

Mental health and the holidays: Resolutions

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Q: The start of a new year stirs up thoughts of reflection and the desire for change. What are healthy resolutions, and what tips do you have for staying committed?

A: Change is hard, and new habits are much easier to make and then break because old patterns may be more familiar, comfortable and easy. Also, stress from the COVID-19 pandemic can make some resolutions more difficult to follow through on. For example, you might want to exercise more, but you're not comfortable working out in a crowded gym.

"This year may require extra thought and planning about how to make a meaningful resolution work within the parameters of our new routines," says Lisa Hardesty, Ph.D., a Mayo Clinic Health System psychologist. "We may need to be more open and flexible, but [positive changes](#) are certainly possible with planning and dedication."

— **Take time to reflect.** Planning a change in lifestyle and committing to resolutions takes time and energy. Set aside time to reflect on the lifestyle you want and the one you lead now. How will you dedicate time to planning and taking action? What insights have you had over the past two years that may lead you to a new and exciting future?

— **Have a solid plan with a simple focus.** It's hard to hit the ground running when you don't know where you're running to. That's why it's important to create an achievable, solid plan with small, achievable benchmarks before the new year is underway. People have a tendency to

start with high energy and effort, and then lose that within approximately three months after starting. Creating small goals, celebrating minor successes, and building on those early wins will be much more sustainable over time.

— **Stay motivated.** You will need internal and external motivation to keep you going. Begin with identifying your "why" for the change to stay focused on the meaning of your new imagined future. You also can use this "why" when you face unexpected barriers or start to fall back to old ways of thinking or behaving.

— **Build confidence.** In addition to your "why," you will need to learn to be confident. Confidence is related to small goals and big celebrations. Being confident and patient are key factors to sticking with your [resolution](#).

"Finally, sharing your goals with others is a great way to gain support, accountability and external motivation to continue," says Dr. Hardesty. "If you build internal and external motivation, and accountability, then you will think, feel and behave in ways that sustain success over [time](#)."

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