

Resolved to get fit this year? An experts offers tips

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Is that New Year's resolution to improve your fitness already looking less likely?

It can be tough to know where to start, said [Benedikte Western](#), a research fellow at the University of Agder in Norway.

"It takes time to develop new habits, but if you're motivated, it is certainly not impossible," Western said in a university news release.

"As time goes on, your new lifestyle will become more ingrained as a habit and a natural part of your everyday life," Western added. "You'll

discover strategies that work for you and gain experience in overcoming obstacles."

She offers a set of recommendations to help folks turn intention into action:

Assess what you want out of exercise.

Some people might want to be in better shape so they can play with their kids or go on a hike with friends. Others might want to reduce stress or improve their sleep.

"Start by outlining the pros and cons you perceive in adopting a more active lifestyle. This will empower you with better control over the situation before you commence," Western said.

Find exercise you enjoy.

It will be easier to stick to a workout plan that includes activities suited for you, Western said.

Take into account your level of motivation, the time you have to spare and the equipment you have on hand.

"If [bad weather](#) prevents you from going out, make sure you have the right gear," Western said. "If you're unsure about how to use the [equipment](#) at the gym, take a session with a [personal trainer](#) or ask a more experienced friend to be your workout buddy for the first few weeks."

Also keep in mind that small improvements are easier to maintain than grand ambitions.

"One of the most common reasons why many people don't succeed is that they lack consistency over time," Western said. "Therefore, it's incredibly important to be realistic and think long-term."

Set SMART goals.

A person's exercise goals should follow the SMART acronym: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound.

For example, set a specific goal of regularly running two or three miles, playing racquetball twice a week or going on a daily half-hour walk.

"Goals like 'exercise more' or 'get healthier' won't help much. Set specific goals that you can track and that you will achieve within a given time frame," Western said.

Western also recommends setting sub-goals along the way. People who want to regularly run three miles might start by having a couple of weekly sessions where they alternate between walking and jogging, then gradually increasing the frequency and duration of their efforts.

"The goals you set should be realistic based on your current fitness level. You can gradually set more [ambitious goals](#) as you progress," Western said. "This approach allows you to establish a [habit](#) while also gradually increasing the workload on your body."

Don't overdo it at first.

Try to stay focused on a couple of specific goals rather than attempting a wholesale shake-up of your habits, Western said.

People who try to [exercise](#) five times a week, quit smoking, go to bed

early and eat more vegetables might find themselves overwhelmed if they tackle those goals all at once.

"If you try to do too much, you may end up struggling to meet all the targets and abandoning the entire plan," Western said. "Taking a gradual approach increases the likelihood that your actions become habits that can be sustained over time."

Also be ready to adjust your plans if obstacles pop up, and don't let yourself get discouraged.

Reward yourself.

Track your progress, and set rewards for meeting specific goals, Western said.

"Tracking your workouts and progress can be a smart move. That way, it becomes a bit harder to slack off," Western said. "If having a reward to look forward to when you achieve a goal motivates you, there's nothing wrong with that, as long as the reward doesn't compromise your objective."

More information: The Mayo Clinic has more on [starting a fitness program](#).

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