



Health & Wellbeing



New Year, Better You!

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Make this the New Year you finally keep your resolutions

We've all been there: after weeks of Christmas parties and mince pies, not to mention the excesses of the big day itself, we decide that this year, definitely, is the year we'll turn over a new leaf and make some positive lifestyle changes.

According to a media source, about 60% of people make a lifestyle New Year resolution, but only about 20% end up keeping them. Gym memberships, for example, increase every January; but while most new members are apparently happy to spend an average of £564 in annual membership fees as they promise themselves, they'll finally get fit this year, around 21% of people say they end up going just three times (at a cost of £188 per visit), and 11% don't go in their gym at all.

Resolutions about quitting smoking, drinking and eating better are just as unlikely to be a success. Many, probably most, of those good intentions fall by the wayside in weeks, days, even hours.

So how can you make it more successful this time? To be achievable and sustainable there are some very simple ways to set yourself on the path to success, and stay on it.

Resolve to make better resolutions

The first step is to keep it simple. Focus on just one simple small resolution or change. Don't worry about the big campaigns: you'll probably hear a lot of buzz about 'Dry January' at the start of 2019, but if eating better is more important to you than not drinking, that's what you should do.

But choose carefully and go for a change that will give you the most satisfaction. Focus on the benefits of changing your behavior, rather than what you're losing by giving something up. For example, quitting smoking is obviously good for your health, but it also gives you a sense of achievement. And if you keep track of the money you would have spent on tobacco, you'll soon see a financial reward as well. Why not save it up for a treat like a meal out or even a weekend break and reward yourself on your achievement?

Above all, be realistic and don't aim too high. Start small, and remember you can always use a small success as a stepping stone to a bigger achievement. Break down your goals into manageable chunks:

- You could lose 1kg by swapping a few of your sugary drinks for a glass of water. This helps reduce calories and will save you money.
- Save up to £25 by cooking at home rather than eating out – why not visit the NHS Eat Well programme (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>) for tips and recipes.



- Go for a run – check out the NHS Couch to 5k programme (<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/couch-to-5k-week-by-week/>). They have a free app to keep you on track.

Organise yourself

One of the most important parts of any new habit is getting started. The biggest barrier can be procrastination. It is surprising how many reasons we can find to put things off. Plan a time frame for your resolution: it'll enable you to set short term targets and see how you're doing against your plan. And write down your plan and your motivation: seeing it there in black and white is a useful way to make it real. Keep a notebook and fill it with photos of your new, slimmer self, your sporting or hobby equipment or the treat you bought yourself with all the money you saved.



Be part of a team, but be in charge

You don't have to do this on your own; in fact a support network can be vital. Think about the people around you. Is there a friend who can come running with you, or just someone who can say the right things if you find you're struggling? Build a team of trustworthy, supportive buddies who can help when the going gets tough and you've made a big step towards success.

Remember the occasional slip up is almost inevitable. Think of any failures as a temporary setback rather than a reason to give up altogether. When things go wrong, you'll need to draw on all your reserves of self-belief and strength, so take the time to build them up as much as you can. Be proud of your

achievements, however small, and don't become your own worst critic.

When it comes to creating and establishing lifestyle changes you need to push beyond three months to ensure that it becomes a habit and a natural ongoing part of your lifestyle.

Higher self-esteem makes success more likely, so if something goes wrong, remember to forgive yourself and start over straight away.

Now you've read these tips, you're in a great position to decide how you're going to make life better in 2019. So whether you want to shed a few pounds, quit smoking or drinking, eat better or anything else, just remember: start small, set and plan small goals along the way, keep a record, share it with your friends and, above all, remember that you – and only you – can make the changes that lead to success.

If you are not sure where to start or what is important for you to change in order to improve your health and wellbeing why not take the NHS 10 minute quiz "How are you" and get a free personalized health score to point you in the right direction?

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/how-are-you-quiz/>

It is never too late to improve your health! Making small lifestyle changes such as eating better, drinking less alcohol, quitting smoking or being more active can double your chances of being healthy at 70 and beyond.

Have a great New Year – and good luck making the changes that will mean a better you in 12 months' time!

References and Information

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/brits-wasting-558m-unused-gym-9679158>

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/>

- 2 Lang. I.A, et al. (2012) "Healthy behaviours in middle age: Long-term consequences for functioning and mortality" Age and Ageing 41.

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