

Tired of Resolutions? Follow These 10 New Year's Tips to Improve Your Tech Instead

By Jill Duffy, pcmag.com, December 18, 2023

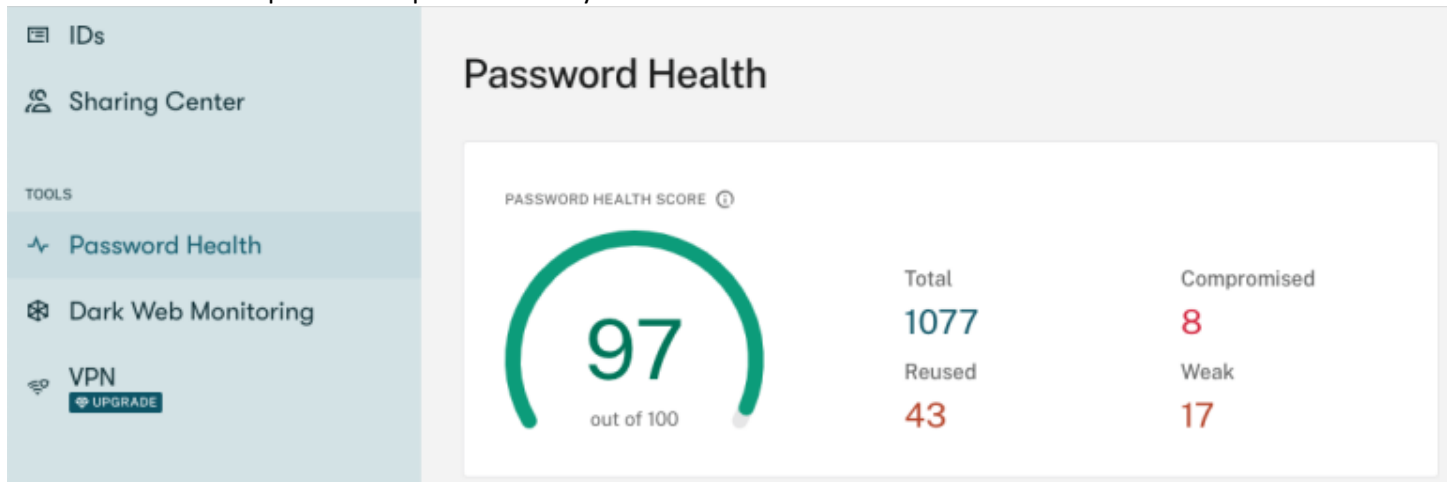
Resolutions require sustained willpower. Checking off simple and effective chores is a better way to make small but meaningful improvements.

All the traditional New Year's resolutions, like losing weight and dropping bad habits, seem pretty passé. The current zeitgeist feels more centered on compassion and softness than a battle toward never-ending self-improvement. This year, I propose swapping New Year's resolutions for a few much smaller tasks, things you do once and immediately feel accomplished for doing.

These little chores are necessary, but they're easy to put off because most of them aren't that urgent. I always find that time slows down a little at the end of December, and I have a moment to check off some of these tasks. Give them a try yourself. Doing some sure feels better than making a list of all the things you'd like to change about yourself.

1. Clean Up Your Weak Passwords

When people say you should change your weak passwords, don't you wish you had a list of what they are? If you use a [password manager](#), there's a good chance it does! So go fix them. Some password managers can even log in to your online accounts and update weak passwords on your behalf.



(Credit: Dashlane/PCMag)

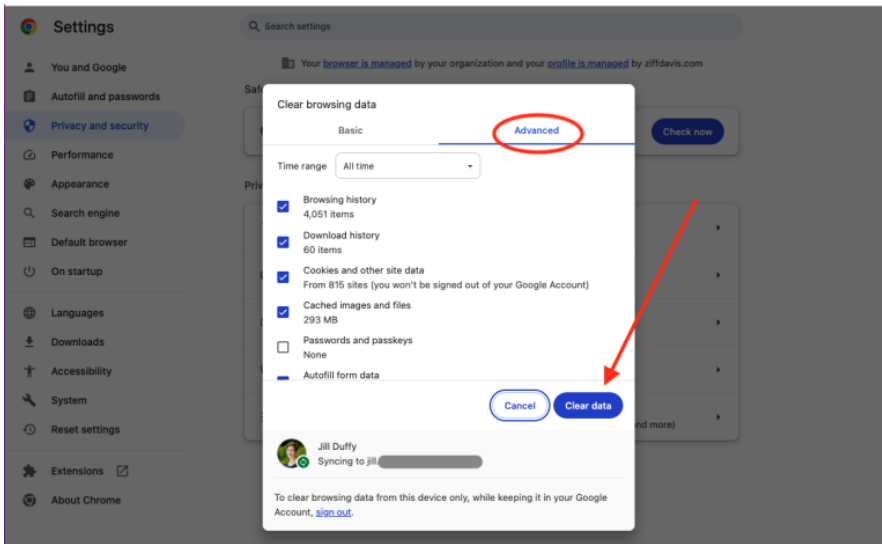
If you are not yet using a password manager, it's the number one thing in your digital life that you absolutely should do right now. Many [very good password managers are free](#), so there's no excuse not to sign up for one. It does take a little time to get all your existing passwords into a password manager, but you don't have to do that today. You do it little by little as you visit all your accounts and log in to them. So sign up for a password manager right now in less than three minutes, and then let the password manager do its job automatically—you don't have to do much more work once you've set it up.

2. Test Your Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Detectors and Change Their Batteries

When did you last change the batteries in your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors? Doing it on or around January 1 makes it easier to remember. The general rule with these devices is to test them twice a year, replace the 9V battery once per year, and change out the units entirely once every 10 years. Renters should know that landlords are typically responsible for maintaining the units and their batteries, though specific rules may vary by state or city. In any event, it's so important to have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors that you should at least test yours by January 1.

3. Dump Your Browser Cache and History

When did you last delete your web browser's cache and history? What about the history on your mobile web browser? It takes just a minute to do. Go to the browser's settings and look for the history. If you see advanced settings, open them. Now, make your selections to delete everything: all history from all time, all cookies, all cache, and all saved passwords (use a password manager, and you don't need your browser to save passwords).



(Credit: Google/PCMag)

4. Reach Inbox Zero (Just to Try It)

I know, I know. Everyone who isn't already getting to inbox zero regularly just hates the whole idea. But I have a hack that lets you try it out with zero commitment!

Instead of processing all the messages in your email inbox to clear it, make a folder and label it "2023 and older." Select all your inbox messages and move them to that folder. If you don't like the results, move the messages back to your inbox. But at least you get to see what having a clear inbox is like. You might like it.

5. Enable Multi-Factor Authentication for Your Most Important Accounts

You can never get un-hacked, but you can enable [multi-factor authentication](#) (MFA) with a free [authenticator app](#) to increase your security from being hacked in the first place.

Full disclosure: I don't use MFA on all my accounts, but I have set it up on the most important ones I want to protect. They include my email and bank accounts...and I just realized I didn't have it enabled on my social media accounts. Adding MFA to Instagram took 45 seconds. Turning it on in a few of the most important places does a lot to protect your identity, money, and reputation.

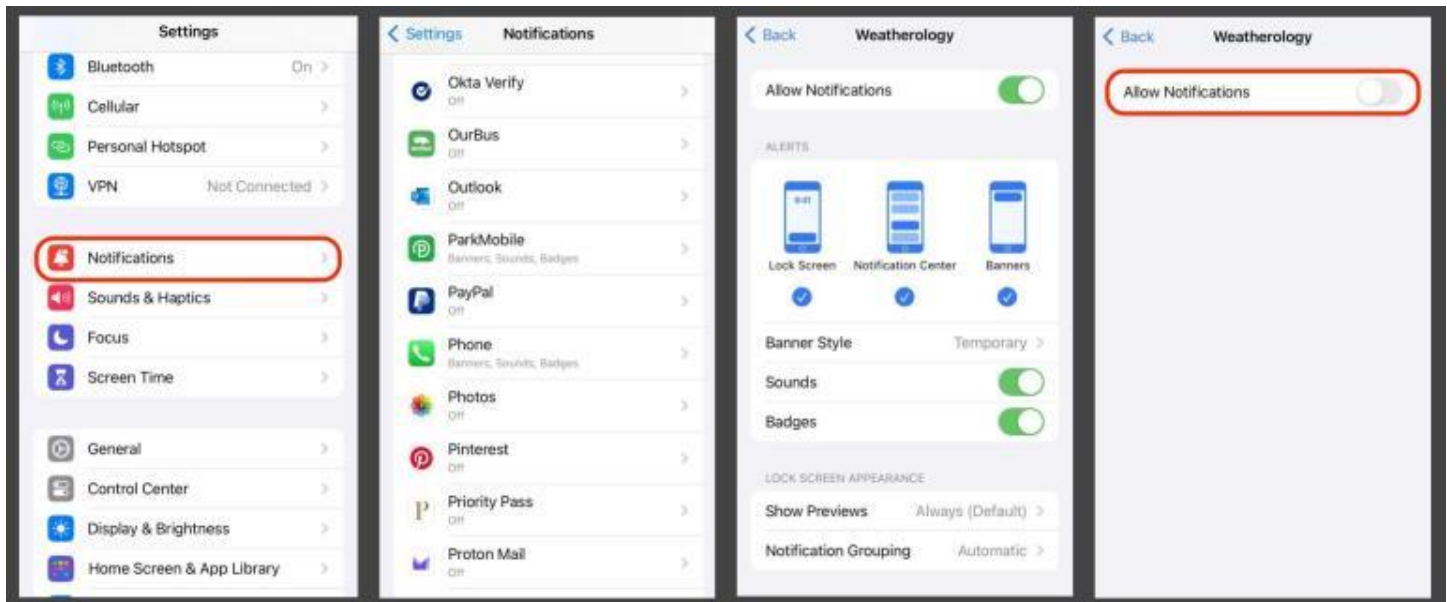
6. Put Screen Protectors on All Your Mobile Devices

We may never resolve the debate about phone cases and whether they should be necessary (shouldn't a \$300+ device that you carry everywhere be self-protective?), but there's no debate when it comes to screen protectors. You need them on your phones. Do you have kids with phones? They really need a screen protector. You can buy a three-pack for less than \$10. Think of it as an insurance policy against spending \$75 to \$100 and a few hours replacing a broken screen.

7. Turn Your Notifications Way Down

Notifications and their badges on phones lose their meaning when there are too many of them. Notifications are useful on apps for messages, calendars, to-do list reminders, baby monitors, security cameras, delivery services, and a few other types of apps. But if you have 55 unread notifications across 19 apps, it's harder to see the ones that matter. So when you have a few minutes of quiet time on the couch, open your phone settings and go to the notifications section. Disable notifications on all the apps where you don't need them and, frankly, don't use them. Going forward, default to saying no when a new app asks if it can send you notifications. You'll know if you need them.

While notifications are most burdensome on phones, you might also review the settings on your computers, tablets, and other devices.



(Credit: Apple/PCMag)

8. Clean Your Phone, Keyboard, Mouse, and Smartwatch

Online articles will tell you you need supplies to clean your PC, keyboard, mouse, smartwatch, and other electronics. Certainly, it helps to have compressed air, cotton swabs, and super high purity isopropyl alcohol, but all you really need is a lint-free cloth and in some cases a little water and a few drops of mild dish soap ([the soap is for your smartwatch](#)). Buff your screens (you *can* use a cleaning solution for screens, but you don't have to), shake out your keyboard, and wipe, wipe, wipe. The lint-free cloth should do most of the work, but you can also use a cotton ball with a dab of water or alcohol to go over hard surfaces, like keys on a keyboard or the exterior of a mouse. Those tiny pre-saturated wipes that come in first-aid kits are good, too.

Go deeper with more details on [how to clean a laptop properly](#) and [how to clean a keyboard](#). Don't neglect your desk as well! Give it a good wipe down.

9. Cancel Subscriptions You Aren't Using

"Now" is always the best time to [review recurring subscriptions](#) that you pay for and cancel the ones you don't want. A great tool for this is a [personal finance app](#). [Simplify](#) and [Rocket Money](#) have tools for dredging up a list of subscriptions you pay for.

If you don't use a personal finance app, check the subscription in your Android and iPhone settings. You might find others in your credit card or bank statement. Many credit cards now have a feature that identifies ongoing subscriptions for you when you want to review them. Don't forget about subscriptions that recur annually, like Amazon Prime.

10. Clear Out Your Old Devices

Some people, myself included, do a deep house cleaning as part of our New Year's traditions, making it an ideal time to get rid of devices we no longer want. It's important to [declutter responsibly](#), though, both in terms of [erasing all personal data from your phone](#) and other gadgets and following best practices for minimizing the environmental impact.

You don't have to recycle everything. You can also [repurpose](#) or sell old phones, PCs, eReaders, and whatnot. For more, see [how to sell your iPhone](#) and [how to sell your Android phone](#). Trading them to the manufacturer for store credit is a good option, too; Apple has a great program.