

Finding Motivation for Healthy Habits

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a bright yellow-green athletic tank top and a teal wristband, is crouching on a paved path. She is looking down at a young girl. The girl has brown hair in a ponytail, wearing a purple t-shirt and a bright pink headband. She is also crouching and looking up at the woman. They are on a grey asphalt path that curves into the distance. In the background, there is a grassy area and a small figure of another person further down the path. The overall tone is motivational and healthy.

FINDING MOTIVATION

FOR HEALTHY HABITS

LIVE WELL UTAH

Are you working on healthy habits for the new year? We've got some tips on how to find the motivation you need to establish those healthy habits and meet your goals.

What Motivates You?

There are basically two types of motivation: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*.

Extrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is driven by external rewards such as money, fame, grades and praise. This type of motivation arises from outside the individual, as opposed to intrinsic motivation, which originates inside the individual.

Extrinsic examples: working to receive a bonus, gaining a reward for an accomplishment, receiving recognition, changing habits based on how you think others may see your body or losing weight to fit into new clothes or look good for a beach vacation.

Intrinsic motivation is defined as performing an action or behavior because you enjoy the activity itself. Whereas acting on extrinsic motivation is done for the sake of some external outcome, the inspiration for acting on intrinsic motivation can be found in the action itself.

Intrinsic examples: losing weight because your body feels better, working because you enjoy making a difference, reading a book because you are curious about the subject, etc.

Intrinsic motivation is much stronger than extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation can empower individuals to reach their goals and can help sustain an active lifestyle.

The Power of Habit

"Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your HABITS,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny."

-Mahatma Ghandi

Habit, combined with internal/intrinsic motivation, is where an active lifestyle begins. Before a new habit of physical activity can be born, individuals must believe that being active is good for them, then they must think about the benefits and build their intrinsic motivation. Next, individuals can vocalize their thoughts and establish goals and guiding principles for their actions.

Then comes action. Until action occurs, the belief is only a wish. Motivation comes from looking at the things you want and realizing what it takes to get them.

Strategies for Success

Here are some strategies to help you stay motivated and improve your wellness:

1. Get support. Tell your family and friends you are trying to make changes, and ask them to encourage and support you. Invite them to participate in your healthy activities.
2. Celebrate your successes. Recognize the changes you have already made and be proud of the person you are

becoming.

3. Focus on the benefits. Make a list of the possible positive outcomes and review the benefits of living an active lifestyle.
4. Expect setbacks. Understand that there are times when you will falter, and this is normal. Don't expect perfection. Forgive yourself and move forward.
5. Be patient. Remember that change is hard and it takes time to form healthy habits.
6. Have fun! Do something you love. Add variety to your workout and your diet.
7. Search for inspiration. Notice others who have made changes and be inspired by their hard work and dedication. Realize that you can do it too!
8. Plan and prepare healthy meals and snacks ahead of time. Keep tempting foods out of the house/office.
9. Schedule a workout time. Have a set time to exercise.
10. Look for healthy options when eating out. Choose a meal that is nutritious with low calories.
11. Eat small meals/snacks every 2-3 hours to keep you from getting hungry and to maintain blood sugar levels.
12. Exchange processed foods for whole foods. Shop the perimeter of the grocery store.
13. Change your thinking. Think like an athlete.
14. Always have your workout gear ready.
15. Enjoy your favorite foods in moderation.
16. Log/track your food and exercise.

And when you feel like quitting, think about why you started!

This article was written by Cindy Nelson, Utah State University Extension assistant professor