

January: New Beginnings

Keeping Your New Year's Resolutions

Only five days into January, and already you've broken your New Year's resolution to (pick one) stick to a weight-loss diet; exercise more; eat better in general. And while you're not tearing your hair out over your failed attempt, that little voice inside your head is telling you, quietly but insistently, that you're inadequate or that you lack willpower—each subtle wave of accusations eroding your self-esteem. Take heart. New Year's resolutions are typically made three years in a row before they "stick." Moreover, people who take action and fail within a month are twice as likely to succeed over the next six months as people who don't take any action at all; failure, in fact, is usually part of the equation for success. Finally, it's willpower that, by itself, is inadequate—not people who wish to change.

These are the findings of James Prochaska, PhD, a URI psychologist who has specialized in studying how people alter their behavior. His approach has been used successfully by such organizations as the National Cancer Institute to help people stop smoking, the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism to help people with alcoholism stop drinking, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to curb behavior that leads to infection with the virus that causes AIDS. New Year's is "an excellent time for change," says Prochaska, coauthor of *Changing for Good*. It "represents a new beginning" and brings with it a sense of "getting down to work" after the holidays. The problem, he explains, is that people equate change with action. Yet action, he believes, is only one stage in the process of change. In other words, there's no such thing as making changes cold turkey, even when people think that's how they've accomplished something. It's the same with, say, a weight-loss diet. Have you thought hard about what foods you might be willing to give up for a while? What foods to eat less of? Whether, if you eat out a lot, you're willing to stop looking at every restaurant lunch or dinner as a time to indulge yourself? How you're going to cope with the urge to overeat at moments of emotional distress, even distress that includes nighttime boredom? Have you tried any particular steps to see if you can live with them?

Have a Plan

The particular problem that often occurs at New Year's, Prochaska comments, has to do with the common social pressure to "do something." That makes sense because doing something, or acting, is the only stage of change that other people can see. The rest is much more internal. Bowing to that pressure, people feel "more of a 'should' rather than an 'I'm ready.'" As a result, Prochaska says, they end up unprepared without a plan for action. "It's hard enough to accomplish something even when you have a good plan," he says. "Without a plan, forget it."

Think It Through

Even before you start planning, Prochaska says, have you thoroughly contemplated the ramifications of the change? That is, have you carefully considered the difference between "wanting" something and "being prepared to pay a price for" the thing you want? After all, Prochaska says, change is not easy. It often takes a pretty dramatic restructuring of your life. And it inevitably comes with a certain amount of anxiety because of not knowing exactly how the outcome is going to feel. These are the steps you have to take before you can successfully take action and put willpower to work. In fact, by taking these steps, you increase your willpower because you strengthen your commitment to the change. Now, back to your failed attempt. Don't think of it so much as a failure, Prochaska says, but rather as a lesson that you could use to figure out what you did "right" and where you need to reexamine your approach. That way, failure becomes "a learning experience" rather than a loss, "a way of recognizing that change is a process rather than an event," often with two steps forward and one step backward. Furthermore, failure provides an opportunity to recognize that willpower alone could never be expected to shoulder the entire burden of change. Once you've thought about your attempt that didn't work, decide whether you're really ready to take action. Maybe you need more time to make a solid plan that you could fully implement by February 1. Maybe you need two or three months because you haven't really thought through all that it's going to take and aren't prepared to make the necessary lifestyle adjustments. That's okay, Prochaska says. You're still changing, even if no one else can see it.

Be Specific

Once you do decide you're ready for action, be as specific about your behavior change as possible. For instance, it's not enough just to say, "I'm going to lose weight." That's an outcome, not something that you do to arrive at the outcome. Better to say to yourself, "I'm going to allow myself one scoop of ice cream a night and not eat any sweets after 8 PM.," or "I'm going to walk briskly for 25 minutes a day," or whatever. While engaging in this process, Prochaska says, you can enhance your willpower by offering yourself more than one choice. Specifically, he says, ask yourself to come up with three good choices you would feel most committed to. The very process of carefully opting for some choices and weeding out others heightens resolve. Whatever you do, he says, the "biggest mistake is to give up on yourself." Instead, no matter what happens, tell yourself, "I learn from my mistakes, and I move on."

Source: Larry Lindner, MA
Copyright © 2010 EBSCO Publishing



January 2012

January: New Beginnings

Dieting Resolution Works Best When Done in Stages:

Setting a goal, visualizing it, then taking small steps boost odds of success

If your New Year's resolution involves losing weight, your best chance of success may be to divide your goal into small, manageable parts that you can work on every day, suggests an expert.

"Instead of making the number on the scale the focus, look for other ways to measure success," Stefanie C. Barthmare, a psychotherapist at the Methodist Weight Management Center at Methodist Hospital in Houston, said in a hospital news release.

When you set your goal, take the time to create for yourself a vision of what it will look like to achieve that goal. For example, your goal might be to participate in a specific activity or to fit into a smaller size of pants. The next step is to break your goal down into segments and gradually begin to stop consuming foods that are bad for you.

"Start by cutting down your intake of soda from three a day to one for the first week, and the next week maybe eliminate cheese from your sandwiches," Barthmare advised.

"It's also important to realize that depriving yourself never works. By refraining from one behavior that you know is potentially causing weight gain, you will begin to accumulate small successes. These positive actions and resulting good feelings give you the momentum to keep going and eventually reach the goal you set for yourself."

Barthmare explained that suddenly turning your back on all unhealthy foods may work for a few days or weeks. But when you start thinking about how you are restricting yourself, it's highly likely that you will return to your old eating habits and gain even more weight.

"When you don't come up with a plan to lose weight and the process is torture, you are setting yourself up for failure," she warned. "Doing it a little at a time will keep you from being overwhelmed, and keep you on track for keeping the pounds off and keeping your New Year's resolution."

A Healthy Recipe: Beef Barley & Lima Bean Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 1 can low sodium (14.5 oz) beef broth
- 1 lb lean beef stew meat, cut in 1/2 inch cubes
- 4 cups water
- 1/4 cup dry pearl barley
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 3 cups cooked (1 cup dry) large lima beans or 2 cans (15 oz each) butter beans, drained
- 2 Tbsp minced parsley

Instructions:

Place onion and carrots in a large dry saucepan. Cook over high heat, stirring frequently until vegetables start to brown and stick. Add 1/2 cup broth; stir to release brown bits. Cook until liquid evaporates and vegetables begin to stick again, about 5 minutes. Add 1/2 cup broth and continue cooking until liquid evaporates and vegetables are soft and golden brown. Add meat and cook until no longer pink. Stir in remaining broth, water, barley, salt and pepper. Simmer, covered, 25 minutes. Add beans and parsley; cook 10 minutes or until barley is soft.

Nutrition Facts:

- Serving Size 1/6 recipe
- Calories 280
- Total Fat 6 g
- Saturated Fat 2 g
- Cholesterol 45 mg
- Sodium 270 mg
- Total Carbohydrate 31 g
- Dietary Fiber 9 g
- Sugars 5 g
- Proteins 24 g

Servings and Times: Servings 6

Preparation Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

Source: Author: Robert Preidt
Copyright © 2010 HealthDay
<http://consumer.healthday.com/Article.asp?AID=647787>

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/dnparecipe/RecipeDetails.aspx?RecipeId=247&Search=&PageNumber=1&SortBy=TA&PerformOrSearch=1&Fruits=&Vegetables=&MealTypes=129>