



# INTER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS ALLIANCE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

# New Year's Resolutions

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## NUTRITION CHANGES FOR THE NEW YEAR

*Michelle Gelfand MS, VCUHS Dietetic Program*

Losing weight is the most popular New Year's resolution. Just making a few changes to your diet can help you lose weight. It can also decrease your risk of many diseases. Here are some simple changes you can make in this New Year:

1) If you drink whole milk, **try skim milk**. Skim milk has less fat and calories. You can try slowly switching to skim milk by starting with 2% milk one month (for example, January). The next month (February), try 1% milk. Try skim milk by the 3rd month (March). If you usually drink 1 cup of milk 7 days a week, switching to skim milk will save you 2,920 grams of fat and 21,900 calories in one year. This is a weight loss of over 6 pounds!

2) **Eat more fruits and vegetables**. Frozen fruits and vegetables are just as nutritious as fresh fruits and vegetables. They also cost less. If you buy canned food, look for **no added salt or sugar**. **If you have high blood pressure, aim for less than 2400 mg of salt (sodium) per day**. Remember that 1 gram of sugar is 4 teaspoons of sugar. **Buy fresh produce in season**. This will save money as well. Pears, oranges, sweet potatoes, squash, and collard greens are currently in season. They should be at your grocery store right now!

3) **Don't skip meals**. Skipping meals can contribute to weight gain. This is because it changes the way your body breaks down food. Your body uses food as fuel just like a car uses gas to work. To keep your body running on fuel, don't skip meals, especially breakfast.

4) **Eat more lean protein**. Protein is found in food such as fish, chicken, turkey, and lean ground beef.

Choose one of these. Lean protein contains less fat. Eating too much fat can contribute to heart disease. If you purchase regular ground beef, fat can be removed by draining the cooked meat into a colander and rinsing with water. Also, taking the skin off chicken and turkey can decrease fat.

5) **Add more fiber to your diet**. Fiber keeps you full so you will naturally eat less. Foods that contain fiber include whole grains such as whole wheat bread, oatmeal, beans such as kidney beans, nuts such as walnuts and almonds, and all fruits and vegetables.

If you would like more information about nutrition and diet, schedule an appointment with a Registered Dietitian (RD). Registered Dietitians are nutrition experts that can create a more personalized diet and nutrition plan for you. Also, certain diseases such as diabetes require a specific diet. RDs counsel and educate people with these diseases about diet and nutrition. To schedule an appointment with a RD at VCU's Nutrition Clinic a refer-

## PROTECTING YOUR VISION

*Janae Miller, VCU School of Medicine*

The eye is an amazing organ (part of your body). It allows humans and other animals to see their surroundings. The eye gathers light and focuses it onto the back of your eye on the **retina**. Then the eye changes the light into a message or signal the brain can understand. This signal is sent to the brain through the **optic nerve**. The optic nerve is at the back of the eye. It carries signals to the brain by acting like an electrical wire.

What is the best way to keep your eyes working well? The eye is very sensitive, so it is important to have regular eye

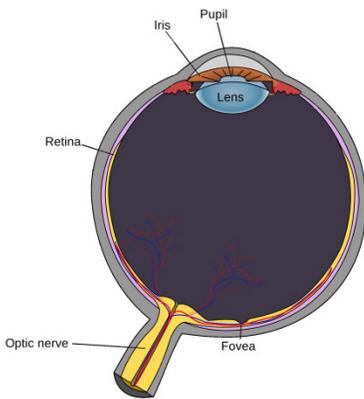
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exams. This means visiting an eye doctor every 2 years. People over the age of 60 or people with diabetes may need to go every year. Eyes begin to change at age 40. Please see your doctor right away if you:

- 1) Notice a worsening problem with your sight.
- 2) See bright lights or dark spots.

Either an optometrist or an ophthalmologist can check your eyes. The doctor will ask you to read numbers or letters from a chart. This is to check how well your eyes focus light. Next, the doctor will put drops in your eye. The drops make your **pupil** bigger. This is to look at the back of your eye. This can help find early signs of eye diseases like glaucoma.

Glaucoma is an eye disease. It can damage the **optic nerve**. This happens due to buildup of eye pressure. It can cause vision loss or blindness. Early in the disease, people often have no symptoms. By the time symptoms show up, there might be too much damage to stop vision loss. With regular eye exams, the doctor can find the disease before vision loss. Does someone in your family have glaucoma? Then get yearly eye exams at age 40. If glaucoma is caught early, early treatment can slow or stop vision loss. This may include eye drops, laser therapy, or surgery. Talk to your doctor about your eye health today.



Schematic of the eye with important features labeled. Adapted from "Schematic diagram of the human eye," by Rheasilhos, 2007, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eye>.

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## WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT CERVICAL CANCER?

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The cervix is at the opening of the uterus (womb). Cervical cancer is a disease in which the cells of the cervix grow out of control. The most common cause is certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV passes from person to person during sex. Usually, the body gets rid of HPV. However, if it does not, it could lead to cervical cancer.

All women are at risk for getting cervical cancer. However, it is usually found in women older than 30. The risk is increased by smoking, having HIV, and having many sexual partners. It is also increased by using birth control pills for five or more years or having given birth to three or more children.

The **best way to prevent cervical cancer is regular screening**. The **Pap smear** looks for changes in your cells. Women 21-65 years of age should get this test. The HPV test can look for the virus in your cells. **Cervical cancer** is very easy to find and treat if found early. Regular pap smears detect this cancer. If not detected early cervical cancer can cause death. A pap smear is done by a physician or nurse practitioner using a tiny brush. The brush gets cells from the cervix which is found in the vagina. These cells are placed in a small bottle and sent to a lab for reading under a microscope. The report your health care provider gets can be normal, not normal, or show cancer. This will be explained in detail to you. If HPV is found you may need more regular pap smears.

**To lower your risk for cervical cancer:**

- 1) **Stop smoking.**
- 2) **Use condoms during sex.**
- 3) **Limit your number of sexual partners.**
- 4) **Get the HPV vaccine. Start at age 11 (before sexual activity) to 21(men) or 26 (women).**

There are not many symptoms of cervical cancer early on. Later in the disease, abnormal bleeding or discharge from the vagina can happen.

Your doctor would be more than happy to talk with you about this. You can find more information at Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 1-800-CDC-INFO or [www.cdc.gov/cancer](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer).

**IH** is a collaborative student organization of professional students from Virginia Commonwealth University who provide health education and outreach in the community.

**PA**

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