

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

No, Don't Give Up On Those New Year's Resolutions Quite Yet

from the American Counseling Association

Admit it. You've already forgotten those New Year's resolutions you made just a few weeks ago and most likely you didn't succeed in accomplishing most of them (any of them?). But it isn't too late to give them a second chance and it is worth doing.

Serious New Year's resolutions are never easy to bring to fruition. The key to success is to approach the changes you'd like to make in ways that will help you succeed.

Start by being realistic. Expecting giant lifestyle changes to happen quickly or easily is asking for failure. Our bad habits usually developed in small increments over a long period of time. So, changing them will also take time and probably will happen in small steps, too. You're not going to lose those 35 pounds next week, but you might lose 4 or 5 pounds next month.

In some ways, changing habits or behaviors is similar to undertaking a home remodeling project. You need to start by accepting three basic realities:

- It's going to take longer than you hoped.
- It's going to be more difficult than you expected.
- It may even take more than one try to reach your goal.

Accepting these concepts can give you a realistic foundation from which to plan and take actions that will bring success.

A first step is to forget rigid time deadlines and instead set achievable mini-goals that will eventually lead to your final goal. You probably can't stop smoking tomorrow, but you can make an appointment to talk to your doctor or check out the local hospital's smoking cessation program.

For weight loss, it's easy to feel depressed and like a failure when you don't drop that five pounds in week one, or when you slip up and eat that big dessert. So instead, set smaller goals that are easier to achieve. Maybe it's just skipping that morning donut this week. Next week, perhaps it's taking a daily walk after dinner. Most important is not giving up. Yes, you will make mistakes. Yes, you might even fail one or more times. Studies report losing weight often takes multiple tries and quitting smoking as many as eight attempts.

It's important to accept that you're human and fallible, but also quite capable of giving it another go. Try again and you just might have one less resolution to make next New Year's.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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