



New Year's Resolutions: *"What if...?"* by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Tired of making (*and breaking*) the same New Year's resolutions? Fed up with fitness plans that last three days and of promises to be more patient or cheerful, or to drive within the speed limit? Tired of the same repeated vows to stop smoking... or arguing... or drinking or eating too much? Maybe you're aiming at the wrong target.

What if you simply made two or three small changes to manage the stress in your life and discovered you were becoming a healthier, happier person? What if you shifted one or two perspectives and found yourself less irritable, sleeping restfully, and more fulfilled in your work and relationships? Most of the behaviors we don't like in ourselves are the direct result of the stress we experience, but do not manage in healthy ways. So if we aim at the source and learn to release that stress in simple, manageable ways every day, it's by-products of impatience, anger, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, crabbiness and unhealthy behaviors, tend to diminish dramatically and sometimes, effortlessly. For many, the same items appear on the list year after year. Why not redirect your focus to reducing the stress, instead of trying to address each negative by-product it creates?

(Drumroll.....)

#1: Most Common New Year's Resolution: "Get Fit."

Out of shape? Wondering who that is in the mirror? It's mostly in your head. Tired of losing the same ten (or 80) pounds? Huffing and puffing up the stairs?

- ~ Figure out *why* you really want to be more fit. We generally do not make real, lasting changes for others, but we do so for ourselves. Genuine goals of health & fitness are infinitely more productive in the long-run than fitting into the pants in your closet. Coping with stress is a job for body, mind and spirit. What we eat, drink, breathe and think has everything to do with how we feel, and how we cope.
- ~ Enjoy your endorphins: If you don't feel like moving your body, think about how good physical activity is for your head. Even ten minutes at a time can help.
- ~ Be realistic: Goals that involve numbers (*e.g. pounds, ounces, calories, fat grams, reps*) can be traps for some people. For others, they are a safety net. Know which type you are. Either way, start small and build in healthy rewards along the way.

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CONTINUED



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- ~ "For every diet, there is an equal and opposite binge." --Eating disorder author, Geneen Roth Deprivation only works in the very short-term. Then... Boom! Fill the kitchen with healthy fruits and vegetables. Plan and prepare meals in advance. Learn to avoid your trigger foods.
- ~ Find physical activity you genuinely enjoy and then, move every day. As you do, feel your body working for you as you breathe and perspire and grow stronger. My friends Ann and Yvette have walked together every morning for six years, not because they "should," but because they enjoy the time together, solving the problems of the world, and they love how they then feel as they begin the day. When I'm trying to get back in the groove of walking, I buy myself a new book-on-tape that I'm really eager to listen to, then only let myself listen while walking.

#2: Tossing and Turning in Bed?

Plan ahead for restful sleep. Try an earlier dinner. In addition to the discomfort of a full stomach, digestion initiates a metabolic boost that can stimulate, making it harder to sleep. If you wake to use the bathroom, open your eyes only enough to see your way safely. Avoid fully awakening, so you can drift gently back to sleep.

#3: Worrying Too Much?

Try writing meditation in a journal for ten minutes, morning and night. Scribble all your concerns and confusion. Write fast, without thinking too much. The first few writings may seem "rambling," but notice how gradually your thinking becomes clearer. Your inner-wisdom will intuitively show you what you really do, and do not, feel is right for you, and help you to make wise decisions.

#4: All Stressed-Out and No Place to Go?

Reassess your goals.

- Is this really necessary right now?
- Is there a simpler way?
- What other options are there?
- Who could help me with this?
- Will this matter in six months? If so, it needs attention. If not, remember: Life is short.

#5: Mind Racing?

Blow away head noise: First, exhale any stale air hanging-out deep in the lungs. Then, imagine slowly inhaling cool, sparkling light into your ache, dissolving pain. Pause briefly, then exhale from the site of your pain. Listen to your body for a rhythm, to avoid light-headedness, and find a gentle, comfortable pace. (*That's more important than "doing it right."*)

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#6: Too Tense? Simple Soothers to Loosen Up:

- Re-position car seats, your computer screen, adjust your desk chair, or perhaps try a new bed pillow.
- While waiting at a red light or on line at the bank, inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth, imagining neck and shoulder muscles softening *and s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g*, like warm taffy.
- When you feel those shoulders start to tense, ask yourself, "Is this *an emergency* or simply *annoying*?"

#7 Irritable? Impatient? Negative? (You?)

Life really is short, and you have unique and wonderful gifts that people need. Especially now. Have a good long heart-to-heart with yourself, and ask the following:

- What do you value most in yourself? In others?
- Who do you want to be in six months? In five years? In twenty years?
- What are you afraid of, and what does that fear make you do?
- What would you try if you weren't afraid?
- What could you do in the next 5 minutes to feel safer?
- What brings you joy?
- What are three things you will do this week to help others?
- When's the last time you laughed? Danced? Had a good cry? Enjoyed a long hot bath? Schedule a massage, or plan a lunch date with someone who likes you -- or both. Repeat as needed.

#8. Be the Friend You Would Like to Have

A favorite quote: *"Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away."* -- Dinah Craik

#9. Parting Gifts

Each time you leave a friend or loved one, part warmly so that if somehow this were the last time you spoke, they would know how much you care.

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#10. Create a Not-To-Do List

Here are a few of my own:

I will not procrastinate so that I feel anxious.

I will not rush any important decision.

I will not promise anything I am not sure I can deliver. My word can be trusted.

#11. Grow. Every Day

Mark Twain said, *"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."* And Henry David Thoreau taught us, *"Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked, in which you can walk with love and reverence."*

#12. Gentle Yourself

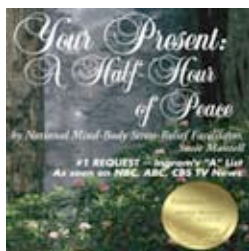
Whatever your goals, expect imperfection and forgive it. If you slip off-track, gently say to yourself: *Exhale, and Simply Resume.*

BONUS: When All Else Fails Go to Bed. . .

Sometimes the best thing to do with a day is simply let it be over so that you can rest and try again tomorrow.

Enjoy lots more, (and more serious) stress-relief tips on Susie Mantell's website at www.relaxintuit.com

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