

Tips for Keeping Your New Year's Resolutions

By Shawne Diaz, MA, LCMHC



The statistics vary, but approximately 85% of those who make New Year's resolutions will fail.^{4,6,7} So, how do you become one of the 15% who will succeed? A popular internet site defines New Year's Resolution as "a commitment that a person makes to one or more personal goals, projects or the reforming of a habit. This lifestyle change is generally interpreted as advantageous."⁷ Looking at the definition there are a couple of key factors that need to be considered, *commitment* and *lifestyle change*.⁴ Ask yourself some questions, are you ready? At this time, do you have more reasons to be motivated to change or more reasons to be motivated not to make a change? If you have more reasons to be motivated to change, how confident are you that you can do what is necessary to make the change?^{2,4}

The chart showing the S.M.A.R.T. goal format can be used to determine both your commitment and confidence levels while you are defining your goal.⁴

It's almost that time of year again when many of us will start to make those promises to ourselves that we call New Year's resolutions. What will it be this year? Lose weight and get fit? Improve finances by reducing debt and saving more? Spend more time with family and friends? Maybe it is general self improvement by reducing stress, getting organized, quitting smoking or reducing alcohol consumption?

S.M.A.R.T. GOAL FORMAT

Specific – Chose one goal and be specific. Saying "I want to get fit" is vague. Does that mean you want to exercise more, lose weight or eat a more balanced diet? A more specific goal might be I want to lose 25 pounds. Once you have a long-term goal break it down into smaller goals like, I want to lose 1-2 pounds a week. Then, indicate how you are going to do that, e.g. health coaching with a nutritionist, cardio activity for 45 minutes four days a week, etc.

Measurable – Make sure your goal is measurable. Saying "I will lose 1-2 pounds a week" is measurable. One very important factor is to write down your goal and the plan you are going to use to achieve it. This not only will help to keep you focused and motivated, but it will help with accountability. Research has shown that writing goals down and keeping track of progress doubles the chance of success.^{3,6}

Achievable – Be honest with yourself and be realistic.⁶ A goal of I will lose 25 pounds no later than June 15, 2012, is realistic if you are working within the framework of a healthy 1-2 pounds weight loss a week. I will lose 25 pounds by the end of January, 2012 is not realistic or healthy. Also, find someone that will support your weight loss goals. It will be easier to stick to your plan if you have other people cheering you on.

Relevant – An argument can be made that all self-improvement goals are relevant, but is the goal that you have chosen appropriate for you? If you have a chronic health condition that limits your ability to exercise or requires a special diet you might need to speak with your primary medical provider before setting a weight loss goal.

Time-based – A good goal or resolution has a timeframe for completion. For instance your resolution may be I will lose 25 pounds no later than June 15, 2012. Short-term goals working toward that resolution might be: I will call and set up an appointment with a nutritionist by the end of the first week of January. I will start walking for exercise January 1st working my way up to 45 minutes, four days a week by the end of January. I will start strength training two days a week for 20 minutes by the end of the second week of February.

It only takes 21 days to develop a new behavior, a habit. That is just three short weeks! Keep at it for at least six months and there is a good chance it will become part of your life.⁴ Just take things slowly, one step at a time. Make your goal specific and realistic. Give yourself a timeframe to work within. Write it down and don't forget to celebrate your successes! Before you know it, you will be one of the 15% of people who make a New Year's resolution and actually succeed!

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Shawne D. Diaz, MA, LCMHC, practices adult individual counseling and group anger management. She is experienced in crisis intervention, short-term inpatient treatment and works within a cognitive behavioral framework. She specializes in adults with depression/anxiety disorders, ADHD, divorce, grief and particularly likes focusing on wellness issues.

Ms. Diaz graduated from Notre Dame College, Manchester, NH with a Masters degree in Counseling Psychology. She completed her internship at the Community Internship Collaborative in Manchester, NH. She is licensed as a Clinical Mental Health Counselor in the state of New Hampshire.

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