Resolution Reset

Try a Different Approach to Make 2015 the Year You Meet Your Healthy Goals

By Rochelle Melander

At the beginning of the year, everyone talks about making New Year’s resolutions. Yet many of us may feel like we set the same weight-loss and fitness goals every year without achieving lasting success. In fact, it’s commonly thought that most people drop their resolutions by the third Monday in January.

Let’s make this year different! Psychologists have studied the process of setting goals, and they offer concrete tools to help us succeed. We can keep our resolutions. Read on to find out how. And if you decide to give the Get Healthy & Active Plan a go, you’ll find that we incorporated a number of these techniques to help you.

1st Tool for Success:
Envision your future. When we decide to lose weight, we envision a new life for ourselves: We’ll climb stairs with ease, shop anywhere for clothes and feel good when we step on the scale at the doctor’s office. A study by psychologists Ken Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky found that writing out a vision of one’s
best possible self increased positive feelings and helped people achieve their goals. **Make this year different.** Record a vision of what you want your life to be like in a year. Write in the present tense, use as many sense words as possible, and focus on what you’ll be able to do after a year of eating less and exercising more. Keep this vision in front of you as you set your New Year’s goals, reminding yourself that the goals are stepping stones toward this vision of a healthier, happier you.

**2ND TOOL FOR SUCCESS:**

**Take small steps.** When we set resolutions, we often vow to make big changes: become a vegetarian or run every day. According to psychologist Robert Maurer, author of *One Small Step Can Change Your Life: The Kaizen Way*, drastic changes can rattle the fear center of our brain. We panic and revert to familiar, comfort-seeking behaviors—like eating a burger. The solution? Take tiny steps toward a goal and we won’t feel afraid.

**Make this year different.** Take your list of big, vague goals and make them specific. Add small steps you can take toward each goal. Tackle one step at a time. When that step becomes a habit, try another one.

For example, turn a vague goal of eating better into a more specific goal of choosing more fresh fruits and vegetables, so you can achieve your goal of losing weight. Small steps might include eating a salad for lunch; having a healthy, 100-calorie snack every afternoon at 3; or eating only whole-grain bread. The Get Healthy & Active Plan suggests similar mini goals.

**3RD TOOL FOR SUCCESS:**

**Schedule it!** We have a saying at my house: If it’s not on the calendar, it doesn’t happen. Research backs me up. In a study of women who agreed to perform a breast self-exam, nearly 100 percent of the group who wrote down when and where they’d do the exam did it. When we know when, where and how we’ll complete a task, we’re more likely to accomplish it.

**Make this year different.** Schedule your small steps. It often helps to pair new habits with something you already do, like drinking your morning coffee. A contractor with a demanding job always grilled for his family on Sunday afternoon. When he set the goal of making healthier food choices, he grilled extra chicken on Sunday so that he’d have enough for the entire week.

**4TH TOOL FOR SUCCESS:**

**Decide early.** Life comes with choices. Eat dinner out, and the server wants to know if we’d like our fish broiled, baked, grilled, deep-fried or pan-fried. Yikes! In *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*, social psychologist Roy F. Baumeister and science writer John Tierney say that our ability to make decisions that support our goals decreases throughout the day. But we can bypass this problem by deciding ahead of time.

**Make this year different.** Make a plan for tackling difficult choices at the beginning of the week by using what psychologist Peter Gollwitzer calls an “implementation intention.” The simple plan has three parts: When I [insert external cue], I will [insert action] so that I can [insert goal]. For example: When I encounter the desert table, I will choose fruit so that I can achieve my goal of eating healthier.

**5TH TOOL FOR SUCCESS:**

**Reset and renew.** Will following these suggestions mean you’ll be able to keep all of your resolutions? I hope so. But life happens. When we finish a tough week at work, we might slip and treat ourselves to a big helping of comfort food. Or we might skip a few workouts to catch up on sleep.

Does that mean we’ve joined the ranks of the failed resolution keepers? Not necessarily. Each day offers an opportunity to begin again. Reset your plan, and renew your life.

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