

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Making New Year's Resolutions That You Can Keep

from the American Counseling Association

It's time to start thinking about New Year's resolutions and the changes you'd like to see for the coming months. Unfortunately, most of us tend to break many (or all) of our resolutions, sometimes before New Year's Eve is even over.

So this year, approach those resolutions a little bit differently in order to increase the odds you'll be successful at the improvements you desire.

A starting point? Make realistic resolutions. After years of slow weight gain, those pounds won't disappear overnight just because you make a New Year's resolution. The same thing applies to other types of resolutions, such as to stop smoking or to improve a relationship.

Any of these, and many, many others, can be realistic resolutions if you approach them with an actual plan to make them work, rather than just a wish that you'd like to see those things happen.

For example, a weight loss plan must include recognizing that healthy weight loss takes time and requires lifestyle changes. It means accepting that it will be a slow process and that there may be plateaus and backsliding, but that you will still continue to try.

Similarly, stopping smoking is a difficult process. A realistic New Year's resolution is one that accepts that you might fail the first time (or several times) you try to quit, but that you're willing and planning to keep doing your best to succeed.

To make such resolutions come true, once you accept a realistic view of them, it's necessary to come up with achievable plans to get to your goal. You can do this by breaking a big task into smaller, more manageable pieces. A weight loss plan, for example, might include mini-goals of cutting out one high-calorie food each week and substituting one desirable low-calorie food.

A plan to exercise more might begin with a mini-goal of a daily 15-minute walk, and then slowly adding more time each week.

When you use mini-goals that focus on positive behavioral changes, rather than just the big, overall goal, you can use the successes of hitting those mini-goals as positive reinforcement to help you keep going.

Resolutions offer a very positive opportunity to change areas in our lives that we would like to improve upon. Making a resolution can be one step toward this self-improvement and succeeding at a resolution can both improve our lives and bring a rewarding sense of accomplishment.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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