

Make Your New Year's Resolutions Stick

FOR MANY OF US, the New Year is a time to reflect on the past and make plans for the future. A time to break bad habits and create good ones. If you're like 90 percent of North Americans, you've scribbled down a list of New Year's resolutions and have every intention of keeping them. But the truth is that most people lose their steam within three to eight weeks. So, how do you keep your resolutions on track?

"Start slow," advises Adrienne Wang, a cognitive behavioural therapist at Changeways Clinic in Vancouver. Among the varied aspects of her work, Wang offers personal coaching services to those wishing to define and more effectively work toward life goals. "Unfortunately, most people don't accomplish their New Year's resolutions because they set unrealistic goals."

Wang outlines some principles to help you effect the behavioural U-turn you desire, beginning with the "three cardinal rules of goal-setting": be specific, be realistic and schedule when to start your goal.

Be Specific: Common resolutions include quitting smoking, losing weight, eating better and getting more exercise. But those are very broad categories. Instead of saying you will eat better, promise to eat two servings of fruit and

vegetables each day. Naming your goals and being specific makes them more tangible.

Be Realistic: Set goals that are within reach. Don't overload yourself. Too much, too soon means you'll get easily discouraged. "People often set goals that are too ambitious," says Wang. "For example, a resolution to lose weight is too big a goal. Instead, say how many pounds you want to lose and give a specific time period for losing them."

If you haven't exercised much at all in the last year and promise yourself that you'll head to the gym for two-hour sessions, three times per week, that's unrealistic, too. "Start with something easy," Wang advises. "A 15-minute walk three times a week is realistic. It's easy to extend that walk and make it more frequent."

It is never too late to become what you might have been.

—George Eliot, British author



Schedule When to Start Your Goal: It's easy to put off something that has no definite starting date. Schedule your goal like any other routine task. When do you want to start losing weight—tomorrow, next week or next month?

Here are more tips to keep you focused:

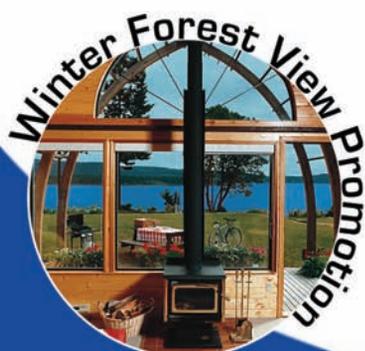
Go Public: Announce your goals to friends or family members, people who can keep you motivated. "It's hard to change our habits," says Wang. "Making a public commitment creates a certain amount of pressure."

Just Do It: Not motivated to make yoga class in the dead of winter? Go anyway. Contrary to popular belief, motivation comes after the action rather than before, says Wang. "Once you see the benefits of the action, the motivation comes."

Re-evaluate Your Goal: Look at your progress within a certain timeframe. If you haven't achieved what you set out to do, try to figure out why and find another way to tackle the goal.

And remember, a small change is better than no change at all. —Belinda Bruce

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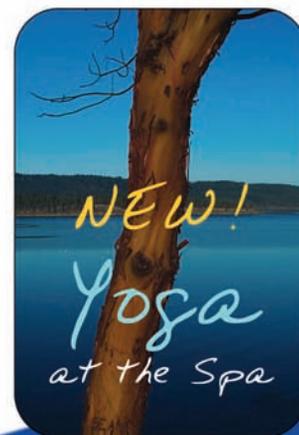


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