

Small Habits, Big Results: Making New Year's Resolutions That Stick



Every year in January, millions of people promise themselves big changes and by February most of those promises have quietly fizzled. The problem usually isn't one of motivation, it's strategy. If you want resolutions that last, you need to create a plan based on the science of how to make lasting changes. Plans based on small, repeatable actions, clear and achievable goals and realistic solutions for setbacks.

Creating new habits takes time and energy, but there are ways to ensure long-lasting change. So why do New Year's resolutions tend to fall apart so easily?

Here are 7 ways to create New Year's resolutions that stick:

Start Small

James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*, recommends starting small when building new habits. He suggests you start with two minutes of your desired behavior. The goal is to make the new behavior so easy in the beginning that it's impossible not to do it.

Behavioral change starts with micro-steps. Break big resolutions into smaller components. Instead of saying "I'll relax for twenty minutes", say "I'll sit down for one minute after brushing my teeth."

In the beginning, go for the surefire bets. This will give you confidence and create momentum to succeed at implementing even bigger changes.

Pick the Right Goals

Vague or unrealistic goals won't go far in terms of implementing change. To increase your chances of success, create goals that follow the SMART strategy – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-sensitive. Frame resolutions as something

you will *do* rather than something to *avoid*. Be specific. Say “I’ll walk ten minutes after lunch on Wednesday” rather than use vague ambitions.

Break down the steps you need to take to be successful. This might mean opening another bank account or choosing another route to work to avoid stopping in at the coffee shop. Determine the right steps needed to get the job done.

Go Easy on Yourself

Don’t let one failure derail your progress. Negative self-talk makes it harder to achieve your goals. Embrace the “never miss twice” rule suggested by James Clear. If you miss one day of your new habit, don’t let it become a reason to quit. Get back on track as soon as possible and don’t beat yourself up.

You can even pre-write a “lapse” plan and outline what to do if you miss a week (i.e. scale back to a one-minute habit and restart immediately).

Revisit Your Commitment to Old Habits

Take time to understand why you’re sticking to old habits. Unhealthy behaviors have immediate payoffs as well as costs. Your chances of success are higher when the pluses and minuses of adopting a new behavior are more attractive than the status quo.

On the plus side, one of the best ways to establish new habits is by attaching them to existing ones. If you already drink coffee every morning, then take your vitamins right after your coffee. If you want to exercise more, make it easy on yourself and pack your gym clothes the night before.

Celebrate Your Wins

Tracking makes your progress visible and reinforces your commitment to the goal. Use whatever works for you – a journal, an app – or even a simple checklist. Blast your favorite tune each time you reach a desired number of steps.

Humans are social creatures, and social support plays a key role in habit formation. Ask your family and friends to cheer you on or get encouragement from an online support group. Having someone nearby to share the journey makes the end goal more fun and increases accountability.

Have Fun

Research shows that we’re more likely to stick with something if we enjoy it. Find a way to make an activity fun. If exercise feels like a chore, pair it with something you enjoy doing. For example, watch your favorite TV show while exercising. This strategy called “temptation bundling” turns a tedious task into a more enjoyable experience - making it increasingly likely you will stick with it.

Take Time to Reflect

Before deciding to drop a habit, take the time to learn all the things you do around the habit. What do you do before and after engaging in the activity? For example, what leads you to pick up a cigarette? If you understand setting and context, you might be able to figure out a way to stop or change the habit.

Be mindful and stay focused in the present. Being more aware of your actions makes it easier to break habit loops.

Resolutions don't fail because we lack willpower - they fail because we ask too much of ourselves all at once. Understanding the science behind habit formation and applying strategies from psychology can increase your chances of success.

Start small, establish meaningful goals, track your progress and be gentle on yourself during the journey. The path to change isn't often linear but a series of twists and turns. With patience and the right strategy, you'll be able to transform New Year's resolutions into permanent habits that will last long after the January fanfare fades.