

This Year Make New Year's Resolutions That Work

from the American Counseling Association

We all make New Year's resolutions. Unfortunately, most of us also tend to break most, if not all of them, sometimes before New Year's Eve is even over.

One problem with most New Year's resolutions is that we set unrealistic goals for change. It might be important to lose weight, stop smoking or improve a relationship, but simply deciding something must change doesn't mean it will. For a resolution to work, it requires actual planning, not just wishing.

Start by making realistic resolutions. Don't expect to shed all your excess weight by the end of January. Accept that breaking a long-term smoking habit may not succeed on the first try. Set goals that are realistic and attainable.

Next, develop a plan which takes into account that your resolution requires a meaningful change in behavior. Figure out what you need to do to help make your goal attainable, and accept that you may not be one hundred percent successful. Habits acquired over years don't change instantly.

Instead of focusing on the final, desired outcome, break big tasks into smaller, more manageable pieces. A resolution to exercise more might start slowly with a daily 15-minute walk, adding time each week as you get into better shape.

For weight loss, your achievable mini-goals might be changes in eating habits, rather than actual pounds lost. A first goal might be to cut out one high-calorie food each day. A second goal might be to replace one high-fat favorite with a new fruit or vegetable. Use mini-goals that focus on positive behavioral changes and use the successes of hitting those mini-goals as positive reinforcement to help keep you going.

The secret to success with resolutions lies up front, both in the resolutions you develop and in what you expect from yourself in terms of compliance. Once you have carefully and thoughtfully planned the resolution, and accepted that you may stumble a time or two on the way to your final target, you can rest assured that you have begun the process in good fashion and have a better than average chance of success.

Resolutions can 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.

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words: 395