

Mindful Medicine Corner With



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Shedding Our Skin

In the Chinese lunar calendar, 2025 ushers in the Year of the Wood Snake. While many of us associate snakes with darkness and despair, in the Chinese zodiac, this creature rather represents wisdom, ingenuity, and adaptability. Another key aspect to the snake is its ability to shed its skin, which is a sign of transformation. I love the image of a snake sloughing its used skin in response to growth and change - getting rid of the old in preparation for new beginnings. What a great way to think about the New Year!

Frequently, we meet the New Year with a list of resolutions, or transformation goals, that will hopefully set us on a path towards health and happiness. It's also true that resolutions are usually broken within the first two weeks of January. Why is this? Partly it's because in order to experience true long-lasting transformation, we have to change our habits. And this can be extremely difficult to do.

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As a primary care physician, I face this everyday with my patients - it's honestly one of the hardest parts of my job - to be the cheerleader for change. I used to think that learning about countless disease states and memorizing medication uses was daunting, though guiding patients towards healthier habits remains one of the more elusive skills that I have had to develop - for both my patients as well as myself. It is very rare that I have a patient who does not know that they need to lose weight, or follow a healthy diet, or exercise more - this information is not earth-shattering. The tricky part is changing our behaviors to allow these transformations to occur.

Some tips I have for you...

1) To err is human. Remember that. Human beings are flawed creatures with many layers of complexity that frequently resist change. So when we stumble, instead of giving up completely, we can choose to use compassion to refocus and restart. Do not let shame color your missteps.

2) Set an intention and connect with the underlying reason you are making the change. Whether it be for health reasons or otherwise, set a goal and remind yourself of this everyday. Maybe even write it on a sticky note and put it on your bathroom mirror. Intentions allow us to take the next step forward.

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3) Develop a mindfulness practice. Being able to pause and then connect with our true inner selves and values is an important source of motivation. We have a lot of thoughts, feelings, and anxieties that arise everyday that can be distractions away from your goals. Why am I eating another doughnut... is it because I am hungry, or am I just stressed or bored? Pause. Connect. And bring mindfulness into your decisions.

With all this in mind, I challenge you to shed your old skins and meet transformation head on. Embrace your inner Wood Snake and find ingenious ways to adapt and create forward momentum towards positive change!