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Winning at the Resolutions Game

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Happy 2017!

By now, many of you have decided this will be the year you get healthy by losing weight, exercising more, stopping smoking or maybe following your prescription schedule. You will make conscious choices to modify your current behavior by eating more vegetables, visiting the gym regularly, and adopting other healthy habits to live longer and more active lives.

Some changes are more difficult than others. Here are some tips to help you make resolutions and keep them beyond January:

1. Create a long-term strategy with benchmarks and clear objectives. It's great to say you are going to eat healthier starting this year, but it's unlikely you'll switch from a mainly fast food diet to all salads all the time. Every week, try switching a sugary dessert for a healthier option, like fruit – with this method, your transition will feel more like a lifestyle change instead of a joyless punishment. Substitute soda with naturally flavored seltzer. Cultivate habits while reaching for an ultimate goal.

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2. Be realistic because the human capacity to make more than one change at a time is low. You won't turn into a totally different human being overnight. If you get winded jogging around the block, you can't reasonably expect to run a marathon after three weeks of training. You will be dejected because you made grandiose plans – you'll set yourself up for failure. Instead, make small, gradual changes so your resolutions are sustainable. Walk a mile, then two. Build up to jogging, then eventually finishing a marathon.

3. Be flexible and forgiving. If you had a particularly stressful week at work and gave into the temptation of a few extra snacks, don't let that completely derail you. Show yourself some compassion for faltering, and then get back on track next week. Humans fail and personal growth is healthy – this is part of the process. Don't quit because you stumbled one week in the grand scheme of an entire year.

Author of The Marshmallow Test and noted psychologist [Walter suggests](#) making implementation plans with uncomplicated **if-then** terms, which seem simple but have been proven to be “astonishingly effective.” For example, “If I am at the diner and I want a milkshake, then I will order an iced tea instead.”

New Year's resolutions shouldn't make you miserable—it's about self-improvement. Think of creative ways to stay on track and reward yourself while maintaining accountability. Best wishes for better health in 2017!

Co-authored with Shane Power, President of [Watertree Health](#), where Lisa works in communication and business development.