



UMB News

Face To Face: A Healthy New Year

December 3, 2021 | By [Alex Likowski](#)

There's something about the prospect of a new year that gives us hope that we can start over, do things right this time. We can be happier, more successful, and, of course, healthier. It's not a new thing or even an American thing. Ancient Babylonians had a big feast right before crop planting season — the start of their year. The Romans made promises of good behavior in the new year to the god Janus — that's right, the one January is named for. Janus had two faces, one looking backward at what you did, and the other looking forward, keeping an eye on you during the new year.

About a quarter of Americans are willing to admit they still make New Year's resolutions. Even if we're pretty sure we won't keep all of them, it's still a good time to look at how we're living, particularly our health and habits, and at least consider how we might lose 10 pounds, get more sleep, or overcome chronic aches and pains.

Staying healthy or losing weight isn't easy when everything we see and hear during the holidays here and around the globe is about eating, from Thanksgiving right up through New Year's Day. There are many versions of New Year's cakes, often called King Cakes. In Italy, there's a new year's stew made of sausage and lentils. The Dutch have *Oliebollen* — essentially fried balls of oil, which sounds fantastic and disastrous all at the same time.

Here in the U.S. a lot of what we'll eat in the next few weeks may be best represented by this headline in, of all places, *The New York Times* on Wednesday: "24 days of cookies: These recipes from New York Times Cooking are sure to make your holidays bright." If there was any truth in headlines, *the Times* might've added, "Just as sure to make those 10 pounds you want to lose start looking more like 20 pounds."

Of course, good health isn't just about food. But cold weather does dampen one's enthusiasm for outdoor activities, and exercising indoors at health clubs seems a little less inviting during a pandemic, especially with the threat of new variants like Omicron.

So, what can we do now and in the coming year to be healthier, to feel better, and hopefully to live happier lives? Joining University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, on his program *Virtual Face to Face with President Bruce Jarrell* on Dec. 2 was **Chris D'Adamo, PhD**, a medical research scientist with expertise in the synergistic effects of healthy lifestyle, environmental exposures, and genetics on human health and wellness. D'Adamo is also the director of the [Center for Integrative Medicine](#) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine (UMSOM). Launched in 1991, it is the first academic-based integrative medicine center in the world.

As the name indicates, integrative medicine focuses on the whole person — body, mind, and spirit — and it makes use of every possible safe and effective evidence-based therapy that might work for an individual with an emphasis on wellness, not sickness.

For example, take concerns about COVID-19. In a recent television interview, D'Adamo noted that chronic disease sufferers are more often hit with moderate to severe symptoms. "There've been a number of lifestyle-related risk factors: things like obesity, overweight, diabetes, hypertension, and so on that fortunately can be somewhat mitigated by our lifestyle," he said.

He recommended managing blood sugar more carefully, stopping screen time 20 minutes before bed to prioritize sleep, reducing stress, even finding ways to get a little laughter into your life — all things that can help the immune system function more efficiently.

D'Adamo also leads an extensive education program at UMSOM that includes a [required course](#) for first- and second-year students in culinary medicine. The aim is to increase future physicians' nutrition knowledge through a class that combines lectures on different approaches to healthy eating with experiential techniques that involve things like the proper way to chop onions or sauté vegetables.

"This is an evidenced-based program that fills important gaps in medical education by teaching about nutrition's critical role in chronic diseases and how to use cooking to inspire healthy dietary changes," says D'Adamo. "We teach the general principles of a whole-foods-based diet. We do not, however, advocate for any one diet in particular, taking into account an individual's unique health needs, taste

preferences, and cultural influences.”

Watch the entire interview, including questions and answers with the audience on a wide range of topics, from stress relief and anti-inflammatory foods to supplements and natural ways to reduce blood pressure and maintain glucose levels. Access the link at the top of this page.

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