Did you make a New Year’s resolution? The beginning of a new year is the traditional time to make a grand resolve to do things in a certain way—to change a bad habit, to improve our health and relationships, or to advance our careers to new heights. “Time for a new beginning” is the message promoted by news media, your family and friends, your personal physician, and of course, your own internal voice telling you “it’s time to do something about…”

If you are like most of us, the majority of your resolutions are fated to go unfulfilled. Come February, the enthusiasm tends to fade. Studies indicate that less than 30 percent of all New Year’s resolutions achieve success. Researchers have noted that people who resolve to start or increase a behavior meet with greater success than if they resolve to stop or decrease a behavior or habit. A major contributing factor to failure is believed to be hastily conceived, last-minute goal declarations.

Why do people make promises to themselves they can’t keep? Most likely their intentions are good, their vision strong, but their goals may not be realistic. Without a doubt, the aim is positive. Sales of chocolate and alcohol do decline, replaced by healthier food and drink, even if temporarily. People do take a long, hard look at their spending habits as they sort through the bills coming in January’s mail and resolve to finally get around to doing a budget. Data show that memberships in health clubs and weight loss programs increase significantly. So, why do people abandon their resolutions?

One reason is that we become discouraged when results don’t come quickly enough, or when we find that we are not necessarily happier because of them. Behavioral change requires sustained effort and commitment and can be accompanied by physical discomfort or inconvenience. For example, reducing food, alcohol, or nicotine results in cravings. Forcing yourself to exercise is often difficult when you’re tired. It’s easy to procrastinate—you can rationalize not “getting to it” today because of busy work schedules or lack of time.

Reluctance to change is a defining human characteristic. Even when the desire to change is strong, it is easy to rationalize a reason to maintain the status quo. We use the excuse that this is not a good time of year, with the early darkness, time changes, the cold weather, and our numerous obligations. We think when spring comes we’ll really get into shape. Therefore, we realign the first goal, make another promise to ourselves, and feeling less guilty, put off change for another few months. When spring and warmer weather arrive, we have another temporary surge of motivation, only to abandon it within a few weeks.

Keeping Your Promise

Experts have shown that designing a detailed plan will dramatically increase the success rate for keeping your resolutions. The key factors to making successful resolutions are your confidence in making the behavior change, having commitment to your goals, and seeking help to achieve results. Most importantly, don’t bother setting goals that are unrealistic, even though they sound good or work well for other people. Set goals that fit into your lifestyle, that are important to you, and are attainable with effort and dedication.

Goals should be measurable and concrete, allowing for incremental steps and rewards. Keep your goals simple. Resolutions often fail because they are lengthy or complex. Research concludes that people who succeed in making lifestyle changes typically have exceptional support systems, the right mental attitude, and focus on improving or managing problems literally one day at a time. Reward yourself…behavior needs reinforcement so you can feel good about yourself. Don’t give up. Persistence pays off, even if it takes multiple starts and stops to achieve your goal.

Successful resolutions are a process, not a one-time effort. Developing a plan with coping strategies for dealing with problems or distractions has been shown to contribute to achieving your goal. Understand why you
set the goal. Maybe it is doctor’s orders, a serious threat to your physical or mental health, a high school reunion, or simply a planned trip to the beach. Track your progress. It is hard to be motivated when each individual action seems so small and change so slow. Tracking your successes, big and small, can spur you to new resolve.

Avoid triggers. A trigger is simply anything that causes or increases the likelihood of a behavior or habit to occur. If we know what that trigger is, we can create a plan to prevent derailment of our goals. Call a friend or join a support group specific to your interests and goals.

Set the tasks toward completing your goal as non-negotiable. One can almost always find an excuse. However, if you make a non-negotiable decision that’s based on a sound, logical reason rather than on how you feel at the moment, you will succeed. Give yourself a break and allow for imperfection. No one is exactly on target all the time and nobody’s perfect! Learn from your mistake and move on.

Finally, if you’re waiting for a more convenient time to begin making a change, it won’t happen. Do it now! Research shows that even the smallest changes can have significant results toward an improved lifestyle.

Successful Characteristics

People all over the world make New Year’s resolutions. Psychologists suggest that the beginning of the year lends itself to the ritual of introspection and reflection and promotes an increased desire to change and improve our lives. Yet, few weigh the benefits or consequences of these desires, or the actions and dedication required to achieve the expected outcome. Scientists have found that those who fulfill their resolutions share certain characteristics: They believe they can change; they do not indulge in excuse making; they avoid wishful thinking and concentrate on getting to the goal; and they understand the reasons why the resolution is important to them. Further, they have a clear and specific purpose; they write down what they want to achieve; and they take ownership of their goals. They are committed to and accountable for the results and the desired outcome. Most importantly, they understand that sharing their goals and seeking support will strengthen their determination and promote successful results.

A resolution is a promise. It is a promise that you make to yourself. A new year, full of new possibilities, new expectations, new hopes and new joys, seems like a good time to think about changing. Making resolutions based upon honesty and genuine value, pursued with thoughtful planning and deliberate action, also seems like a worthwhile way to begin your path toward improving your health and well being.

What are your resolutions, your intentions for your life this coming year? What do you intend to do to make it happen?

A desire without action then is just a wish.
Ayn Rand

References


Wellness Warriors Call to Action

The goal of the AANA Wellness Program is to promote improved fitness levels and healthy choices. If you are making changes in your life or your workplace environment and wish to share your stories and activities, contact us. Sharing your achievements provides encouragement and support for your colleagues.

**Wellness Warriors…..**

**Move It.** At least 30 minutes of activity most days of the week.

**Lose It.** Eat well-balanced meals. Reduce calories if you are overweight.

**Check It.** Get regular checkups.

**Know It.** Know your numbers, blood pressure and cholesterol. If high, get them treated.

**Quit It.** If you smoke, drink excessively, or misuse drugs, modify your behavior.

**Chill It.** Improve your mental and spiritual health, control your stress.

**Help It.** Volunteer. Reach out to help others in need.

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