

17 December 2014

VicHealth's Top Ten Tips for a Healthy 2015

As the New Year approaches and Victorians begin setting their New Year's resolutions, VicHealth has compiled its top ten tips for a healthy 2015.

VicHealth CEO Jerril Rechter said people often struggle to keep their New Year's resolutions.

"Every January people across Australia start off their year with the best of intentions to exercise more, eat better and drink less alcohol. Unfortunately those good intentions can be hard to maintain, often making people feel worse in the long-term.

"VicHealth is committed to tackling the tough issues – in particular rising obesity levels. Our Walk to School campaign is a great initiative to get children moving, we have a free TeamUp app that connects adults and groups to a wide range of physical activities within their local community, and we encourage people to take part in our H30 Challenge and switch sugary drinks for water for 30 days. There are also a number of simple changes people can make that will put them on the path to good health and mental wellbeing," she added.

To give people some ideas about alternative New Year's resolutions, Ms Rechter has set out a list of ten simple tips for a healthy 2015:

1. Switch sugary drinks for water.

Did you know sugar sweetened beverages are the largest source of sugars in the Australian diet? High intake of sugary drinks is associated with weight gain and tooth decay. Each bottle of soft drink contains about 16 teaspoons of sugar, "an amount you would never put in your coffee," says Jerril Rechter, VicHealth CEO. Water is free, it contains no added sugars, colours or preservatives, and it's one of the best thirst-quenching drinks. Switch to water and there's a good chance you won't go back. Kick start weight loss and start saving cash by taking VicHealth's H30 Challenge at www.h30challenge.com.au.

2. Start food swapping.

There's no need to cut everything tasty from your diet. Swapping is as simple as taking one unhealthy food and switching it for something else. Consider portion size, and if you're still hungry, eat more fruit. Check out the [FoodSwitch](#) app to scan a product's barcode. It then tells you whether the food is good for you or not using a traffic light system and suggests an alternative brand or product to help you make a healthier choice. Use FoodSwitch to cut back on salt, most of which is hidden in everyday foods like bread and margarine. Salt is linked to strokes, heart disease, high blood pressure, gastric ulcers, stomach cancer and more than 20 other health problems. On average, we eat more than nine times the amount we need.

3. Drink less alcohol.

This might seem challenging during the festive season, but simply considering how much you drink will help. Try having a couple of alcohol-free days each week, or even go booze-free, and see what it's like to wake up without a hangover. Having no more than two standard drinks on any day will not only improve your overall health, it will also reduce the chance of alcohol-related diseases, and any accidents caused by too much booze. Alternate every drink with water, avoid drinking on an empty stomach and be supportive of friends who choose not to drink. Watch Marathon Millie and Snake-eye Steve prove there is really No Excuse Needed at www.noexcuseneeded.com.au.

4. **Quit smoking.**

This is a no-brainer. It's never too late to quit smoking to improve your health and there's a lot of support around to help you give up. As soon as you stop smoking your body begins to repair itself. Within six hours, your heart rate slows and your blood pressure decreases. Get more tips and start today at www.quit.org.au or call the Quitline on 13 78 48.

5. **Bring your dog to work (but check if its OK first!)**

Having dogs in the workplace not only creates a happier, more productive workforce, but there are also benefits to people's physical wellbeing. People who have pets move more, have lower blood pressure and lower stress levels, and having dogs in the workplace can also reduce stress in the office and increase social interaction between staff members who might not normally talk to each other.

6. **Take up a new sport or get involved in an arts activity**

Start by downloading VicHealth's free [TeamUp](#) app which lists hundreds of sports activities in your neighbourhood. From a spontaneous kick of footy to helping out a netball team looking for last-minute subs. Or boost your overall health and wellbeing by joining in an arts activity such as learning to paint or enrolling in juggling school. "Social isolation is a risk factor for mental illness and poor health in general, so getting together with like-minded people is great for your health," said Ms Rechter.

7. **Get up. Stand up. Especially at work.**

Sitting is the new smoking. Sitting for long periods each day is really bad for you, and can't all be compensated for by heading to the gym for a workout every few days. But there are lots of things you can do. Refresh your mind and body by getting up from your desk every hour. Take the stairs instead of the lift. Hold a walking meeting. Stand up when you're on the phone and ban eating at your desk. Take your lunch outside and go for a walk. Ms Rechter suggests speaking with your employer about a standing workstation if your job is particularly sedentary (e.g. call centre). It could make a big difference to your health at work.

8. **What moves you?**

Find out what works best for you and build exercise into your day. Walk or ride to work, take the stairs, or get off the tram a few stops early. "The pedometer works for me", said Ms Rechter. "I have that goal of 10,000 steps every day, and I feel a real sense of achievement when I reach that number. It's a magic number that can start to make a difference to your overall health."

9. **Invest time in others and make more friends**

Having a strong friendship circle is key to improving your overall happiness and wellbeing. A great way of meeting new people is volunteering in a field that interests you. "Volunteering will make you happier and improve your overall life satisfaction," said Ms Rechter. "It boosts your ability to cope with illness, helps prevent depression and lowers overall hospitalisation levels."

10. **Dance!**

Dancing is a wonderful way for people to get their hearts pumping and meet their 30 minutes of daily physical activity, while also having fun and meeting new people. Why not take part in VicHealth's *I Could Have Danced All Night* at White Night on 21 February? Or dance like nobody's watching at [No Lights No Lycra](#), an all-ages casual dance class for the pure joy of dancing – in the dark!