

Tips for Keeping Those New Year's Resolutions

The new year is here, and perhaps you are already struggling with your New Year's resolutions. If so, you are not alone. About half of all Americans make resolutions, but research suggests only eight percent keep them. Mindy Boccio, MPH, has ideas on how you can better make resolutions — and keep them. As a senior consultant with Kaiser Permanente Northern California's Regional Health Education, Boccio trains physicians, nurses, and wellness coaches on how to help their patients make healthy changes in their lives. She offered suggestions based on research around behavior change.

Q. What advice do you have for people making resolutions?

A. I see 'resolutions' as simply the decision to make a change in your life. Three suggestions come to mind. First: Get clear on your 'why.' Ask yourself how this change will benefit your life and support your values. For example, the deeper reason for deciding to quit smoking may be that you want to be a healthy role model for your children. Understanding that can boost your motivation initially and help keep you on track when you hit the inevitable rough patch.

Second: Try to be specific about the behavior change you propose to make. We know from research that the more specific you are about the change, the better. If your resolution is to exercise more regularly, getting specific might be saying, 'I know I can fit in 15 minutes of walking three times a week.' It's helpful to start with something achievable so you don't feel overwhelmed. You can increase your goal later.

Third: Ask for help. Getting support from family and friends has been shown to help us make lasting change. It's also good to partner with someone who's making the same behavior change. That creates accountability, and the camaraderie helps too.

Q. Thoughts on logging your progress?

A. Research supports that tracking your progress helps you to achieve your goals. Even if things aren't going perfectly, tracking your progress can be viewed as helpful feedback to make course corrections instead of abandoning ship. Plus, when you're logging your progress daily, it keeps your goal front of mind. It doesn't matter how you track your progress. Some people keep it simple and mark the days they exercise on a calendar. Others like technology to track exactly how many steps they take each day. If you like using apps, some good health-related ones include KP's Every Body Walk app, My Fitness Pal, and Lose It!

Q. Any advice for when the going gets tough?

A. When you're faced with a dilemma around keeping a resolution, slowing down can help. Take pause and recognize that you may have more choices in the moment than you think. If your resolution is to cut back on sweets because you'd like to lose weight, and then someone offers you a piece of cake, your immediate thought may be 'I want that delicious cake!' You could eat the cake and have the immediate gratification. You could also step away for a few minutes to see if the craving for the cake dissipates. Or you could decide to have a small piece and do more walking that day to burn the additional calories. If you pause, consider your choices and call to mind your 'why' (the deeper reasons for making a change), you can then make a more deliberate decision. You'll feel positive about that, and you're more likely to repeat that mindful approach.



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