

# SAY NO: It's Good For You

Gracefully opting out of social events can be the healthiest resolution you make this year.

BY ELISE OBERLIESEN

If reviewing your calendar makes you sick to your stomach and an invitation from a friend makes your head hurt, it may be time to re-evaluate your social commitments.

Start saying no to unrelenting get-togethers and yes to yourself. It's OK to say no, and it won't ruin your friendships. It's good for you.

Rather than make excuses to squirm out of a commitment, suggests best-selling author Susan RoAne, be honest.

"You don't have to give an excuse when there's an appropriate reason [for canceling]," RoAne says. "A reasonable person would understand."

Your worry about hurting a friend is not unnatural; it originates from that female sixth sense that tunes into other people's needs.

That feeling serves to protect your friendships, says psychiatrist Nanette Gartrell, author of *My Answer is No, If That's Okay With You*.

"We fear that these are not good enough reasons because



we fear our friends will feel a rejection,” she says.

But our reasons are good enough. An appropriate reason can be as simple as a need to have a little time alone. It’s OK to say you’re unavailable. You’re allowed.

Just as you check your 401(k) to see what it’s worth, try doing the same within your social network. Good friends are compassionate about your need to opt out, RoAne says.

### BE TACTFUL

Keep in mind that you’re protecting your well-being by refusing an invitation; it makes things easier when explaining your motivations to a friend. The trick is to be considerate.

“You can say no, but do so politely,” RoAne says.

This way, the news is less of a blow on the receiving end. Plus, it shows you care about the relationship.

## When Saying Yes Is Bad

When yes rolls off your tongue more than you’d like, it can negatively impact your health. Mayo Clinic psychiatrist Robert P. Bright recommends streamlining commitments and re-evaluating your relationships if you recognize any of these signs:

- Feelings of resentment about get-togethers
- Feeling overextended
- Comforting yourself with food or alcohol
- Unusual fatigue
- Uncharacteristic outbursts

### PAUSE A MOMENT

Oftentimes, we say the first thing that comes to mind. Resist the urge and think before you speak.

“Take a moment to pause and collect your thoughts,” RoAne says. With this approach, your words will come out with greater sincerity.

### USE CONFIDENT WORDS

Don’t feel compelled to give a quick response when a friend asks you to meet for coffee. Consider taking time to look at a calendar and then responding, Gartrell says.

And keep the message simple. “I’m an advocate of making the ‘no’ a shorter sentence,” she says.

But if your tendency is to be overly polite, then watch your words wisely. Don’t ask for permission, RoAne says. Replace “Do you mind if...?” or “Can I...?” with self-assured emphatic statements. Try “No, but here’s what I can do.”

### FOLLOW UP

Do what you say you’ll do, says Mayo Clinic psychiatrist Robert P. Bright. To promise a callback and then purposely avoid it is a form of passive-aggressive behavior, a personality trait expressed by a lack of follow-through. When we’re under pressure, passive-aggressive solutions may seem like a quick escape route, but they rarely solve problems.

### SET BOUNDARIES

If you’re a people pleaser, break free from a deliver-the-moon attitude. Instead, try something new—please yourself.

First, know your own



**“You don’t have to give an excuse when there’s an appropriate reason [for canceling].”**

—author Susan RoAne

limits, Bright says. Be honest about overly ambitious time traps. Say no if you think another commitment will send you overboard.

“Agree to what you can do and what you want to do,” Bright says.

Set boundaries by acknowledging how you’d rather spend those precious extra minutes; maybe you want more lingering time at the library or a leisurely workout without the stress of a commitment afterward.

That way, the invitations you do accept strengthen your friendships and, more importantly, make you happier and healthier. ●