

# KeyOpinion



## Get Ready to Drop the Ball

I want to say something cloying and mushy for New Year's. You know, something about how I am going to better myself, try harder, shed 10 pounds. But the best I can come up with is a vow to put one less scoop of Hagen Daaz ice cream in my belly every day for a year.

Every night, I eat two scoops with whipped cream. It's part of my Brie-guacamole-Hagan Daaz Diet of the Stars. I calculate that in one year, I will weigh 365 scoops of chocolate ice cream less than today. This time next year, I will weigh less, look sexier and be an inspiration.

### Plan for Success

On a serious note, I want everyone to be a contrarian this New Year's. I hope as a culture we resolve to eat more, drink more and put on massive amounts of weight. I'm talking about making double-digit gains in sizes. I also hope we spend less time with family and loved ones and start smoking. After all, by the looks of things, all the usual resolutions don't work and turn good intention and confidence into a wasteland of failure and dashed aspirations.

Let's look at some of the most common resolutions to find a more reasonable way to deal with this high-pressure holiday.

### 1. Tame the Bulge

The most traditional resolution is the desire to shed extra tonnage off our bodies. That's like asking Michael Jackson to not like boys. We are the Super Size-Buffer Busting-Plus Plus-Society. If cattle could graze next to your average mall, they would think the humans were fattened up and walking into a slaughterhouse.

We want to diet on New Year's because of our obvious guilt. Our minds rewind to the holiday spreads of cheese and the tins of chocolate truffles that tasted so sweet, decadent and innocent going down, but found a safe resting spot on our sagging faces and burgeoning behinds. Not to mention all the turkey and gravy and ham with

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glaze. Come to think of it, anything created with a gravy or a sauce is designed to form a marshmallow quilt around the body that increases your waist at least two sizes within a week.

And here's the catch: All the dieticians, all the common wisdom, is completely false. Culturally, we gain more weight in the month of January than any month of the year. Anthropologists like to say it's because the month is dark and cold and instinctually we like to wrap ourselves in a friendly and jolly layer of fat.

### 2. Quit Smoking

One of the more noble New Year's resolutions is to quit smoking. That is one of the single most life affirming acts anyone can take. And it's actually frightening watching all the methods employed as people try to stave off their cravings. I'm talking about the patches, the gum, the pills, the injections. Anytime someone crawls out of the smoking habit, we should stand and clap. Because if there's anything this planet needs, it's more human life.

### 3. World Peace

Probably the most spiritually significant ideal to wish for is either World Peace or the always-relevant Peace in the Middle East. Asking for peace in the Middle East is as realistic as asking Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando to look sexy once again. The collision of cultures, competing mythologies, literal interpretations and economic disparity is a recipe for, as Dr. Phil would say to the well couched, "a disastrous relationship."

### 4. Spend More Time with Family and Friends

This resolution is purely un-American. If we spend more time with family, especially intimate time with our spouses, then we would have larger families, which goes strictly against our career-driven, youth-obsessed society. Also, family and friends add directly to our stress levels. Just picture any extended family gathering. Believe me, I have tried the bring-the-family-together approach. Here is what happens:

First, the family on my mother's side is very strict Roman Catholic Eastern European. They have a masterful way of asking guilt-laden questions in broken English such as: "So will the baby not be with God in its life or will she be christened? Where is your God Stephen?" Or...

"Why did you name your child a peasant name? We had someone who fed our horses with that same name."

My Eastern European family also has high expectations of table manners. Whereas I am happy to get through a

meal without one of my four very young children melting down, running through a restaurant and randomly yelling things like a tourettes patient, my relatives are used to the children eating silently at a separate table.

Then there is my mother-in-law, who fancies herself as straight out of a Rosanne episode. Her way of saying hello is to ask a pleasant question like: "You didn't pay for that haircut, did you? You have a lawsuit sitting on top of your head!"

Another dilemma is my father and brother who are adamant historians. A typical argument will go along the lines: "Gore Vidal is an idiot. 'Lincoln' was unreadable. The Civil War had everything to do with states rights and nothing to do with romanticized liberal notions of the abolitionist movement."

Whew...

It's these kinds of conversations that make me drink and eat excessively around the holidays.

### 5. Become More Fit

It's not redundant. Most fitness freaks need a 12-step program, not a thousand steps on a Stairmaster or a treadmill. Fitness addiction and the worship of working out are in direct proportion to our obsession with obesity. Spending excessive hours at the gym also numbs the mind irreparably. After all, places with mirrors make people neurotic.

### 6. Get Out of Debt

Noble sounding, but there goes home ownership for most Americans and the real estate market.

### 7. Quit Drinking

You can always do what our president did for the first 25 years of his adult life — drink to excess and marry someone pure who reads a lot. That's why when Laura called him dissolute, he got away with that inimical quizzical expression.

### 8. Enjoy Life More

Anyone with this as a goal needs help. Especially since it is incompatible with all the other resolutions. After all, most people like to drink, buy things and dine more than anything. How can we be happy with so many contradictions?

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The truth is, New Year's Eve is the most bittersweet evening of the year. Its bitterness is the remembrance of everything left undone, of the things we have failed and the ways we have failed ourselves. It is a reminder that we are careening in a measured pace toward our own demise. But the beauty is it also reminds us that with life there is hope. With tomorrow there is possibility. Good Luck!

## The History of New Year's

### Ancient New Years

The celebration of the new year is the oldest of all holidays. It was first observed in ancient Babylon about 4000 years ago. In the years around 2000 BC, the Babylonian New Year began with the first New Moon after the Vernal Equinox. The beginning of spring is a logical time to start a new year. After all, it is the season of rebirth, of planting new crops, and of blossoming.

The Romans continued to observe the new year in late March, but their calendar was continually tampered with by various emperors so that the calendar soon became out of synchronization with the sun.

To set the calendar right, the Roman senate, in 153 BC, declared Jan. 1 to be the beginning of the new year. But tampering continued until Julius Caesar, in 46 BC, established what has come to be known as the Julian Calendar. It again established Jan. 1 as the new year.

### New Year Traditions

Other traditions of the season include the making of New Year's resolutions. That tradition also dates back to the early Babylonians. The early Babylonian's most popular resolution was to return borrowed farm equipment.

The tradition of using a baby to signify the new year

was begun in Greece around 600 BC. It was their tradition at that time to celebrate their god of wine, Dionysus, by parading a baby in a basket, representing the annual rebirth of that god as the spirit of fertility.

### For Luck in the New Year

Traditionally, it was thought that one could affect the luck they would have throughout the coming year by what they did on the first day of the year. For that reason, it has become common for folks to celebrate the first few minutes of a brand new year in the company of family and friends. It was once believed that the first visitor on New Year's Day would bring either good luck or bad luck the rest of the year.

### Auld Lang Syne

The song, "Auld Lang Syne," playing in the background, is sung at the stroke of midnight in almost every English-speaking country in the world. At least partially written by Robert Burns in the 1700's, it was first published in 1796 after Burns' death. Early variations of the song were sung prior to 1700 and inspired Burns to produce the modern rendition. An old Scotch tune, "Auld Lang Syne" literally means "old long ago," or simply, "the good old days."

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