

Q and A: Making New Year's resolutions that stick

January 5 2022, by Cynthia Weiss



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DEAR MAYO CLINIC: Every year I make one or more New Year's resolutions that I have every intention of starting on Jan. 1. But I find myself losing momentum quickly into the new year when the holiday merriment starts to fade. Do you have tips for achieving resolutions and

goals?

ANSWER: It is the time of year again when people make New Year's resolutions, many of which are [health](#) related. Losing [weight](#), eating healthier, exercising and quitting smoking are popular choices. Losing weight often leads the list, but it also is the most difficult to accomplish.

New Year's resolutions are easy to make, but not so easy to achieve. To make the resolution into an actual solution, you need to spend time preparing and planning. There is no magic button for keeping a resolution.

The first step toward success is developing a structured [health plan](#). Your health plan should include where you're headed and why you want to get there. Be realistic about what challenges you may face along the way and define how you plan to work through the challenges.

The second step is to visualize your goals. Think about a what a healthy future might look like to you. Convert those thoughts into a short, clear statement: your health vision.

While there are many ways to write a health vision, one popular format is: "I want to (blank), so I (blank)." Examples may be: "I want to lose weight, so I have more energy to enjoy life." Or, "I want to have [better balance](#) between my work and personal life, so I have more quality time for myself and for my family."

After you create a health vision, the third step is to set SMART goals. SMART is an acronym that is all about achieving identified goals to produce a feeling of accomplishment and much-needed motivation to fuel your health journey.

SMART means:

- **Specific**—What am I going to do? You need to have a specific plan in place to start. Take the time to design and research.
- **Measurable**—How will I track my progress? You may say, "I would like to lose some weight." But it would be better if you said, "I want to lose 50 pounds in four months."
- **Achievable**—What steps will I take to make this happen? Set a realistic [goal](#). With the right weight-loss program, 50 pounds may be realistic. Ask the program you're considering what the average weight loss among participants is after one year. Depending on the program and its weight loss approach, you may need to set a smaller, more attainable goal.
- **Relevant**—Is this important enough to me to want to do it? Think positively. Behavior only changes from the positive. Remember there are programs to help you accomplish your goal.
- **Time-framed**—When will I do this? Set a specific target date. There is nothing magical about Jan. 1 as a start date. It is better to pick a date when you have a plan in place.

Your SMART goals should consist of long-term and short-term goals. Establish your long-term goal first. An example of a long-term goal is: "I will walk briskly for 30 minutes each day at least five days a week."

However, if you haven't been exercising on a regular basis, there often is a need for intermediary, short-term goals. For example: "I will walk 15 minutes during my lunch hour at least three days each week for the next month." After reaching your short-term goal, extend your efforts gradually, until you ultimately accomplish your long-term goal.

Finally, accept challenges, and don't give up. Nearly everyone will face challenges during their health journey. Perhaps it's a busy family life,

work, school, medical issues or peer pressure to continue bad habits. It's important to identify potential challenges and envision strategies to address them as part of an effective health plan.

Here are a few tips for success:

- **Confront your temptations.** You will need to change your environment to help with your weight goals. Get rid of food that won't help you realize your goal—this should be part of your planning.
- **Tell your friends.** Changing your habits for good may affect your inner circle of friends. Let them know what you're trying to do and enlist their support in helping you achieve your goal.
- **Remember the reward.** Make a list of the reasons you want to lose weight. When you lack reasons to change, it is easy to fall back into old habits.
- **Be prepared for a setback.** Give yourself another chance. Most people slip up at some point. The people who are successful are the ones who get back on track. Look at how many days you still have left in the calendar year and see what you can accomplish before the year is up. Don't give up.
- **Commit yourself.** You can't take lifestyle changes lightly. Consider keeping a health journal to record your activities and achievements, adding to your motivation and accountability. Make your health a priority.

Embracing a healthy lifestyle is an ongoing, dynamic process. Use the [new year](#) as an opportunity to start the journey to living a healthier life.

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