

# Make (And Don't Break) Your Resolutions This Year. Here's How.

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Many of us make New Year's resolutions that underscore our eternally-optimistic efforts to improve ourselves.

Whether it's losing 20 pounds, quitting smoking, exercising more, or scoring that promotion at work, there is something about the change of the calendar that inspires us to make promises to ourselves.

"People like to set goals for themselves and they use the new year as a time to examine themselves and think about what they want to change," explains [Dr. Bonnie Levin](#), a neuropsychologist with the University of Miami Health System. "The date is a way to get organized and to start over."

Most of our New Year's resolutions, she adds, tend to center around our health, though plenty of people also take stock of their work life. Others might strike a more playful note by vowing to pick up a hobby or embark on a bucket-list trip.

"It's not always a formal exercise," Dr. Levin says. "Some frame it not as a resolution but something along the lines that it's a goal they want to accomplish in the coming year."

Unfortunately, this annual ritual doesn't have a good success rate. According to a 2002 study in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, only 46 percent of us were still sticking to those resolutions six months later. Other estimates are even more dismal — one puts the figure of successful resolution-keeping at 9.2 percent and another says 80 percent give up on their good intentions by February.

## **But there are ways to keep those promises.**

Here are Dr. Levin's suggestions to help you stick to your dreams of being a slimmer, healthier, happier, saner, smarter, more financially savvy you:

- Start small. "It doesn't always have to be grand," Dr. Levin says. "You're more likely to achieve what you want when it's something that can be accomplished. Most people fail because they fail to set realistic goals." It also helps, she adds, to break up a goal into smaller steps, so the final goal itself — saving for a down payment, say, or running a half-marathon — feels more attainable.
- Know yourself. What works for one person might not work for another. For example, some people who want to lose weight do well by joining a group and participating in a particular diet activity. Others do best solo. "One size fits all doesn't work. Everyone has different styles," Dr. Levin says.

- Be patient. “Most behaviors become established only after much effort and time,” she says. “You’re not going to change overnight. I always tell people: patience, persistence and focus.”
- Reward yourself. Celebrate hitting the small milestones — but with healthy behavior, not by reverting back to bad habits.
- Forget punishment and recriminations when you fall off the wagon. “I don’t think punishment and beating yourself up accomplishes much of anything except to make you feel worse about yourself,” says Dr. Levin. Instead take these steps: Acknowledge that you deviated from your goal. Analyze what triggered the cave-in. Figure out how to remove the temptation or obstacle. Focus on the best way to get back on track.
- Utilize support teams. Get a gym or diet buddy who will hold your hand, cheer you on and make you accountable. Don’t hesitate to ask for help. You’d be surprised how many people share a common goal.

And if you’re not ready to make any resolutions by January 1, don’t sweat it. “There’s nothing that says you have to do it for New Year’s,” Dr. Levin adds. “Resolutions are really about being responsible for yourself, about trying harder, and you can start that at any time of the year.”



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