

Motivation for Healthy Change Tools & Incentives to Keep You Going

No matter what healthy goal we may be trying to achieve, anticipating how we will feel when we have to put the plan into action can be a difficult obstacle to overcome. We are often “gung ho” when we decide to make a change, but then reality hits—the alarm goes off, and we actually have to put on our tennis shoes and go out for a run. Or the party begins and we have to decide to only eat the one piece of cake we planned instead of sampling the whole buffet. Or our friends are smoking at the gathering although we’re trying to quit. Whatever the goal, it is so much easier to give into temptation and pull the proverbial covers back over our heads than to follow through.



“It’s the story of the boy who goes to bed at night resolving to get up before dawn and run two miles in the cold. When the alarm rings, it is very hard for him to get out of his warm bed. It’s almost as though the boy who made the promise is not the same boy who has to wake up in the morning.”¹

“When we make a resolution, we have a difficult time anticipating how we’ll feel or behave in the moment that we must put it into action. ...The run seems like a better idea at 5 p.m. than at 5 a.m., [just like] it sounds quite reasonable to say you’re going to save more money until you’re standing in front of the Best Sweater Ever at Neiman Marcus.”¹

– Meir Statman, Behavioral Economist, Santa Clara University¹

Making changes can be difficult, but it is not impossible.² We just need to tap into some ways to stay motivated. This issue of *HealthHints* will go beyond making plans (see the previous issue of *HealthHints* at <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2007jan/healthyresolutions.pdf> for goal setting and planning) and give ideas for keeping us going on our worst days.

Ten Tips to Keep You Motivated Finding the tools that work for you

1. **Train your senses for success.** In the last issue of *HealthHints*, we talked about the importance of commitment and confidence in reaching a goal. If we can’t see

ourselves succeeding, then it’s hard to pursue the goal. When you feel like giving in, stop and close your eyes for a few minutes; visualize success. Tell yourself you can do it. Whether it’s walking an entire golf course or avoiding the office party buffet table of lavish desserts, you can do it. Stop and envision success. Envision taking one cookie at the table instead of sampling all the treats; envision the benefits of exercise, such as feeling your best and being able to play with your kids or grandkids; envision yourself as a non-smoker who will live to see his/her grandchildren and their children.^{3,4} Be sure to pay attention to your thinking throughout the day. Try to counter ideas like “I’ll never succeed”; instead think “Today, I made some progress.”⁵ Even if it is small, it is progress.

2. Keep it visible. If you can keep your goal in front of you – visibly – it can serve as a reminder and an encouragement to keep on going. Keep your goal and plan for attaining it on a calendar that you see daily. Write a “why” list, telling why you want to accomplish this goal and all the benefits of accomplishing it⁵ (e.g., save money not buying cigarettes, feel more energetic, sleep better, lose weight, etc.). Keep this list in your purse, wallet, on your bathroom mirror, on your refrigerator, by the TV, or in your car – wherever you can see it or refer to it when you feel like giving in. Keep pictures or other visible cues in these locations – items such as pictures of children or grandchildren who you want to see grow up. These cues will be reminders to keep trying to quit tobacco or to keep exercising so you can enjoy playing with them.



3. Choose the same time. Many successful exercisers find that success because they do it at the same time every day, particularly early in the morning.⁶ If your goal is to exercise more, try getting up at the same time every morning and getting it done. If you are not a morning person, pick another time and try exercising at that same time every day. Schedule it on your calendar, and don't let other things push it down on your list. Treat it like any other binding meeting or event you have scheduled. Try this tool for other goals as well. For

instance, choose the same time for a healthy snack each day. Knowing you will have the snack later may keep you from overeating now.

4. Set realistic markers. Set markers to assess your progress once a week or every two weeks.⁷ It's easier to stay motivated from week to week rather than looking far off at reaching a goal 3–6 months from now. If your goal is to lose weight, set a healthy goal like losing 1–2 pounds a week, but don't get on the scale every day – that will only lead to frustration. Evaluate your progress at the end of the week. If your goals are to exercise more or smoke less, you can set weekly goals for these as well. Evaluate how you've done at the end of the week.

Don't be afraid to make a long-term goal. Just be sure to plan it out into small, realistic, achievable steps. When making your plans, start with the things that are easiest to accomplish, and then move on to the more difficult steps.⁸ “If you can do just a little bit to get going, soon you'll feel the positive effects of the change.... And that little bit of change can lead to long-term healthy habits that last....”⁵

5. Track your progress. For some people, keeping a daily record of their progress keeps them motivated and accountable for their actions. You can keep a log/journal of your food intake or exercise. There are free sites to do this for exercise and food records, such as <http://fitday.com/>. Because “tracking makes you more accountable for your actions..., you're more likely to follow through.”⁶

6. Get support. Did you know that the more monitoring you do and feedback you get, the better you will do?⁹ Accountability that comes from tracking your progress and evaluating it on a

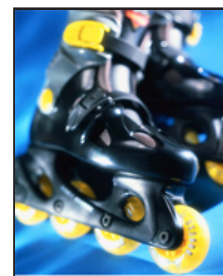
weekly basis is great, but many of us need more than ourselves to keep us accountable for our actions. Form a support system of family and friends who can cheer you on and challenge you to stick to your goals.⁵ Surround yourself with people and situations that encourage good habits. Join a support group; get an exercise partner, and/or find a friend who has the same goal so you can support each other.⁵

7. Make it socially binding. Another way to build in accountability is to make it socially binding. Tell a friend or



family member your plans, and create a consequence for yourself (preferably something more distasteful than fulfilling the actual goal) if you fall short. Promising your spouse you'll wash and wax the car or dust and vacuum the house if you smoke a cigarette over the next week gives you a good reason to follow through. “If your commitment has an enforcement mechanism built in, it can help keep you accountable on those tough goals.”¹

8. Make it fun/avoid monotony. If you aren't having any fun or enjoying what you're doing,



you're probably not going to continue to do it. Break up the monotony by planning new ways to meet your challenge.

As the saying goes “variety is the spice of life,” so keep things spicy. Here are a few ideas that may help:

- Make a plan that involves one small change per week. For example, switch from whole to 2% milk; switch from white to whole wheat bread, or add 1 serving of fruits or vegetables to your diet each week until you reach at least 5 a day¹⁰ (see the food guide pyramid at <http://www.mypyramid.gov/> for recommendations). Designate two “fish days” per week, such as having a tuna sandwich at lunch one day and broiled salmon or baked tilapia one evening.⁶

- Try a new healthy recipe or cooking technique once a week.¹¹ Involve your children, and make it a family learning experience and quality time event. (See the handout *Making Healthy Goals a Family*



Affair at <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2007feb/healthygoals.pdf> for some more ideas on incorporating your healthy goals with your family life.)

- Try a different form of exercise every month. Promise yourself to try to get exercise through ice skating, boxing, running, dancing, or playing a sport every month or over a specific period of time. The variety should definitely relieve monotony/boredom, and hopefully you’ll have some fun in the process – maybe even learn a new thing or two.¹¹

9. Reward yourself. Reward yourself when your immediate goals are met.² Your reward can be lavish or small – whatever works for you. You may reward yourself with a new purchase, a night out with friends or family, or simply taking a bubble bath. Just remember not to sabotage your goal with your reward. If you are trying to eat better or lose weight, don’t reward yourself with a candy bar. If you

are trying to reward your exercise progress, don’t reward yourself with a week off from exercise activity. Make your rewards fun but not counter-productive.

10. Be flexible – have a contingency plan.^{5, 13} Be prepared to forgive yourself² and move forward when you slip-up. Let’s face it – resolutions can be hard to keep. It’s okay if you make a mistake – just don’t make it the end. Plan ahead for what you will do if you slip-up (or if you’re thinking about giving up or giving in to a temptation). Look at a slip-up as an opportunity to learn, and make some plans for what might work better. Don’t quit. Pick up where you left off, and keep trying. The section below on *Setbacks* has more ideas.



Setbacks When being prepared counts most

One of the most challenging things we face when trying to reach any goal is when we slip-up and do the opposite. We have that cigarette, skip the run, eat the chocolate cake, down the caffeine. Whatever the slip-up may be, we have to change our thinking and realize it is just that – a slip-up. It’s not a failure! Just because you had one cigarette does not mean you need to quit trying. Quitting tobacco is one of the hardest resolutions you will make! Don’t give up on your goals the minute you make a mistake. Forgive yourself; be flexible, and have a plan for those days when you don’t feel like following through.

Ideas for Rewarding Yourself

Take credit for your successes – yes, even for small steps or challenges overcome! Here are a few ways you could reward yourself:

- Buy something new for your workout – clothes, shoes, pedometer, heart rate monitor, exercise log, exercise equipment.
- Buy yourself a new cookbook with healthy recipes, new recipe cards, or a journal for your dietary log – or just for your thoughts along the way to success.
- Make plans with friends to see a movie or go hiking.
- Checkout or buy a book that you’ve been wanting to read.
- Go on a weekend getaway.
- Plan a (healthy) dinner at your favorite restaurant.
- Get tickets to the theater or an athletic event you enjoy.
- Enroll in a class, such as ballroom dancing, healthy cooking, or pottery making (call your local college, YMCA, or community center for availability).¹²

We all stumble when trying to reach our goals. The key is to have a back-up plan... a plan for what to do when we slip-up or feel like giving up.

Here are some ideas:

When I feel like smoking or using tobacco, instead I will:

- call a friend,⁵
- meet a family member somewhere,
- get active (go for a walk, shoot some hoops, go swimming, bowling, or golfing),⁵
- work in my garden,
- start a garden,
- do a craft project,
- sit down and figure out how much money I can save by not buying tobacco, or
- go to a non-smoking shop or mall.



When I feel like not exercising, I will:

- do half of my planned activity (half a run, ½ mile walk, 15 minutes of activity instead of 30),
- change my activity to reduce boredom¹⁴ (bicycle or swim instead of walk, meet a friend for tennis instead of doing a solitary activity, go shoot 75 baskets before retiring to the couch), or
- do indoor activities when it is too cold or too hot (walk on a treadmill, use a step, jump rope, lift dumbbells or canned goods if I don't have weights).¹⁴

Break the Barriers – Get Active

Need some ideas for dealing with your barriers to getting active? Take a look at NIDDK's "Tips to Get You Active" at <http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/tips.htm>.

When I feel like giving into my food cravings, I will:

- call a friend (to circumvent stress, rather than opening a bag of chips);¹⁵
- meet a family member somewhere;
- go for a walk, shoot some hoops, or be otherwise physically active;
- not bake cookies when I'm alone (give yourself some accountability – choose to indulge in a "safe setting" where others keep you accountable and you won't be as likely to eat the whole batch);¹⁵
- allow myself a planned piece of birthday cake at the party where others keep me accountable (never disallow any particular food, like saying "I will never eat chocolate"; just plan small amounts – like knowing you will have one dessert at a party);¹⁵
- make myself wait 15 minutes before I take a second serving (it usually takes that long to feel full; give your body a chance – set your timer or look at your watch); or
- ask for a box at the restaurant when I get my meal, and put half the serving into the box for lunch tomorrow¹⁵ (before I begin to eat what's on my plate).

These are just a few ideas for some of the more common healthy goals people set. Think through the barriers you typically face, and make a back-up plan. Look at the list of reasons *why* you wanted to make this change in the first place (make a list if you haven't already). What are the benefits? Keep this list visible so you can stay positive and motivated toward your goal. And, when you do slip-up, don't look at it as failure and give up. Look at it as an opportunity to learn, make some changes, and adjust your plan. Then, pick up right where you left off and keep moving forward. Remember, take small steps and keep going.

Don't worry if you don't accomplish a goal in the timeframe you set. Just re-evaluate and continue to work toward accomplishing it on a new timeline⁸... and don't forget to celebrate and reward yourself along the way. "



To view the references used in this newsletter, go to: <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/healthhints/2007feb/ref.php>

Making Healthy Goals a Family Affair Building up Your Family for Better Health

Let's face it. Life can be hectic. Busyness is the climate of our culture. It doesn't take us long to see a laundry list of why our healthy goals look impossible... *drop the kids at school, go to work, eat donuts and coffee, skip lunch, go to a meeting, pick up a few groceries, take kids to scouts, grab a pizza and a bottle of soda for dinner, pick up kids from sports practice, do laundry, clean house, prepare for a new day - phew!*

"Take a look at your kids. Would you recognize them in a lineup? If life is so chaotic you're rarely together, that needs to change."¹

Many of the activities our families are involved in are wonderful experiences, but our schedules can also be barriers to getting healthy. So, instead of looking at these activities as barriers, why not make them opportunities for healthy change and modeling healthy behavior for the whole family. Don't let your family *be* your setback. Create opportunities for yourself and your family to be

healthier. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Plan regular family fun, such as weekend outings or fun family vacations. Allow the family to vote on the options, and majority rules. That means you don't always get what you want, but sometimes you do—a good life lesson.¹
- Take a family hike every month.²
- Lead your child's scout troop.
- Create and maintain a family garden.²
- Plan a Spring camping trip.²
- Get a group of friends together, and take a weekly class at the YMCA,² or take community education fitness or nutrition classes.
- Coach your child's sports team,² and exercise with them.
- Get exercise when watching your kids' games by walking around the field.
- Sign up and train as a family for a fun run, bicycling, or walking event.
- Schedule a family meal time. Be realistic, but get everyone together several nights a week¹ (yes, put it on the calendar if you need to). A study published in the *Archives of*

Set a date with your family

Set a date with your family and create some of your own healthy ideas. To get the whole family involved, use the YMCA's Fun Brainstorm Worksheet found at http://www.ymca.net/downloads/061212_ymcanet_resolution_worksheet.pdf.

Family Medicine showed that "kids eating with their parents were eating less fast food, less soda, and consuming more fruits and vegetables.... Those kids, therefore, had a lower intake of saturated fats and carbohydrates that raise blood sugar, linked with diabetes and hardening of the arteries..."³

- Get the family involved in community volunteer work,¹ like community clean-up events or preparing and serving healthy food at a community or church event.

Remember to take small steps. Don't overwhelm yourself or your kids with too many goals. Don't make your schedule busier—just make it healthier. Start small; get reacquainted with your kids, and make times together fun for the whole family.¹

References:

1. Davis, JL (2005). Make 2005 new year's resolutions a reality. Retrieved January 5, 2007. From <http://www.webmd.com/content/article/97/103973.htm>.
2. YMCA (2007). Building family new year's resolutions: fun brainstorm worksheet. Retrieved January 5, 2005. From http://www.ymca.net/downloads/061212_ymcanet_resolution_worksheet.pdf.
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