

FEATURE ARTICLE

New Year, New You: Taking Ownership of Your Health

By Erika Schwartz, MD



We only have one body, one life—and yet, so many of us take it for granted. That's the bad news.

Here's the good news: today is a fresh start, and it's never too late to put yourself and your health first.

The Problem with Our System

Our healthcare system is broken. It's a disease-centered model that waits for something to go wrong before it steps in. Worse, it focuses on treating symptoms rather than identifying and addressing the root causes of illness.

Despite spending \$3 trillion annually on healthcare, the U.S. ranks 50th in quality of care. Two-thirds of that money—\$750 billion—goes toward treating the results of poor lifestyle choices.

But here's the truth: we don't have to rely solely on the system. We have the power to take control of our health.

A Personal Journey to Healing

I've been a physician for 45 years, but my path to becoming a healer started long before I earned my medical degree.

At seven years old, I watched my mother battle a life-threatening illness. Doctors believed she wouldn't survive, and my father feared he'd have to give me up for adoption. Miraculously, my mother recovered—and her will to live shaped the course of my life.

When I moved to the U.S. at 16, I was determined to become a healer. Medical school seemed like the obvious path. My training was excellent, but I didn't realize how flawed the system was until years later.

In my early career, I served as Director of Emergency Medicine at a busy trauma center. We saved lives every day, but something was missing: the human connection. So, I moved into private practice, only to find myself practicing "ping pong medicine"—treating symptoms, referring patients to specialists, and prescribing medications without addressing the root of their problems.

That's when I decided to do it my way. I shifted my focus to prevention, healing, and empowering my patients to be their own health advocates.

The Key to Better Health

What I discovered is that health transformation starts with ownership. When my patients took responsibility for their health, they experienced powerful changes.

For example, one of my patients, Mike, became seriously ill with a heart valve issue. Despite the odds, he remained positive, believed in his ability to recover, and fully owned his healing journey. He proved that when you trust yourself and take control, you can defy expectations.

Another patient, Monique, faced a different challenge: a toxic work environment, chronic stress, and poor self-care left her on the brink of serious illness. By stepping away, improving her diet, prioritizing rest, and embracing mindfulness, Monique's body healed itself.

A New Approach for a New Year

You don't need to wait until you're sick to take ownership of your health. Start today by abandoning the outdated belief that the doctor always knows best. Instead, embrace the truth: you know your body better than anyone else ever will.

To make this shift, you need to:

- **Listen to Your Body:** Pay attention to what it needs and respond with care.
- **Focus on Prevention:** Don't wait for symptoms to appear; act now to support long-term health.
- **Seek Supportive Doctors:** Work with healthcare providers who listen, care, and guide you—don't settle for less.

Simple Steps to Start

We all know the basics of healthier living:

- Eat nutritious, whole foods.
- Move your body regularly.
- Get 7-8 hours of sleep.
- Manage stress through mindfulness or relaxation techniques.
- Cut back on alcohol and caffeine.

It might sound too simple, but it works. Small, consistent changes can lead to profound results.

The Time Is Now

The pandemic taught us a harsh reality: many of the conditions that made people vulnerable—obesity, hypertension, and diabetes—are often preventable. We have the power to change these outcomes by taking ownership of our health. Albert Einstein once said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Let's break the cycle.

You have the power to heal yourself. Make the decision today to own your health. When you do, you'll not only change your life but also inspire and impact the lives of those you love.

This is your year. This is your moment. Let's do it together. Start now.

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