

A New Look at Health and Wellness Goals for the New Year



It isn't too late to set goals for the new year. Try these tips to help you have more success with your goals this year.

Each January, many of us sit down with the best intentions of

making changes in the New Year. Many of us want to create habits to improve our health and wellness. However, as January ends, often so does our motivation despite our best efforts. I, like many of you, am left wondering why.

How can we set goals that are more attainable? According to a review by Mann and Ridder (2013), goal setting is a process that includes setting an appropriate goal and determining a process to work toward the goal. Here is a summary of their findings on what makes goal setting more successful.

Why set goals?

Goal setting is the process of determining what we want to accomplish and how we will know when we have accomplished it. Having a vision or overall picture of what we want to accomplish provides motivation for achieving something that we find important.

How do I set an attainable goal?

1. **Simplify health goals.** Nutrition advice seems to be ever changing. Believe me, this can frustrate even nutrition professionals. However, setting goals to improve our health and wellness does not have to mean a complete overhaul of our eating or conforming to a certain eating plan. Most of us have a general sense of what types of foods are nutritious for us and that moving our body is healthy. Small, simple changes over time can really add up. Adding a fruit or vegetable to a meal, choosing a fruit instead of another type of dessert, taking the stairs to our office on the third floor, or taking a walk on our lunch break can make a difference in the long run. Or, setting a goal to listen to our body's hunger and fullness signals to determine what and how

much it needs may lead to naturally eating less.

2. **Make it positive!** Focus on adding something rather than taking it away. Eating is a way to nourish our body to provide it with the fuel and the nutrients it needs to keep our body healthy and functioning at its best. It may feel more nourishing and supportive of wellness to think about adding a fruit to lunch or a fresh, green salad to dinner, rather than thinking about cutting out foods we enjoy.
3. **Determine the difficulty level that works for you.** Recommendations for goal setting often include making them Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely (S.M.A.R.T.) goals. One of the key elements is setting realistic goals that you believe you will actually be able to achieve based on resources, time constraints, etc. However, others suggest going all out when goal setting, creating a goal that is more of an ideal vision of your life, no matter how unrealistic it may seem. Then, the goal can be broken down into smaller, manageable steps that are more realistic and attainable.
4. **Focus on the process, not the result.** Focusing solely on the end result can leave us disappointed if we encounter a setback or fall short of what we hope to accomplish. For example, if our goal is to cook dinner five nights per week and we eat out four times in one week, we can see ourselves as failing to meet our goal and get discouraged. However, if we focus on the process of meal planning and expanding our cooking skills, we would instead recognize the skills we've learned, identify the barriers that got in the way of cooking, and plan to address those barriers. Focusing on the process allows us to use challenges as a way to gather information to learn from, rather than seeing ourselves as failing.
5. **Get more bang for your buck.** Researchers note that people were more successful accomplishing goals that addressed more than one area of importance in their

lives. For example, if your goal is to be more physically active, but you also value spending time with your husband or wife, you could plan an evening walk with your spouse that addresses both priorities.

What's the process to work toward my goals?

1. **Create a plan and commit ahead of time.** Once your goal has been created, it can be helpful to make a plan to implement each component of it and to handle any unexpected hang-ups or stressors. It takes effort and mental energy to implement a new routine. It's natural to want to take the familiar route – go straight home after work and skip the gym or to pick up fast food on the way home rather than cooking. The stressors of life can use up the mental energy we need to make the more difficult choice of sticking with a change rather than going with the automatic, familiar choice that uses less energy. Therefore, the more we can plan ahead of time – pack our gym bag the night before or grocery shop and pre-chop vegetables over the weekend – the less brain power is needed to make the decision in the moment after a long day of work when our energy is low.
2. **Automate it.** Wouldn't it be nice if we set a goal and all of sudden we just do it without thinking about it? Well, as nice as that sounds, actually, as we engage in new behaviors repeatedly, we begin to associate certain cues with the behavior, which can help us accomplish our goals. For example, we might start to associate our morning car ride with drinking water. As we get into our car, we think about grabbing a bottle of water. As we do this more often, we become more efficient at working toward our goal and we don't have to put as much thought

into it.

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Reference:

Mann, T., de Ridder, D., Fujita, K. (2013). Self-regulation of health behavior: Social approaches to goal setting and goal striving. Health Psychology, 32(5), 487-498. <http://doi.org/10.1037/a0028533>