

How to set, and keep, your New Year's resolutions

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Realistic goals and expectations combined with a holistic look at health and wellness are essential to make and keep New Year's resolutions, according to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service experts.

"Three reasons people fail at keeping their New Year's resolutions are that what they hope to do is unreasonable, the person expects an unrealistic benefit or the person wasn't physically or emotionally prepared to make a change," said Jenna Anding, a registered dietitian nutritionist and a professor and AgriLife Extension specialist in the Department of Nutrition at Texas A&M College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Most [older adults](#) tend to shy away from resolutions, while those who take up the challenge for the upcoming year are more likely to be younger or middle-aged, Anding said.

"Statistics also suggest older adults who do make resolutions are not very successful at keeping them," she said. "But that's not to say resolutions don't work. In fact, at whatever age, those who make resolutions tend to have more success at stopping [bad habits](#) and adopting better habits when compared to those who don't make resolutions at all."

Anding said we make resolutions because the New Year serves as a marker or reminder for us to step back and reevaluate our lives, then identify any changes needed to improve them. She said some of the top New Year's resolutions include:

- Eating healthier/losing weight
- Getting more exercise
- Spending less and saving more
- Being more organized
- Dedicating more time with friends and family
- Finding more "me" time
- Quitting smoking or drinking

Evaluating New Year's resolutions

When thinking about the resolutions you want to keep, it's a good idea to look at your health multidimensionally to achieve optimal health and well-being, said Miquela Smith, AgriLife Extension program specialist—health.

"Most people know the basics of maintaining their [physical health](#), including [physical activity](#) and well-balanced nutrition," she said. "However, there are other aspects of your life to consider, such as emotional, intellectual, spiritual, social and occupational wellness."

When setting resolutions to achieve optimal health, people may focus on two or three dimensions but lose sight of the others, Smith said.

"You may be eating well, but are you fostering meaningful social connections and maintaining adequate boundaries between your job and the rest of your life?" Smith said. "Developing a well-balanced life is vital for personal wellness, but can differ depending on environment, culture, circumstance, resources and other factors."

Consider life balance

Smith said New Year's resolutions should take into consideration a balance of work, recreation and relaxation, interaction with family and friends, community engagement and being physically and spiritually active.

When setting resolutions with the goal of improving overall well-being, you must be aware of habits or behaviors that influence your [health](#) and wellness and be able to identify which are working for you and which aren't, Smith said.

"This balance will vary with a person's needs, wants, expectations, preferences and capabilities as well as what stage or season of life a

person is in," she said. "This awareness and understanding are foundational to where you must focus in order to build a [healthy lifestyle](#)."

Smith said if you are not sure exactly where to focus in making your resolutions, some things you might try to improve your overall well-being may include:

- Becoming involved in social or community activities that have a purpose
- Making changes in social interactions that might be interfering with aspects of your overall life balance
- Keeping a calendar to help remember what, when or how often you need to get things done
- Repeating a desired positive behavior until it becomes a habit

Set attainable 'mini-goals'

Anding said one way to approach successful [resolution](#)-making is to first list the three behaviors or habits you most want to change.

"Look at the behaviors you have identified and choose the one you most want to concentrate on improving," she said. "Then take a close and realistic look at the behavior you have chosen and think of a specific goal that would reflect where you would like to be through modifying that behavior. Write down that final goal, making sure it is both realistic and achievable."

The next step is to make a plan and come up with a series of smaller, attainable goals leading toward the final goal, she said.

"For example, if the goal is to run a marathon, but right now you can't run to the end of the block, consider starting with a more realistic goal of

walking for 30 minutes a day three to five days a week," she said. "Once that is a regular habit, set another goal to run a 5K within three to six months and then a 10K, gradually working up to a half-marathon and then a full marathon."

It's also helpful to write down and commit to a specific date to begin the desired [behavior](#) change, Anding said.

"Pick an important, significant or memorable date and put it on your calendar," she said. "It doesn't have to be the exact start of a new year. Once you pick your date, plan how you will accomplish your goal. In other words, identify and write down those specific actions you will need to take to be successful."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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