

TIME TO CREATE MEANINGFUL RESOLUTIONS

The New Year is a time for reflection and a time to renew commitments to health. Many people find themselves feeling overwhelmed and exhausted after the holidays and feel a nagging sense that they should be embarking on a big new fitness plan or healthy eating plan. If better health is at the top of your list, go back to your inner drawing board. What do you need to change in your life so you can be your best self? What is standing in your way? Consider your physical well-being and your emotional well-being. It is very difficult to address the physical self when the emotional self is stressed.

Spend some quiet time thinking about what it is you really want to achieve in the upcoming year. Take the month of January to reflect specifically on your own needs, not on anyone else. If you have already made an ambitious and hasty resolution, give yourself permission to sit with it for the month.

In our busy lives there are thousands of barriers getting in the way of making changes - a lack of money and time, long work hours, kids to care for and dogs to walk. Spend some time thinking about what is really important to you and what you can let go of. What do you need to do to let go of those things? What do you need to do to take care of yourself, to feel relaxed and to be in a place where change is possible?

When you are ready, set realistic goals for the year that are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. For example, my resolution is to walk for 30 minutes, four days a week, until Easter. Notice how there is a specific activity, with measurable numbers in a timely fashion, and the goal appears to be fairly realistic and attainable for someone who maybe doesn't get a lot of exercise, but is fully mobile.

Write down your goal and write down the steps you need to take to get there. If taking a big step feels like too much, here are a few small but SMART ideas that can have a big impact on your health.

- Walk to work on Mondays until spring solstice. Reassess your plan when the weather improves and the days are longer.
- Put your salt shaker in the garbage today. Extra salt contributes to high blood pressure.
- For the months of February and March, commit to packing your lunch each night before school or work, rather than in the morning when you are rushed.
- Make fish a standing item on your grocery list. Even canned tuna and salmon contain healthy omega three fats.
- Have media-free meals for a month.

Wishing you and your family a happy and healthy 2016!

AUTHOR: TARA STARK IS A PUBLIC HEALTH DIETITIAN WITH INTERIOR HEALTH