

Resolutions and Change

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Every year, as the calendar turns to January, millions of people resolve to lose weight, become healthier, and increase their level of fitness. For many of those individuals it only takes a few weeks of being back to work and their daily routines to abandon those broad ambiguous goals that were not well thought through, and only made out of good intentions and wishful thinking. At Upper Arlington Preventative Primary Care there are several clear tips we have learned through the years that will help you fully understand and adopt the skills that will enable you to stay on track.

The one thing we want to emphasize is that it does not require an early January calendar date to begin a true and meaningful lifestyle adaptation. True lifestyle adaptation can begin during any season, in any month, at any time. And only a real lifestyle adaptation will permit the long term realization of a healthier and fitter version of yourself. The best time to start on your journey is whenever you are fully and consciously committed, and ready to embrace the work it takes to create the positive life altering changes.

True readiness. In our opinion, the first thing you need to do before you embark on your journey to a lifestyle adaptation is ask yourself a couple of hard questions. Are you fully committed to doing what it will take to make this change? And do you really want to do the work that will be required to make the change and fully adopt a new lifestyle? Far too frequently people decide to make a change because a friend or loved one is attempting the same, or because someone else suggests that you should, or simply because that is what we have all been almost programmed to do every year in early January. However, in our experience the significant decision to create real meaningful change has to come from inside of yourself. It has to resonate deeply within us when we are alone and able to quietly contemplate.

Make no mistake, creating a lasting lifestyle adaptation is extraordinarily difficult. Often adults are trying to alter behavior patterns that have been learned and reinforced over the course of years and even decades. And we know that many adults are not always as flexible and open to change as younger children can be. Lifestyle adaptation and change will require hard, deliberate, and focused work. Every day. It is never a quick fix. And we know that striving to create a meaningful change due to pressures outside of yourself or for some form of reward does not work in the long term. The driving force, the motivation, needs to stem from a true internal desire, or your efforts will not produce the desired change.

Accordingly, you need to truly want the change, the new you to emerge.

On this journey you have to fully own both your choices and the responsibility for creating what you want. When you discuss this with people they will frequently tell you it is scary. But, it can be very uplifting and extremely empowering for the individual. You can own this lifestyle adaptation and truly, finally, make it your own. It is within your control.

Please know that if you have asked yourself those hard questions above, and your answers are truthfully “no”, that is fine. Honesty and commitment to yourself are the keys. Not being fully ready now, does not mean you will never be fully ready. In many ways being completely honest with yourself also enables you to insulate yourself from failure and disappointment, which can strip your confidence for beginning in the future. Far better to be honest with yourself now than becoming overly discouraged, giving up, and never trying at all in the future.

Focus on the process. For most people, a majority of the goals and commitments they make at the beginning of January are very broad, and made without a specific plan. And the end goal is often the only outcome. Their resolution and goal lacks a process-driven approach. Ideally, resolutions should involve things we have a high ability to control, and capacity to direct the thought through plan and process. It is not realistic to expect an outcome without a clear plan of action, a set of guidelines to get there; a sort of “resolution map”, if you will.

Our suggestion is for every goal or resolution you make to create an accompanying clear and detailed plan to get there, with every point along the way thought through. By having a detailed resolution map, you will be able to focus on the process and not worry over the end outcome goal. Staying true to the process, the daily achievable details, will help to take your mind off the overall struggle and allow you to reach your resolution and achieve the desired goal.

Set realistic achievable goals. If there is one thing we most often observe when individuals do not reach their goals, it is that the resolutions they have set at the beginning are simply not realistic. The resolutions are too broad in scope, too far away from where they currently are. It is important for any goal to make you work and push you past your perceived limits, but the resolution should not be out of reach and not achievable within a reasonable time frame. For example, if you have just started running and you state at the beginning of January you resolve to complete a full-length ironman triathlon in the summer that is simply not a realistic goal. You have set yourself up to fail and become discouraged.

True long-term successful lifestyle adaptation is rarely a linear path. Most often there are steps forward and some that will take you back a small amount. But the wise and patient person learns from the small slip-ups, those backward steps, and continues forward with increased resolve.

We believe this is once again where the detailed resolution map comes into play. It helps to keep you on track and focused on the process. The well-planned process is what creates lasting change. Your life will not always allow for forward progress, things will happen and come up to derail you. Success can generally be defined as staying the course at least 80% of the time. Stay focused on the long range goal. Being consistent and focused is a true road to resolution fulfillment. And remember a temporary change does not create permanent lifestyle adaptation. You have to fully embrace the new lifestyle you wish to adopt every day, and stay true to yourself for the long run.

Monitor your progress. We know that individuals that commit to consistently keeping track of their progress, in a detailed way, are much more likely to achieve long term success and the desired lifestyle adaptation. Tracking your daily progress either via an electronic wearable device or with an old fashioned written log makes you far more cognizant of your daily behaviors and long term patterns. And taking the time to write a few notes in a journal every day allows you to reflect and identify things that might consistently trip you up and result in one of those small backward steps.

By having notes to look back on you are more easily able to adjust, and tweak your plan to work around those events and circumstances that derailed you, and create the long term lifestyle adaptation. You help yourself to stay focused on the goal and detailed resolution map. And by keeping track of your progress you have a written record of your success, a built in method to motivate yourself when you are not having a good day or become discouraged.

Often times when you keep a written record of your progress, patterns will emerge. You will be able to clearly identify those things that consistently seem to knock you off track for a day or two, obstacles tend to be quite similar over time. Having that written record of your daily activities helps to identify them and allows for planning around them.

Finally, look to those that have been successful for increased motivation. Remember those successful individuals that have adopted a true lifestyle

adaptation do not have any less barriers or problems to deal with. They have simply developed the skills over time to work around them, and the discipline to stay the course and successfully attain the resolution.

Are you ready? If the answer is yes, and you are confused about how to start or exactly what to do the professionals at Upper Arlington Preventative Primary Care are here to help you succeed. Dr. Devor is available to meet with you one on one and offer counseling on physical activity program design and general nutritional guidance.