

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center:

Although we celebrated Rosh Hashanah as the Jewish New Year not long ago, I am mindful that a new secular year will be on its way as you read these lines.

A New Year has always been a time for looking back to the past, and more importantly, forward to the coming year. It's a time to reflect on the changes we want (or need) to make and resolve to follow through on those changes.

Around this time of the year, we find many articles online on the top *10 New Year's resolutions*. Although each article lists its own 10 top resolutions, many of them actually overlap.

Below is just one example of the top *10 New Year's resolutions*. If you can check three or more you'd like to work on, you are not alone.

Top 10 New Year's Resolutions

1. Spend More Time with Family and Friends

Recent polls conducted by General Nutrition Centers, Quicken, and others, show that more than 50% of Americans vow to appreciate loved ones and spend more time with family and friends this year. Work shouldn't always come first!

2. Fit in Fitness

The evidence is in for fitness. Regular exercise has been associated with more health benefits than anything else known to man. Studies show that it reduces the risk of some cancers, increases longevity, helps achieve and maintain weight loss, enhances mood, lowers blood pressure, and even improves arthritis. In short, exercise keeps you healthy and makes you look and feel better.

3. Tame the Bulge

Over 66 percent of adult Americans are considered overweight or obese by recent studies, so it is not surprising to find that weight loss is one of the most popular New Year's resolutions. Setting reasonable goals and staying focused are the two most important factors in sticking with a weight loss program, and the key to success for those millions of Americans who made a New Year's commitment to shed extra pounds.

4. Quit Smoking

If you have resolved to make this the year that you stamp out your smoking habit, over-the-counter availability of nicotine replacement therapy now provides easier access to proven quit-smoking aids. Even if you've tried to quit before and failed, don't let it get you down. On average, smokers try about four times before they quit for good. Start enjoying the rest of your smoke-free life! Locally, there are a variety of free support services, hotlines and smoking cessation classes to help you kick the smoking habit.

5. Enjoy Life More

Given the hectic, stressful lifestyles of millions of Americans, it is no wonder that "enjoying life more" has become a popular resolution in recent years. It's an important step to a happier and healthier you! Take up a new hobby or try your hand at skiing. Go to a theater performance, or head to the local spa.

6. Quit Drinking

While many people use the New Year as an incentive to finally stop drinking, most are not equipped to make such a drastic lifestyle change all at once. Many heavy drinkers fail to quit cold turkey but do much better when they taper gradually, or even learn to moderate their drinking. If you have decided that you want to stop drinking, there is a world of help and support available.

7. Get Out of Debt

Was money a big source of stress in your life last year? Join the millions of Americans who have resolved to spend this year getting a handle on their finances. It's a promise that will repay itself many times over in the year ahead.

8. Learn Something New

Have you vowed to make this year the year to learn something new? Perhaps you are considering a career change, want to learn a new language, or just how to fix your computer? Whether you take a course or read a book, you'll find education to be one of the easiest, most motivating New Year's resolutions to keep. Most local colleges and universities offer remote and adult education programs.

9. Help Others

A popular, non-selfish New Year's resolution, volunteerism can take many forms. Whether you choose to spend time helping out at your local library, mentoring a child, or building a house, there are many nonprofit volunteer organizations that could really use your help. Or if your time is really in short supply, maybe you can at least find it in you to donate the furniture, clothing and other household items that you no longer need, rather than leaving them out by the curb to fill up our landfills.

10. Get Organized

On just about every New Year resolution top ten list, organization can be a very reasonable goal. Whether you want your home organized enough that you can invite someone over on a whim, or your office organized enough that you can find the stapler when you need it, these tips and resources should get you started on the way to a more organized life.

Personally, I would like to spend more time with my family, to fit in fitness (this one is always on my list), to continue helping others, and to learn something new. I am also happy to see that throughout the last year, I made some progress with a couple of the above priorities.

Any new beginning is always a good excuse to work on the things we want to change. So I encourage you to make your own list and to start working on it, with realistic goals, as Norman Mollov of blessed memory used to say, one step at a time.

Rabbi Manes Kogan