

CONFRONTING CHANGE IN THE NEW YEAR

By Jenna Caputo

The new year is a funny time. On one hand, the thought of a "blank slate" is thrilling. It's a fresh start with nothing but exciting potential ahead. On the other hand, it's a lot of pressure for just another day in the year. Everyone asks what your new year's resolutions are, and saying something like, "Eat more Snickers bars," doesn't seem to fly.

Quite frankly, what if I don't have a new year's resolution? Or what if I don't want one? The big joke is that by March, all those resolutions are out the window anyway, right? So why bother?

But, it is what's expected.

Which brings us to that other pesky issue that often pops its head at the beginning of the year—change. The start of a new year often signifies the start of something, well...new. And "something new" means change, which most humans are afraid of on some level, even if it's a good thing that we're looking forward to. The uncertainty of what lies ahead in an unknown situation will forever be a hesitation point for most people. Our minds spin with all the possible outcomes, both good and bad. That hamster wheel of anxiety gets turning and just won't stop, revving up our body's flight or fight system and sending us into overdrive. It doesn't matter if we're about to face a tiger, start a new job, get married, buy a house, or just change the paint color in the bedroom. The body perceives it all as the same thing—possible danger. Our stress hormones amp up, and in the non-stop society our world has become, it seems impossible to tell our nervous system that we are safe and everything is okay. It's only Pantone's Color of the year, Peach Fuzz—we can always paint over it if we hate it!

But change is scary.

And that's okay. It's a natural human emotion, and we can't control how our bodies automatically react. We can, however, control our response to that reaction.

Many of us play the "Worst Case" game. What's the worst-case scenario? Let's say you've decided to start your own business making memory pillows. What's the worst that can happen? Maybe it's that your advertising fails, and you can't get the word out fast enough to sell enough pillows. Now you're stuck with yards and yards of fabric that you can't pay for, you can't buy groceries, your kids' clothes no longer fit, the power is about to be turned off, you're going to lose your home, you won't have health insurance, everyone will get sick since you have no heat.... See how it can snowball? But let's turn that panic on its head and say that does happen, what would you do? Make a plan for the Worst Case to help calm your nerves.

One option might be to have a backup plan ready. Maybe you need to have another product besides memory pillows you could pivot to while word is still spreading. Maybe you start a social media account before you open your business to gain some advanced traction. Maybe you have a little back-up money set aside ahead of time to help hold you over during those shaky first few months that every business goes through.

There are always options.

But likely, Worst Case won't happen. The outcome will probably be something in between, and that's what we should focus on.

In the meantime, practicing self-care is the best way to deal with inevitable stress and change in your life.



TRY THESE TEN TECHNIQUES TO GET YOU STARTED:

1. **Visualize a positive way the change might affect your life.** By mindfully concentrating on the good, we train our brains to naturally look for things that make us happy.
2. **Make a list to focus** on what needs to be done first. Break down your tasks into bite-sized pieces instead of trying to jump to the endgame.
3. **Celebrate moments of progress.** Even the smallest things are still a step forward. Celebrate!
4. **Lean into your support system.** Allow the people who are a positive influence in your life to be a part of your success and push you toward your dream.
5. **Create a structured routine** with the things you can control to give yourself stability among the chaos.
6. **Exercise—** Adding in even just 10 minutes of exercise a day can help ease the stress hormones trapped in your body.

7. **Focus on the present moment** instead of jumping ahead to what *might* happen. Usually, the moment you're in is not so challenging, so finish that one, then move on to the next thing.
8. **Find your moment of gratitude.** Even if things seem terrifying, there's always something to be grateful for—even if it's "merely" the air you breathe or the sun in the sky. Focusing on a moment of joy or gratitude will help bring your body back into a sense of safety.
9. **Eat healthy.** Nurturing your body with a variety of healthy foods instead of noshing only on comfort foods will allow it to function at its best state without the added stress of being bogged down with processing excess sugar and synthetic ingredients. Eating unprocessed, whole foods also boosts your immune system and allows you to function at your strongest.
10. **Breathe.** Focusing on your breath slows your parasympathetic nervous system down and can pull your body out of that "flight or fight" mode. Try inhaling through your nose for a slow count of four, hold that breath for a count of four, then exhale slowly through your mouth for another count of four. Hold for a final four and repeat. There are many different types of breathing techniques that can calm, focus, energize, or whatever you need in the moment. Not sure where to start? Download one of the many breathing apps like Breathwrk, Breathe, and iBreathe from your favorite app store.

Qigong techniques are also a great way to dispel unwanted energy from the body. Try simple moves like placing your open palms on top of each other on your chest and circling them around your heart. Notice the sensation under your hands and consciously focus on feeling each part of your body relax as the warmth spreads from your heart. Another great technique is "tapping." Make a fist with one hand, then gently tap that fist all along your arms and across your chest and shoulders. This dispels negative energy from your body and revitalizes your overall energy levels. Other Qigong techniques can be found on YouTube and in the App Store.

Looking to slow down with some guided meditation? Check out the Insight Timer app. Choose from breath work, guided meditations, various timers for your own session, music tracks, workshops, live yoga sessions, and many more self-care options. With filters for all different time frames and types of meditation, there's something for whatever you need for the day, even if you only have five minutes to spare!

Life can be a roller coaster, and change can be scary, but it doesn't always have to be a negative experience. With a little practice, your body can accept change with grace, and the new year can be an exciting adventure ahead!



While the new year is a time of change for many people, the topic of new directions has been at the forefront of my mind lately as I say goodbye to my beloved magazine community. I have been with the *Neighbors* magazines since the first one hit Capital Region homes in 2015. It has been an honor to write so many of your stories and to share in all the ways our community consistently shows up for each other. It is a privilege to be a part of such a vibrant network, and one I do not take lightly.

This magazine has offered me a chance to learn about the many wonderful things happening in our area, and I am proud to have been a small part of each of your stories. So it is with a heavy heart that I say goodbye as I move on to a new venture. It has been an honor being your content coordinator, and I look forward to seeing what you all do next. While I may not be in your pages every month anymore, I will still be reading them, I'll still be cheering you on, and I will still want to hear all your stories! Until we meet again, I wish you all a new year full of joy and exciting possibilities—a year filled with kindness, peace, and a chance to help others.

Change can be scary, but it can also be exciting, and I look forward to seeing the changes ahead for our little community. Keep living your story and please be sure to say hi when we meet out and about!

Happy 2024! ~ Jenna