivation of happiness. Based on the experiments, participants who listened to "happy" music and actively tried to feel happier reported the highest level of positive mood afterwards—more so than those who simply listened to the music. In other words, determining **to be happy** is a productive decision towards achieving it.

Adopting 11 new habits at one time is almost certainly too much to ask. But choose one or two specifically. And then, **give it 29 days**. You'll be surprised how quickly they become habit.