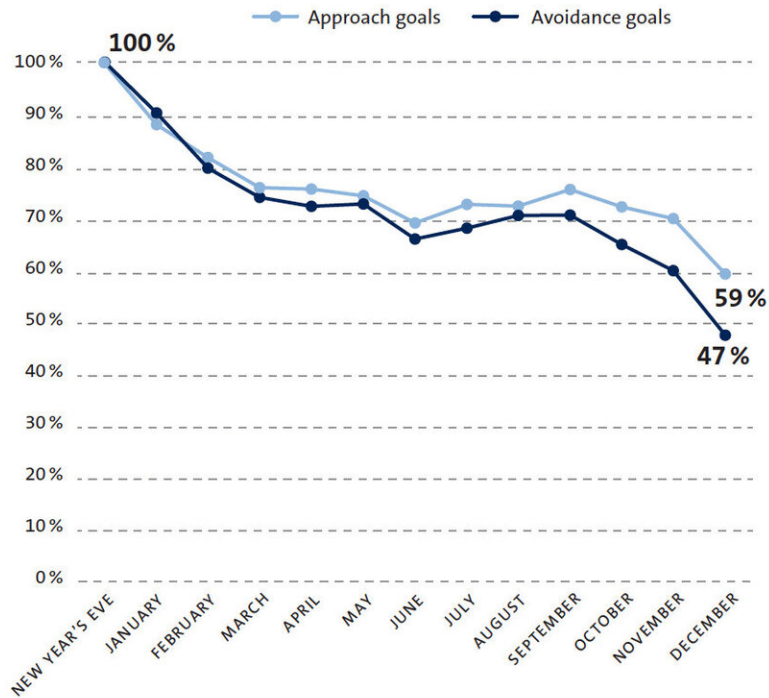


How to succeed in keeping your New Year's resolution

December 9 2020

The graph compares to which extent the participants of the study with approach/avoidance goals kept to their resolutions.



One year later, what types of resolutions were more successful? Credit: Per Carlbring

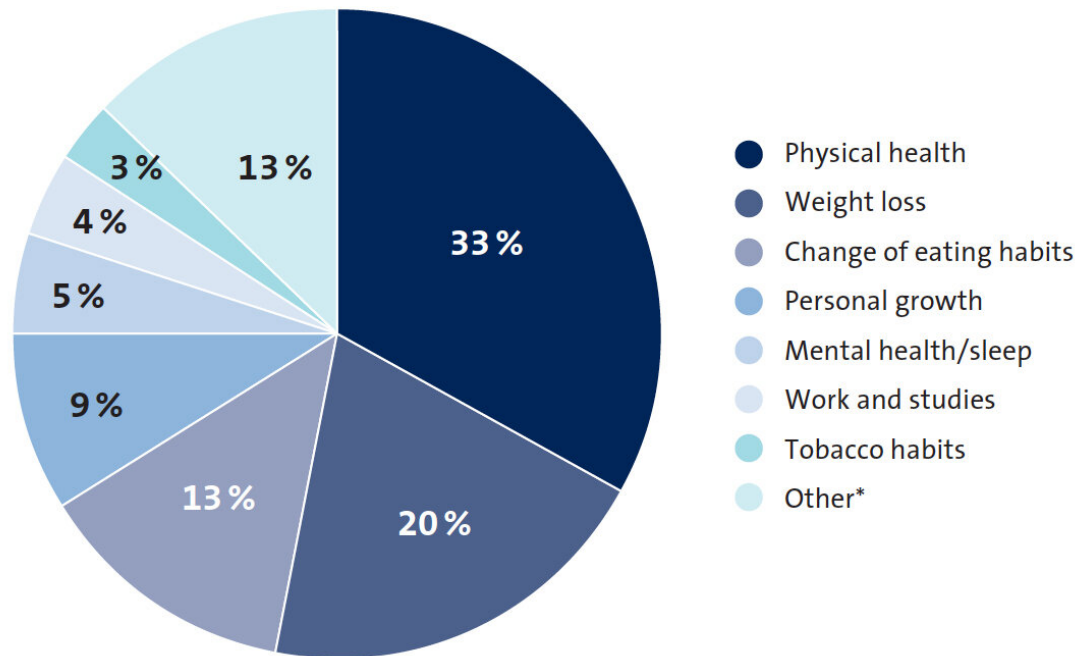
New Year's Eve is coming up, a holiday when many people choose to make a New Year's resolution. They may be hard to keep, but research shows there is one possible way to succeed—rephrase your resolution.

How you formulate your resolution is of great importance for the final outcome. If you rephrase your resolution from "I will quit/avoid" to "I will start to," you will have a greater chance of reaching your goals. This is one of the conclusions that were made in the world's largest study about New Year's resolutions. The study is published 9 December in the American scientific journal *PLOS ONE*.

The study is based on the resolutions that 1,066 people made in the end of 2017 and was conducted in collaboration between Stockholm University and Linköping University. The participants of the study got to formulate their own resolutions and were then divided into three different groups. The three groups received different amounts of support throughout the year—no support at all, some support and extended support. Follow-ups of the participants were made each month throughout the year.

"It was found that the support given to the participants did not make much of a difference when it came down to how well participants kept their resolutions throughout the year. What surprised us were the results on how to phrase your resolution," says professor Per Carlbring at the Department of Psychology, Stockholm University.

Most popular New Year's resolutions



* The category "other" includes resolutions concerning consumption, economy, alcohol, friends and family, home environment, hobbies, commitment and love.

The most popular New Year's resolutions. Credit: Per Carlbring

The participants that formulated an "approach goal" were the ones with the highest rate of success. An approach goal is in this case a resolution where you try to adopt a new habit or introduce something new in your life. Resolutions regarding avoiding or quitting something, "avoidance goals," proved to be less successful.

But is it as simple as to just rephrase your resolution in order to succeed?

"In many cases, rephrasing your resolution could definitely work. For example, if your goal is to stop eating sweets in order to lose weight, you will most likely be more successful if you say 'I will eat fruit several times a day' instead. You then replace sweets with something healthier, which probably means you will lose weight and also keep your resolution. You cannot erase a behavior, but you can replace it with something else. Although, this might be harder to apply to the [resolution](#) 'I will quit smoking,' which is something you might do 20 times a day," says Per Carlbring.

More information: A large-scale experiment on New Year's resolutions: Approach-oriented goals are more successful than avoidance-oriented goals, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0234097](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234097)

Provided by Stockholm University

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