

Setting Reasonable, Healthy Expectations

Setting realistic goals to lose weight loss and get fit can be a challenge. Here's what nutrition and psychology experts say about keeping it real and avoiding temptation when losing weight.

Everyday Health: How do you set reasonable, healthy expectations when you resolve to lose weight or shape up at this time of year or any other time of year?



Tosca Reno (toscareno.com, eatcleandiet.com)

Don't just tell yourself you are going to lose weight and get fit. What specifically are you going to do about it? Are you going to make recipes from a healthy-living cookbook? Are you going to try new vegetables in the supermarket? Are you going to give up snacks and junk food? Will you get a gym membership and commit to going three or four times a week? When specifically (what time and day) will you go to the gym? These are all questions you need to answer before you get started. Map out your success.



Anita Gadhia-Smith, PsyD (fromaddictiontorecovery.com)

Take it a day at a time. Gradually increase the intensity of your goals. Review progress weekly and make changes as necessary.



Ed DeBellis, PsyD (deblistherapy.com)

Set day-to-day, moment-to-moment goals that are achievable (for example, doing things that you have already done and things that you know you can do again). There was a time when you didn't pour chocolate syrup on everything. Think in terms of desirable behaviors that you can live with for the rest of your life.

Completely eliminating anything containing sugar is not a behavior that you are likely to continue for very long and you run the risk of bingeing on sugar when the damn breaks. It's better to occasionally have something sweet, in moderation. This will help to avoid binges and subsequent feelings of failure or defeat.



Roger Gould, MD (shrinkyourself.com)

You have to pay attention to reality, which means you need to start eating healthfully and making sure not to put yourself in the position of feeling deprived, which only sets you up for the next failure. Don't think of losing weight as a contest to win, because that means you are sure to lose. Think of it as a decision to be healthy. It is your responsibility to create a program that works for you. Don't set an artificial weight goal to meet some event deadline. Remember you are losing weight for you because that is the healthy thing to do, not to please or impress others. If you keep all that in mind, you'll be happy with a modest weight loss in the beginning that is tied directly to conscious healthy decision-making. Once that is established, the weight will come off much faster than you imagine. And don't rely on exercise to lose weight. Exercise to be healthy and enjoy your body. You can undo an hour of vigorous exercise in two minutes by eating junk food. Focus on the input, not on burning calories.



Jennifer Schonborn, AADP (jenniferschonborn.com)

Holistic nutrition counselor

The key is to make small, gradual changes, one baby step at a time. This week, try replacing French fries with green vegetables. Next week, go for a brisk walk a couple of times. And so on. Break those big goals down into small, doable steps, and before you know it you'll start to see results. Patience is important, as is the resolve to make real, lasting changes to your habits. Diets don't work. If you lose 15 pounds in two weeks by severely restricting your food intake, that weight will come back once you start eating "normally" again. What you want to do is reset what normal is for you. And it doesn't have to be painful. Making small adjustments here and there add up to huge changes over time. Just stick with it.