

[Possible Titles: Improved health is the gift to give (and get) this year! Give the gift of health]

Consider improving your health as a gift to yourself and others as part of this year's holiday season!

Here's the "who, what, when, where, why and how" of making health a part of your gift-giving this year!

Who: This is the gift to give yourself! Sounds selfish to give a gift to oneself, but the truth is, we are better parents, partners, and family members when we are healthy and happy. We give of ourselves better and we give more when we are giving from a full, healthy place. So while this is a gift you actually give to yourself, it ends up blessing not only you as an individual, but also the lives of all those around you! And you deserve it! You deserve to have a longer, healthier life. You're worth the effort required to improve your quality of life. This kind of self-value and care is a great thing to model to the children in our lives. Setting an example of putting yourself first, in terms of health, of making good long-term choices indicates self-esteem, and is a great thing to show the little ones watching and learning.

What: Companies that create fitness trackers, or sell gym memberships might tout their products as the way to give health as a gift. And those items very well might be a way to give health. But they are not required. They may be helpful and motivating accessories, but the gift of health really is simply a plan and the will to make the changes, either major or minor, in your life that will positively affect your health. Those changes will and should mostly likely include areas such as: more nutritional and healthy eating habits, becoming more physically active, addressing stress, reducing use of substances that are harmful, taking steps to detect and prevent disease, and obtaining healthcare when needed.

When: This is the time of year when many look toward the coming new year, set goals, and think about who they want to be. Everyone wants to live a long and healthy life! This is the year! This is the time to start, to make those changes that will help you to feel better, to improve your quality of life, to experience the self-affirmation that comes with positive lifestyle change. When is now!

Where: Healthy changes can be made anywhere! Let's do it here, in Evanston!

Why: There are so many "why's" it is hard to know where to even start. Nothing would be more important and significant in improving your life, making you feel good, and, as aforementioned, increasing your capacity to give more to the ones you love, than making some positive choices and changes in terms of promoting health. Healthy behaviors, including eating healthier and exercising, affect mental health and mood, brain function, self-esteem, and of course, your physical body—better numbers on blood tests, decreased risk for disease, a longer life with fewer problems, etc., etc.

"There is no happiness without a healthy body, a positive mind and a good lifestyle," (Dr. T.P. Chia.)

It might be hard to worry much about your health and seeing it as an important gift if you're currently in good health, but consider the truth that one's health always seems much more valuable when it's gone. Looking ahead, and valuing it now, will pay great dividends later on.

Those are some general and widely accepted reasons, but one can only answer the "why" question for him or herself. Here are a few questions to ask yourself to know why:

What aspect of my health would I most like to have improved?

If my health were better, then _____. (Fill in the blank. Ask yourself this one repeatedly.)

What positive things would happen in my life if I felt better (or weighed less, or had less pain, etc.)?

What are the three best reasons to improve my general health?

What would some of the benefits be?

How: This may be where many people get tripped up in their intentions. There's a lot of information out there, and it can be overwhelming in deciding how and where to start. The first step is probably to decide what your end goal is, (what part of your health you want to focus on, what the priorities are in terms of your health) and what motivates you, personally. Regardless, the most basic steps going forward are to: eat more healthily—going for 5 servings of fruits and veggies daily, avoiding processed foods, and get up out of the chair and move a little. The goal of 10,000 steps per day is a good one to work toward.

But, truly, the actual details of the plan are secondary. When it comes to how to work toward more wellness, finding and renewing motivation is the key. Continually tuning into those personal reasons is important, as is finding outside motivations. Some people find classes and groups motivating. Some like quotes and images that inspire. Find your thing and revisit it regularly. Zig Ziglar said, "People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing. That's why we recommend it daily."

There are a lot of resources that can help come up with a plan for how to start giving and receiving the gift of better health. The internet is a good source, but locally, you can find help and guidance from personal trainers, public health's wellness program, and the rec center has fitness classes and incentives for all levels. Contact us for help getting started!