

## Healthy Resolutions: Tips for Success

Have you ever made a New Year's resolution thinking that this would be the year it would stick, then within a few days, weeks or months, your motivation has diminished and the goals set are now a thing of the past?



If so, you are definitely not alone! In a typical year, only about 7-8% of people that set a New Year's resolution actually keep it for the entire year.

So, what is the secret to success? According to many experts, repetition isn't what makes habits stick; emotions do. Research suggests it's a positive emotional response that actually rewires your brain, leading you to want to continue to stick with a new habit again and again. That's why it is recommended that to increase your chance of success, all behavior change should start with the factors that you want to change rather than those you think you should change. **Rather than force yourself into something you're not excited about, you should make it really easy and then find where it fits naturally into your life.**

It is also important to remember that real change takes work. You are working to change habits that have often been in place for months, years, sometimes even an entire lifetime! It takes about three months for a change to become routine. After six months, about 40 percent of people will stick to their resolutions. If you make it to then, you're likely to maintain your resolution for life — but you need an actionable plan to get there.

Here's how experts say you can make your resolution stick through 2022 and beyond.

## Be Realistic and Plan Ahead

For a resolution to be successful, it is important to take the time to really think about what you want to change and how you are going to go about doing so. Set goals that are realistic and attainable. Don't set yourself up for failure by expecting too much from yourself. This often leads to disappointment and frustration. Start small and as you reach those milestones, you can always strive for more if you are motivated and it feels right!

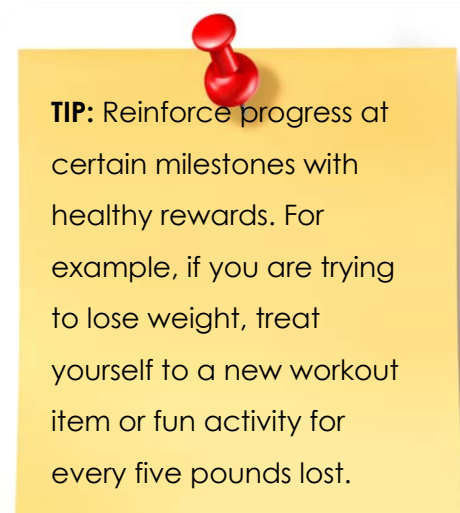


## Use Your Brain's Ancient Reward System

A resolution is a lot more than just getting rid of a bad habit. To undo a bad habit, you'll need to replace it with a good one.

Habits are usually a good thing. Without them, you wouldn't be able to drive a car — a task that requires you to do many things at once without thinking. A habit forms when a certain behavior is consistently rewarded. The first time you turned the steering wheel of a car and it went the direction you wanted, it triggered your brain's reward system. Over time, driving became habitual.

But the same system also rewards negative habits, such as feeling less tense after a cigarette. Your resolution should focus on using this same reward system to form the new habit by coming up with a new behavior that will also be rewarded. Over time, you will replace the old, bad habit with a new, positive one. For example, if your resolution is to stop smoking, replace your cravings with a different fix, like chewing gum, or exercising.



## Eliminate Triggers from Your Environment

When it comes to making successful resolutions, our environment plays a major role. Cues that can trigger your bad habit should be removed from your home.

Certain rituals can also trigger negative habits — like snacking while watching television in the evening, or looking at social media before bed. You'll need to replace those rituals with positive ones such as enjoying a warm cup of your favorite nighttime tea instead of reaching for those chips or ice cream while you watch your favorite show in the evening.

If your goal is to quit smoking, it is important to identify the times, places and situations where you are likely to smoke, and then come up with a plan ahead of time to address it. It is also important to eliminate ash trays from your home, which can trigger cravings and if you typically smoke after dinner, plan to go for an evening walk with a supportive friend or family member instead.



## Rearrange Your Environment

It is also critical to rearrange your environment to reinforce the good habit you're trying to create. If you are wanting to exercise more, pack your gym bag the night before and put it in front of your door to remind yourself to go to the gym before work in the morning. If you are wanting to reduce screen time before bed, find a good book and keep it on your nightstand. If you are wanting to adopt a healthier diet, make sure you have plenty of healthy snacks and meals on hand so you are less likely to revert back to grabbing a familiar, unhealthy item instead.

By strategically placing items that enforce the new habit you are working to adopt rather than derail them, you are more likely to be successful in sustaining your new habits!

## Get Social Support

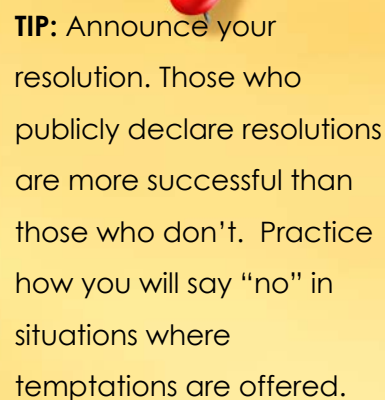
Family, friends, and coworkers can be major triggers for bad habits. If there are people in your life who share your bad habit, see if they are willing to make the resolution with you. Sometimes it is easier to change together with your partner, family, coworker or friend. If you are wanting to become more active and your coworkers share that goal, consider joining an upcoming WellPATH Challenge together!

It is also important to remember, however, that not everyone is willing to change. As we stated earlier, the key to success is that you are the one that wants the change, not that you are doing it because you feel pressured to do so. Be mindful of that and if those close to you do not share the same goals for themselves, it is ok to still ask them to be supportive of you and the changes you are looking to make.

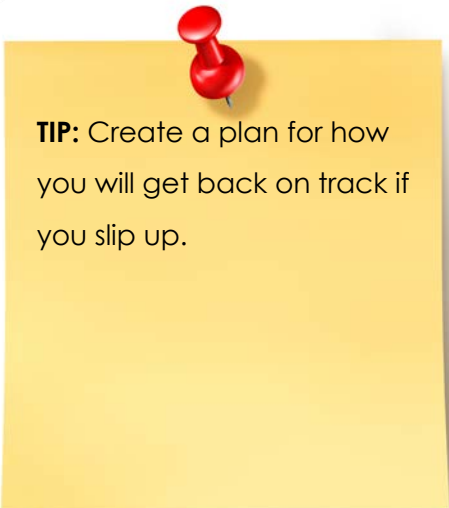
## Avoid Self Blame if you Slip Up

Resolutions can be difficult to stick with at first, and there's a chance you will slip up along the way. Mess-ups are normal and you should allow them to strengthen, rather than hinder, your resolve.

If you do mess up, avoid self-blame and get right back on track. Failure simply means you are trying.



**TIP:** Announce your resolution. Those who publicly declare resolutions are more successful than those who don't. Practice how you will say "no" in situations where temptations are offered.



**TIP:** Create a plan for how you will get back on track if you slip up.



The start of a new year can be a great time to set goals and make the changes that you are ready to make. But to be successful, it is important to take the time to plan and set realistic expectations for yourself. It is ok to start small, it is ok to have a set-back, and it is ok to modify your resolutions where needed.

As always, WellPATH is here to help you along the way. Keep an eye out for information on group fitness classes, wellness screenings, challenges, monthly spotlights, and more to help you achieve your health and wellness goals throughout 2022 and beyond!

***Happy New Year!***