

# Why **NOT** to make New Year's Resolutions (and what to do instead)

By Barika Butler, MD, MHCM

It is that time of year again. Gym memberships will be purchased, workout clothes are flying off the shelves. People are juicing and dieting. Another year resolved to save more than you spend, spending less time on your devices and more time "being present." The calendar has flipped to January and that means New Year's resolutions. Is this really the way to make the improvements



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that we desire and push ourselves to new heights?

Studies estimate that up to 80% of New Year's resolutions have failed by the second week in February. That's right. Not two months in to the New Year and for most, the new you has become the same old you. We are essentially setting ourselves up to fail. Why, then, do we do this to ourselves year after year? The simple answer is that we have been doing what we have always done. So how do we make ourselves more successful in the changes that we want to see in the upcoming year?

Do not make New Year's resolutions. Swap out your resolutions for goals. What is the difference? Resolutions are wishes, thoughts, and hopes. Goals are clear, specific, and realistically attainable.

## Set Meaningful Goals

To make your goals meaningful, they

must be well thought out and carefully planned with the beginning, middle, and end in mind. Goals should be very specific. Alter your general statements like "I am going to start exercising this year" to something like "I am going to walk, run, or do some form of cardio exercise for 30 minutes, 2-3 times per week." Once you have established your goal, carefully outline what it will take for you to realistically meet that goal. For example, it may require you to wake up an hour earlier every morning or prepare dinner ahead of time for those days when you will be focused on your goal. Rally the troops of supporters who will help to take some responsibility off your hands to allow you the time to work toward your goal. Engage your spouse, children, and friends to help you. Once you are regularly completing these goals, push yourself to set new ones to build upon them. For example, once you are regularly completing your target exercise goal, you might then set a new goal of adding some weight training to your regimen 1-2 times per week or to beat your previous running times. Be sure to make your goals measurable and specific (30 minutes, 2-3 times per week, on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays) so that you can track your progress and understand

where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Remember those sticker reward charts you used as a kid? Create a similar tracking system specific to your goal. Journal, check off your lists, make your progress visible.

## Celebrate your wins and evaluate your shortcomings

Now that you have set goals so specific that they allow you to track your progress, celebrate what you have accomplished. Pat yourself on the back, give yourself

healthy rewards, allow yourself to feel good about all of your hard work. When you have fallen short, go back and analyze what the shortcoming was and why it may have occurred. Because you have tracked so closely, you will be able to pinpoint what kept you from reaching your goal in a specified time period (for example, you

did not exercise 3 times last week because there was a looming work deadline, or your child had a project due that you helped with). Whatever it is, your close tracking allows you to understand why goals were not met and improve upon those things for the next time period.

## Enlist an accountability partner

An accountability partner is a person who helps you keep a commitment. They

will help you design the steps and process for reaching your goals and ensure that you are successful. There is an important distinction between an accountability partner and a friend or a mentor. First, selecting the right fit for an accountability partner is key. This relationship is less about personality or shared interests and more about having someone who understands your goals and knows how to get you to success. Second, be honest and transparent with your partner. Not doing so defeats the purpose of having them around. Finally, allow a "no judgment zone" between the two of you where criticism is constructive and results driven while successes are celebrated but not based in fantasy.

The New Year is an opportunity for you to grow in ways you have always wanted, to push yourself to new heights and to bring those you love along with you. Are you ready to dump those resolutions and set some serious goals? How are you going to change your approach to self-improvement in 2019?

*Isn't it nice to think that tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet?"*  
- L.M. Montgomery

