Tip 7: Seven Steps for Making Your New Year’s Resolutions Stick

Maybe you plan to ring in 2021 with a new resolve to quit smoking, lose weight, exercise more, not sweat the small stuff. And maybe these resolutions sound familiar — maybe just like the ones you made a year ago! So how can you ensure that your determination to get healthier in 2021 sticks around past Valentine’s Day? By creating new habits.

Creating new habits takes time and energy. A new behavior won’t become automatic overnight, but you may enjoy some of its benefits fairly quickly. Also, as you start to take walks regularly or engage in stress-soothing practices frequently, you’ll find you won’t feel quite right if you stop. That’s a great incentive to continue. So, keep nudging yourself in the direction you’d like to go. And try the following seven tips to help you create long-lasting change.

1. Dream big. Audacious goals are compelling. Want to compete in a marathon or triathlon? Lose 50 pounds or just enough to fit into clothes you once loved? With perseverance, encouragement, and support, you can do it. An ambitious aim often inspires others around you. Many will cheer you on. Some will be happy to help in practical ways, such as by training with you or taking on tasks you normally handle in order to free up your time.

2. Break big dreams into small-enough steps. Now think tiny. Small steps move you forward to your ultimate goal. Look for surefire bets. Just getting to first base can build your confidence to tackle — and succeed at — more difficult tasks. Don’t disdain easy choices. If you start every plan with “Make list,” you’re guaranteed to check one box off quickly. That’s no joke: a study on loyalty programs that aim to motivate consumers found giving people two free punches on a frequent-buyer card encouraged repeat business. So break hard jobs down into smaller line items, and enjoy breezing through the easy tasks first.

3. Understand why you shouldn’t make a change. That’s right. Until you grasp why you’re sticking like a burr to old habits and routines, it may be hard to muster enough energy and will to take a hard left toward change. Unhealthy behaviors like overeating and smoking have immediate, pleasurable payoffs as well as costs. So, when you’re considering a change, take time to think it through. You boost your chance of success when the balance of pluses and minuses tips enough to make adopting a new behavior more attractive than standing in place. Engaging in enjoyable aspects of an unhealthy behavior, without the behavior itself, helps too. For example, if you enjoy taking a break while having a smoke, take the break and enjoy it, but find healthier ways to do so. Otherwise, you’re working against a headwind and are less likely to experience lasting success.
4. **Commit yourself.** Make yourself accountable through a written or verbal promise to people you don’t want to let down. That will encourage you to slog through tough spots. One intrepid soul created a Facebook page devoted to her goals for weight loss. You can make a less public promise to your partner or child, a teacher, doctor, boss, or friends. Want more support? Post your promise on Facebook, tweet it to your followers, or seek out folks with like-minded goals online.

5. **Give yourself a medal.** Don’t wait to call yourself a winner until you’ve pounded through the last mile of your big dream marathon or lost every unwanted ounce. Health changes are often incremental. Encourage yourself to keep at it by pausing to acknowledge success as you tick off small and big steps en route to a goal. Blast your favorite tune each time you reach 5,000 steps. Get a pat on the back from your coach or spouse. Ask family and friends to cheer you on. Look for an online support group.

6. **Learn from the past.** Any time you fail to make a change, consider it a step toward your goal. Why? Because each sincere attempt represents a lesson learned. When you hit a snag, take a moment to think about what did and didn’t work. Maybe you took on too big a challenge? If so, scale back to a less ambitious challenge, or break the big one into tinier steps. If nailing down 30 consecutive minutes to exercise never seems to work on busy days, break that down by aiming for three 10-minute walks — one before work, one during lunch, one after work — or a 20-minute walk at lunch plus a 10-minute mix of marching, stair climbing, and jumping rope or similar activities slipped into your TV schedule.

7. **Give thanks for what you do.** Forget perfection. Set your sights on finishing that marathon, not on running it. If you compete to complete, you’ll be a winner even if you wind up walking as much as you run. With exercise — and so many other goals we set — you’ll benefit even when doing less than you’d like to do. Any activity is always better than none. If your goal for Tuesday is a 30-minute workout at the gym, but you only squeeze in 10 minutes, feel grateful for that. It’s enough. Maybe tomorrow will be better.

*Source:* [https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/seven-steps-for-making-your-new-years-resolutions-stick](https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/seven-steps-for-making-your-new-years-resolutions-stick)