



Strategies to Help Maintain That Healthy Habit by Wellness Council of America

Set Realistic Goals

One challenge with New Year's resolutions is that people often set unrealistic goals. They can quickly become frustrated and give up. Therefore, any resolution to change should include small goals that are definable and accompanied by a solid plan on how you'll get to that goal. For instance, a resolution to lose 30 pounds may seem overwhelming. Instead, try setting smaller goals of losing four or five pounds a month for six months. Think baby steps rather than giant leaps.

Develop an Action Plan

You might decide to walk a half hour each day to burn calories. You might stop buying vending machine snacks. Or you might limit and keep track of your daily calories. "These are specific behaviors that could help you meet your larger goal of losing 30 pounds," says Dr. Deborah Tate, an obesity and behavioral researcher at the University of North Carolina.

Surround Yourself with Support

Setting up a supportive environment is another step toward success. "Think about the physical support you'll need, like the right equipment for exercise, appropriate clothing and the right kinds of foods to have at home," says Dr. Christine Hunter, a behavioral researcher and clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Health. Remove items that might trip up your efforts. If you're quitting smoking, throw away your ashtrays and lighters. To improve your nutrition, put unhealthy but tempting foods on a hard-to-reach shelf, or get rid of them. Remember, seek professional advice and support to help you make transitions or identify realistic goals.

Monitor Yourself

"Self-monitoring or tracking seems to be critical for almost every sort of behavior change," says Christine Hunter, a behavioral researcher and clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Health. That includes jotting down the foods you eat, keeping an exercise diary or making a record of your sleeping patterns. Monitoring yourself might feel like a burden, but it's one of the best predictors of successful change. "Think about how you can make tracking more convenient, so it fits naturally into your life," Hunter says. For some people, that might be a pad of paper in a purse or pocket. For others, a mobile app or a computer program might be a great help. Of course, you don't need a new year to make healthy changes; you can make them any time of the year. But New Year's is an opportunity to think about the improvements you'd like to make and then take concrete steps to achieve them.

Focus On the Benefits

Think of exactly how the change will enhance your life. For instance, when you stop smoking, the risks of cancer, heart disease, stroke and early death plummet. Reducing stress might cut your risk for heart disease and help you fight off germs. Even small improvements in your physical activity, weight or nutrition may help reduce your risk for disease and lengthen your life.