

Don't scrap your resolutions! But maybe rethink them.

Making those New Year's Resolutions stick.

February is when most of us give up on our New Year's resolutions. Rethink them and re-commit!

According to U.S. News, approximately 80% of New Year Resolutions fail by the second week of February. This is not only discouraging, it is bad news for health, since exercising, losing weight, and eating better are consistently some of the most popular resolutions.

Whether you're still going strong on your health-related resolutions, or if you've bumped up against some obstacles in keeping them, here are some great tips to help keep resolutions at the time when many are struggling to maintain motivation.

A lot of resolutions are hard to keep because they're too lofty, vague, and represent a major life change. If a change doesn't fit your lifestyle, it's not going to work for you. If it is an extreme change, we're more likely to burn out, feel discouraged, and revert back to old habits.

So, rather than seeking to make sweeping life changes, you're more likely to have lasting and real success if small lifestyle modifications are implemented on a daily basis. Pick a few healthy things that you can begin to work into your normal daily life, like getting up and walking 10 minutes during the day or during commercials, cooking one more meal at home than you usually do, cutting down on soda, not buying junk food at the store, or adding a vegetable to every meal. When you experience success with smaller goals, it leads to bigger goals, and in the long run, small changes add up to big changes. Slow change is still change.

Experts recommend using the acronym S.M.A.R.T. when setting these goals: making them Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Focused and Time-sensitive. For example, if your overarching resolution is to exercise more, perhaps a daily goal could be outlined like this: Walk 10 minutes at noon, and again at 6pm. Each small step can lead you toward accomplishing bigger goals.

One way to build consistency with these manageable changes is to utilize a calendar and physically mark off the days when you've accomplished the small change for that day. After a few X's on the calendar, you build up a string of successes, which is a strong motivator to keep going. Another way to be consistent is to schedule in the change, just like you would an appointment or other task that needs doing.

This idea of taking it one day at a time is key, seeing each day as a fresh start and a chance to make positive changes (rather than looking at the whole, big, looming year.) If one day doesn't go as planned, it's okay to start back up the next day. One slip-up doesn't mean failure.

Tracking or self-monitoring can be an important part of successful resolutions, as well. Using step-counters or pedometers, weighing yourself daily, and recording what you eat—these have all been shown to contribute to success and real results in incorporating healthy changes.

It is also very helpful to focus on the positives of making changes, rather than emphasizing the things you're "giving up." Think about how it feels to have exercised, for example, a break from drudgery, rather than seeing it as drudgery, or, think about the new and delicious foods you're learning to cook, rather than being bummed about giving up those less-than-healthy options, etc. How you frame healthy

choices makes a big difference in not only achieving it, but also in the health-related decisions you make all day long. Here's another positivity trick: tell yourself that you can have as many fruits and vegetables as you want—having an unlimited mindset is psychologically powerful, and 800 calories of healthy food is better than 600 calories of junk food. A positive and happy outlook is much more likely to lead to goal achievement.

Investing in the process by working with others is a great way to increase odds for success, too. Signing up for something is a great way to be part of team, and also to develop accountability. There are several great resources in our community, with some exciting new options. You can call Public Health for more details on any of these. Discussing and working closely with a healthcare provider to achieve health goals can also be helpful.

As we come up on the date when a lot of us scrap our resolutions, we can use this time to rethink them, and instead of giving up, we can alter how we've been going about them, and set ourselves up for success. At the end of the year, we can look back at our calendar full of X's, and happily and more healthily, be part of the reportedly 10% who attain their resolutions.