

Resolution Success Checklist

Terry Estrin, Ph.D.
Registered Psychologist

Research suggests that people who successfully adopt New Year's resolutions use different behavior-change strategies from those who do not succeed. No matter what your resolution goal (i.e., losing weight, exercising, quitting smoking) you can dramatically increase your chances of initiating and maintaining positive change in your life if you follow these guidelines (and please consult your physician before starting any health-related program):

WINNING STRATEGIES

- Commit:** simply committing to a resolution makes it *ten times* more likely that you will succeed. Not ready to commit? Don't worry. Making a change in your life is a *process*, not an event. Even if you are only contemplating a change, you can help yourself make the shift from contemplation to action by learning all you can about your goal and forming a plan.
- Harness your will power:** when it comes to will power, you have to know yourself. Some of us can muster our will power when we go it alone, some find their motivation when they join a group of fellow resolvers, and others do best with a coach. Do what works for you.
- Positive Thinking:** frame your resolution as "I will" as opposed to "I will not." Use positive self-talk and visualize who you want to be (i.e., an active, healthy person).
- Keep it realistic:** make sure your goal is do-able in terms of time, effort, and expense (unrealistic: "never eat a donut, ever again").
- Be specific:** rather than set general goals like "I will get in shape," be more specific: "jog for 5 minutes and walk for 10 minutes at 3 pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday"
- Set goals:** write down short-term and long-term goals to remind you of what you are working toward.
- Track your progress:** charting your progress provides positive feedback that not only increases your confidence in your ability to accomplish your goals – it also increases your likelihood of success.
- Rewards:** motivate yourself with small rewards that reinforce short term goals (i.e., a relaxing shower and healthy snack after exercising) and bigger rewards that reinforce long term goals (i.e., a new pair of skis, a vacation).
- Avoid high-risk situations:** do not underestimate the power of certain people or situations to weaken resolve. If you always enjoyed a cigarette with fellow smokers during your morning coffee, consider a change of beverage, companionship, and venue.
- Surround yourself with positive reminders:** put your progress chart on the wall, associate with people who share your goals, enlist the support of family and friends.
- Consider Fading instead of Cold Turkey:** those who successfully adopt resolutions tend to avoid all-or-nothing, black-and-white thinking. If you want to change your diet, for example, you may have greater success if you make the change gradually. Please note: if your goal is to stop drinking, consult your physician regarding the suitability of fading vs. abstinence.

WHAT TO AVOID

If you find yourself doing any of the following, gently redirect yourself to one of the success-promoting choices listed above: 1) self-blame, 2) wishful thinking (hoping the problem will just go away), 3) making light of the problem, and 4) thinking about how much your behavior is hurting you.

DEALING WITH SETBACKS

- Remember that **keeping a resolution is a process**, not a one-time event. Most people make many, many attempts before achieving their resolution.

- Be kind to yourself: **setbacks are the rule rather than the exception.** A setback is not a sign of failure, it is simply a reminder that you are making a conscious effort to succeed. If you relapse, don't beat yourself up - just "get back on the horse."
- Learn to **recognize relapse triggers**. Research has identified the most frequent triggers as: 1) feeling a lack of personal control, 2) excessive stress, 3) negative emotions, 4) social pressure, 5) conflict with others, and 6) positive emotions.

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