

BE WELL

Start 2022 with Positive Habits and Resolutions that are Easy to Implement

As the temporal milestone of a New Year begins, many of us set goals to create new habits through the implementation of Resolutions. According to research, 44% of Americans create New Year's resolutions or positive habits/goals, but by February 80% have failed to stick with them.¹ Now, in a more skeptical country, such as Sweden, only 12-18% of the population makes resolutions. What enables people to stick to their new goals and not fizzle out in a month? I believe it is two-fold: (1) determine a habit you want to change; and (2) rephrase the resolution or goal as a positive.

What are habits? A habit is a routine of behavior that is repeated regularly and tends to occur subconsciously or involuntarily.² A habit must be done often and is built into your daily routine without much effort. A habit is something we do out of convenience. More than 40% of the actions people perform each day, are not the result of actual decisions, but habits. A habit is different from an addiction, which is some-

thing that is done over and over again, despite causing harm to our lives. Our brains actually cling to habits because they create neurological cravings where a certain behavior is rewarded by the release of "pleasure" chemicals in the brain.

13 Simple Ways to Cultivate Better Daily Habits:

- 1. Think Small – Really Small**
-- Create an atomic habit, or a really small habit. Thinking small is easier because once you get started, you can build. For example, don't promise yourself you are going to read more, instead commit to reading one page per day.
- 2. Create a Physical Reminder**
-- A physical totem can make the habit or standard you're trying to hold yourself to into something more than an idea. (Examples: AA chips, post-it note on your mirror, or calendar notification).
- 3. Lay out your supplies**
-- You are less likely to take the easy way out if it's embarrassingly simple to do the thing you want to do. (Examples: journal, running clothes, healthy foods).
- 4. Piggyback New Habits on Old Habits**
-- Use an existing habit and add something to it, like walking and picking up garbage. Instead of walking dog, run with your dog.
- 5. Surround Yourself with Good People**
-- We are the average of the five people we spend the most time with.
- 6. Commit to a Challenge**
-- It is easier to hand yourself over to a scripted practice when you just need to show up. Handing the wheel over to someone else is a way to narrow our focus and put everything into the commitment.
- 7. Make it Interesting**
-- Find a way to stay motivated. I use the Insight Timer to track my meditations, which hold me accountable, but it also has a supportive community.
- 8. It is About the Ritual**
-- Create the practice and then just repeat it in the exact same way.
- 9. It Does Not Have to be an Everyday Thing**
-- What matters is the results average out.

10. Focus on Yourself

-- If you wish to improve, be content to be seen as ignorant or clueless about some things, like the news and avoid comparison to others.

11. Make it About Your Identity

-- I am a writer, I am a meditator, I am healthy, etc.

12. Keep it Simple

-- Little things make a difference.

13. Pick Yourself Up When You Fall

-- Don't quit because you aren't perfect.

One of the most effective ways to create a habit, resolution or goal that will stick is to change it from being an "Avoidance Goal" to an "Approach Goal." Thus, you simply frame it as a positive thing that you would like to commit to doing RATHER than something that you would like to stop. So think: "I will start to do _____" NOT: "I will quit or avoid _____." Why does this positive reframing work? Because, it is hard, if not nearly impossible, to erase a negative habit or behavior. It is much easier to just replace this negative habit or behavior with something else. For example: (1) if you want to eat less sweets/sugar, commit to eating more fruits and vegetables each day; (2) If you want to drink less alcohol, commit to drinking more water and other non-alcoholic beverages each day; (3) if you want to watch less television, commit to reading more.

I do want to issue a **Pandemic Disclaimer** to implementing new habits, goals and resolutions in 2022 because we are really depleted, stressed, and may not have the energy and cognitive resources to tackle significant change. Pandemic Disclaimer:

- Avoid pushing yourself too hard to make too many changes.
- Be realistic, kind and compassionate with yourself.
- Join me in my resolution – "I will start to be gentle with myself."

¹ "A large-scale experiment on New Year's resolutions: Approach-oriented goals are more successful than avoidance-oriented goals," PLOS ONE Journal, published December 9, 2020 (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234097>)

² The Power of Habit, by Charles Duhigg (January 7, 2014).



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