

Secrets of Successful Resolutions



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January is Healthy Weight Awareness Month, which shouldn't come as a surprise given that every year Americans ring in the New Year by setting resolutions to lose weight, exercise more and eat healthier. But even with the best of intentions, statistics show that only 8 percent of people achieve their New Year's resolutions. Why do so few people reach their goals? And what are the secrets of those who have success?

Keep It Simple

Setting lofty goals or a long list of healthy changes is bound to fail. If goals are complicated, we get overwhelmed and frustrated, making the changes difficult to sustain for more than a few weeks. In working with clients in my private practice, I have found it's not the extent of the change that is most important, but instead the ability to make small changes and gradually combine several together, that leads to long-term success.

Be Realistic

Everyone wants to get in shape or get extra pounds off as quickly as possible. But sudden, excessive exercise or diets that are complicated, have strict rules or severely restrict certain foods will only be successful in the short term. It's important to recognize that changing behavior is like a slow jog, not a sprint. I tell my clients to ask themselves, "Can I see myself doing this goal six months or one year from now?" If the answer is no, then it's not a realistic place to start.



Make It Measurable

Telling yourself “I’m going to lose weight and exercise more” is a goal that is too vague and very difficult to measure. People need positive reinforcement when making lifestyle changes, and being able to measure initial successes motivates us to keep going. The more specific a goal is, the more likely it will be successful. For example, measurable goals might be “I will walk in the morning on Tuesdays and Thursdays” or “I will bring two fruits and one cup of vegetables to work each day.”

Record It and Reward It

Once a resolution is specific and measurable, the next step is to keep track of your progress. There are many ways to do this, such as writing on a calendar each time you complete the goal; using an app that allows you to record your progress on your phone; journaling each day; making a “to-do” list; or posting on a chart that you keep on the refrigerator or at your desk. This keeps a new behavior on your mind and allows you to give yourself credit for your accomplishments. We all need reminders when we are trying to break old habits, and we all love positive feedback when we are doing a good job. Just be sure the reward is healthy and not food.

Get Support

After the first few weeks, motivation often starts to wane. Support becomes critical and can come in many forms, such as socializing with like-minded people, having an exercise group or buddy, finding an online support group or working with a health coach. My clients tell me that sharing their goals and progress is important not only for support but also accountability. Here’s an example to put into practice. For 2015, I encourage families to set a resolution to eat **5-a-Day, Every Day**. This means eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. This resolution is an example of **keeping it simple** because there is just one goal that the whole family works on together. It is a **realistic** place to start given the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables is six to eight for kids (depending on age) and nine to 10 servings daily for adults. It is a **measurable** goal and can be **recorded**. Family members can **support** each other’s efforts and decide together what will be fun family **rewards** along the way.

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