

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

How to Make Your New Year's Resolutions Stick

*Shoot for the moon. If you miss, you'll still reach the stars.
Dream it, and you can be it.
Obstacles are only visible when you lose sight of your goal.*

Sayings like these make goal achievement sound like a cinch. The truth is that setting and accomplishing goals isn't as simple as it sounds. Because resolutions are often health-related, Dr. Gravesen wants to help patients follow through with them.



Dr. Gravesen has gathered techniques from recent research to help you establish objectives that will stay around way past Jan. 1. Read on for tips on creating and sticking with New Year's resolutions.

Select and Frame Goals With Care

If you're like most people, coming up with goals — from health and finances to family — is no problem. To determine which goals are most important, give each goal a priority. Focus only on one or two goals that top the list.

Frame goals around conditions over which you have as much control as possible. Goals based on personal achievement and acquiring skills or knowledge are more attainable than

goals with outcomes beyond your control.

While it is vital to challenge yourself, choose only realistic goals. The saying that "procrastination is perfectionism in disguise" is true. You are more likely to tackle missions that you know you can actually complete.

For example, if your goal is fitness oriented, consider setting a goal of exercising each day rather than finishing in the top 10 of a race. With "outcome" goals, such as winning a race or being promoted at work, many factors are outside of your command. Ineffective management, bad weather, injury and others' poor judgment can sabotage your success.

Begin With Baby Steps

Have prior failures made you leery about whether you'll follow through with your goal? Do you lack inspiration to start or feel that you just don't have enough time?

Relax, you're not alone! Feeling overwhelmed by resolutions is not uncommon, but there's a simple solution: Dr. Gravesen suggests you start by breaking down a goal into small, measurable mini-steps.

For example, the goal "clean up the



house exterior so house will sell" is much too vague and broad to inspire. Small, incremental steps to meet the primary goal are much more manageable. Each small step should be something that you can visualize, such as "pick an exterior paint color" or "trim hedges of front bushes."

Research shows that considering goals in terms of small, manageable increments is the best way to attain them. In a study performed in Ontario, Canada, researchers asked 96 participants to perform a complex task.

Individuals who tackled the assignment by identifying and executing specific steps were much more committed than those with general goals to do their best.

The researchers explained that identifying strategies to accomplish the small steps increased the participants' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's personal estimate of his or her own ability to reach a specific goal. The researchers found that self-efficacy further increased performance and determination (*J Organizational Behav* 2001;22:291-307).

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Write Down the Game Plan

Write down the exact steps in detail along with a date for completion. Jotting down all the small steps avoids confusion and gives the mini-steps more force by crystallizing the process.

Your written list of small steps is your action plan. Research shows that framing goals around a plan with clear objectives is much more productive than thinking of goals as desires.

One study, which included 188 participants, found that distinguishing between “desires” and “intentions” dramatically increased decision-making and action. When individuals framed goals around clear intentions, rather than desires, they were much more likely to perform and take action. Seeing goals as intentions also decreased the timeframe for achievement (*Eur J Soc Psychol* 2004;34:69).

Keep Up Momentum

Review your to-do list of mini-steps on a daily basis. Incorporate this review into your morning routine. Don't skip it, even if you're off schedule. If you do veer off schedule, regroup and adjust your schedule. And, don't be afraid to modify the small steps into micro-mini ones if you still feel overwhelmed.

Keeping up momentum is important to self-confidence. Check off what you've done, and reward yourself for finishing the step by doing something healthy that you enjoy.

Predict a Sunny Forecast

You may remember Eeyore from the children's book *Winnie the Pooh*. Eeyore's mood was as blue as his coat, and his spirit drooped as low as his head and tail. He's an extreme image of how negative thoughts can zap energy and focus.

A positive mindset is key to goal success. Research shows that people with optimistic expectations are more likely to follow through with goals than those with negative predictions.

Positive statements, expressed either out loud or inwardly, propel creativity and energy to reach goals. Successful positive thinkers refuse to let small defeats bring them down.

For instance, instead of saying “I skipped a workout this week,” say “I made all but one workout this week, and next week I'll make all of them.”

Find a Coach

Consider finding someone to work with you toward your goals. Have him or her hold you accountable for specific weekly or monthly action steps. For instance, at work this would be a supervisor or mentor. There are also many coaching options for personal goals. Many successful individuals have goal buddies or join mastermind groups, where they serve as each other's coach(es) on specific goals. Also consider hiring a professional life coach or other professional best suited to help you achieve your goal, such as a personal trainer, financial planner or interior designer.

Keep Quiet Around Naysayers

Carefully choose with whom you share your goals. Form a supportive network with upbeat friends, family members and co-workers who believe in you. But shy away from expressing your intentions to those with negative outlooks. Unfortunately, some people may not want you to succeed, and their mere attitudes can sabotage your efforts. Your inward dialog should be constantly encouraging.

Help Kids Set Goals Too

Setting goals is not just for adults; studies show goal setting is highly effective for children as well.

In one study, over a period of five years, 43 elementary students with emotional and behavioral difficulties set daily, weekly and overall goals. The youngsters received rewards when they achieved their goals and met target behaviors, such as increasing cooperation and decreasing aggression. The results showed that the children were highly successful and consistent in attaining daily (75 per-

cent), weekly (72 percent) and overall goals (86 percent).

The researchers concluded that “the motivational aspects of behavior contracting and goal setting may combine to produce maximum success for students with emotional and behavioral difficulties.” (*Psychol Sch* 1998;33:153-8.)

The best way to inspire children to set goals may be to establish and successfully follow through with your own goals. Show children how to establish small steps to meet their goals and how to identify healthy rewards to encourage motivation.

Let Us Help

Our chiropractic office strives to teach patients how to prevent the chemical, physical and emotional causes of vertebral subluxations. Failure to achieve goals is an emotional stressor that may erode health. Don't be afraid to talk to the doctor about ways to reach your goals, especially if they're health or fitness oriented. We're your partner in establishing a balanced, healthy lifestyle. Working toward goals is challenging and takes daily effort, but the payoff is rewarding and certainly worth the effort.

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