

New Year!

# Resolutions You Can Stick With



by Heidi Smith Luedtke, Ph.D.

New Year's resolutions often fail, and it's not because people lack willpower. You may be stuck in the same old pattern because you're overwhelmed by detailed (and conflicting) information about how to lose weight, get fit, save money or get organized.

Changing behavior is simple, but not easy. These 10 principles apply to any live-better effort. And you can enact them immediately. Go ahead, start now.

- **Think positive.** If you want to succeed, focus on a desired outcome, such as "I want to eat more fruits and vegetables." Research by Harvard psychologist Daniel Wegner, Ph.D., shows avoidance goals — for instance, "I want to stop eating junk food" — set people up for thinking about the very things they're avoiding (junk food). Monitoring behavior requires conscious mental effort. Focus yours in the direction you want to move.

- **Write it down.** Writing down goals

creates a sense of intention and commitment. Make your goals specific and challenging. "Don't be so realistic that you underestimate yourself," says life coach Caroline Adams Miller, author of *Creating Your Best Life: The Ultimate Life List Guide*. "Make a contract with yourself: 'I will do this, by that time, and get this reward,'" says Miller. Post your goal where you'll see it frequently. Let it serve as a motivation and an affirmation.

- **Keep account.** Track actions you want to change, like spending, eating or texting. You'll spend less if you document purchases before you buy. Writing down expenditures interrupts thoughtless spending patterns so you can change course. The same strategy can curb mindless eating. A 2008 study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* showed dieters who kept a food diary lost twice as much weight as those who didn't.

- **Change your scenery.** Don't underestimate the power of situational cues. If you want to cut calories, toss the cookies (literally). Eat from a smaller plate. Order the smallest portion, not the 'value meal.' Stay far away from cues that might undermine your efforts. Surround yourself with inspiring images and role models instead.

- **Take baby steps.** You may think audacious goals require revolutionary action. Not true, says Robert Maurer, Ph.D., author of *One Small Step Can Change Your Life*. Small changes add up big, and — because they don't cause as much anxiety or resistance as large changes — you're more likely to repeat them until they become habits. Ease your way into an exercise routine with a two-minute walk every morning. Yes, two minutes!

- **Just do it.** Don't wait until you're in the mood. Get busy in the house and clear some clutter. Follow the one-minute rule: If a task takes only one minute, like hanging your coat in the

closet, do it immediately. This prevents problems from piling up. Get started — you may keep going.

- **Assess progress.** "Checking off goals you've accomplished is addictive," says Miller. At least once a week, measure what you've achieved in a holistic way. Avoiding your weekly weigh-in or forgetting to check you bank balance are signs you aren't committed to shedding pounds or saving pennies. Adopt a growth mindset about assessment. Use your results as a learning tool to help you tweak your technique.

- **Take it public.** Sharing your goals with others can create powerful pressure to perform. Family and friends can support your efforts with information and camaraderie. Find support groups to help you get fit, lose weight, get organized, quit smoking or climb out of debt.

- **Energize.** Changing your behavior exhausts mental and emotional energy. Tackle one project at a time. Stress activates old patterns of behavior — often the exact ones we want to change. "Do things on a daily basis that give you energy and enrich your sense of self," says psychologist Todd Kashdan, Ph.D., author of *Curious? Discover the Missing Ingredient to a Fulfilling Life*. Meditate, exercise or sing in the shower.

- **Be persistent.** The difference between people who succeed at changing behavior and those who fail is successful people regroup when others give up. Studies show only 40 percent of smokers quit on their first try and only 20 percent of dieters with a history of obesity sustain a 10 percent weight loss for a year or longer. If your improvement efforts fall short, revise your plan and try again. To paraphrase a well-known Japanese proverb: You may stumble seven times; get up eight. ♥

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### Consult these resources for help achieving your resolutions:

#### Save Money:

- Get Out of Debt Guy: [getoutofdebt.org](http://getoutofdebt.org)
- Budgets and Tracking Tools: [www.Mint.com](http://www.Mint.com)

#### Stop Smoking:

- Freedom From Smoking: [www.ffsonline.org](http://www.ffsonline.org)
- American Lung Association: 1-800-LUNG-USA

#### Clean House:

- FlyLady: [www.flylady.net](http://www.flylady.net)
- Organized Home: [organizedhome.com](http://organizedhome.com)

#### Lose Weight:

- WeightLossBuddy: [www.weightlossbuddy.com](http://www.weightlossbuddy.com)
- Online food diary: [www.my-calorie.counter.com](http://www.my-calorie.counter.com)

#### Get Fit:

- My Kids Fan: [www.MyKidsFan.com](http://www.MyKidsFan.com)
- DailyStrength: [www.dailystrength.org](http://www.dailystrength.org)