



January Wellness Tip:

Setting Goals you Reach!

The New Year brings a time of reflection on our lives, and thoughts of what we would like our future to be. Many people set New Year resolutions only to find their motivation drop after a few weeks. Fitness is a big one and gyms are full for January, then slowly numbers decline to the usual level by some time in February.

So what can you do to increase the odds of reaching your goals?

One of the first things to do is to ask yourself WHY do you want to achieve that goal? What good things will happen as a result?

Maybe “being more patient” will result in better relationships with others and less stress for you. “Studying more” could result in a deeper understanding of the material and better grades. Knowing the ‘why’ will provide clarity as well as motivation to hang in there, even if the going gets a little tough.

Second, be really clear about what exactly you want to achieve. “Be more patient” or “study more” sounds good, but what does that really mean? How will you know when you reach that goal?

In order to know, you need to describe it in behavioral terms. For example, “be more patient” could mean that you will not complain when a friend is late 5 minutes or less, you will be still when standing in line and use the time to practice diaphragmatic breathing, and you will silently count to 5 before responding to someone who has said something that triggered a negative emotional response in you.

For “study more” what does ‘more’ mean? Five minutes more a week? One hour more a day? It would be best to keep track of your studying time for at least a week (or two) so you have a baseline. Then set a goal based on what you would like to achieve.

Next, ensure the goals push you a little but are still realistic. Setting a goal that is really big can actually be de-motivating because it seems out of reach and is too different from your usual way of being.

Create a plan to achieve your goal. If you have never worked out and set a goal of working out 4 days a week, that can be a big jump. You could set step-wise goals, meaning they increase as time goes by. Perhaps the first week is to walk ½ hour three times a week, then slowly increase your activity until you reach your working out goal. Recording your progress can also be helpful.

An accountability buddy can help!

We are all human and sometimes don’t feel like doing things. Having an accountability buddy or partner can help you stick with your goals.

When I was a student I used to meet a friend in the gym to work out. I'm embarrassed to admit this, but I can't tell you the number of times I would have skipped it had it not been for her. I felt an obligation to go and honestly, once we started I always felt good about it and was glad to work out.

Maybe your accountability partner has a totally different goal than you but this can still work. Just agree to check in at regular intervals and report on how you are doing. Generally speaking, we like to look good in the eyes of others so this can help with motivation. It can also help if you find yourself slipping a bit. Maybe your accountability buddy has some suggestions of how to get back on track.

Reward yourself!

When you reach a goal, it is time to celebrate! Is there something you can do, or get, to reward yourself? It doesn't have to be huge. The point is that it is something that helps you maintain motivation throughout this process.

You also don't have to wait until the final goal is achieved. By setting up mini goals along the way with mini rewards when they are met, you can more easily track your progress while also having the push to keep going.

Keep perspective

Even if you don't reach your goals in the end, be patient and understanding with yourself. Beating yourself up only results in your self-esteem taking a hit and future motivation being way-sided. Instead, acknowledge that you tried and took some steps (even baby ones count) towards your goal.

It can also be an opportunity to re-assess your goals. Were they really yours or ones you felt others wanted you to do or be? Is the 'why' a big enough reason? Are there people or resources that can help you meet your goals? Would a vision board help?

You can always start working towards that goal whenever you want. Who says one can only start January 1st? Maybe February 20th works better for you, or March 5th, or whenever you are ready.

Celebrate every little success and keep going. You are worth it!

**“If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts,
liberates your energy and inspires your hopes.”**

—Andrew Carnegie

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