



MEDICAL MOMENTS

Making New Year's Resolutions That Stick

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It's 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 usually leads the group, but also is the most difficult to accomplish.

By the time the new year rolls around, many people are well-versed with the classic promise: "I will start my diet on Monday." In fact, by the end of December, many people have made that promise to themselves 52 times.

Discover the secret to success

New Year's resolutions are easy to make, but not so easy to achieve. To make the resolution into an actual solution, spend time preparing and planning. The first step toward success is developing a structured health plan.

Step 1. Developing a structured health plan. Should include:

- Where you're headed
- Why you want to get there
- What challenges you may face along the way
- How you plan to work through the challenges

Step 2. Visualize your goals. Create a health vision.

- Think about what a healthy future might look like to you
- Convert those thoughts into short, clear statements

Set SMART goals

- Goals help keep you focused after you record your health vision. Achieving identified goals produces a feeling of accomplishment and much-needed motivation to fuel your health journey.

When setting your goals, remember the SMART acronym:

- **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. However, if you haven't been exercising on a regular basis, there often is a need for intermediary, short-term goals. After reaching your short-term goal, extend your efforts gradually, until you ultimately accomplish your long-term goal.

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.

A network of family and friends can encourage and partner with you. Consider keeping a health journal to record your activities and achievements, adding to your motivation and accountability.

Here are a few other tips for success:

- **Temptations.** For weight goals, get rid of food that won't help you realize your goal.
- **Tell your friends.** Share new habits with friends and enlist their support in helping you achieve your goal.
- **Remember the reward.** Make a list of the reasons you want to lose weight.
- **Be prepared for a setback.** Give yourself another chance. The people who are successful are the ones who get back on track. Don't give up.
- **Commit yourself.** You can't take lifestyle changes lightly. 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.