



5 Key Strategies To Make Your Health Goals Stick This Year

January 2011

If you're like most people, you have probably already set your New Year's resolutions goals not just 6 days ago but even during the holidays... "I will eat and drink through Christmas and New Year's, but come January 1st I am going on a diet".

We all do it at some point of our lives and throughout the year but most of us experience that sudden burst of motivation that comes with the first day of the year. It represents a new start, out with the old, in with the new, a new way to do things better, to improve, to look and to feel better, healthier, slimmer and happier.

This year you vow to lose those last 10 lbs and keep them off!

This year you vow that things will be different and you will stick to your goals.

Will you? What really makes this year different for you?

Well I don't claim to know all the answers, as I have "fallen off the wagon" myself a few times, but there are some tricks I have learned along the way that have made a huge difference in helping me follow through and reach my own goals.

There are 5 essential strategies that have helped me immensely and I want to share them with you too to support you in your journey.

1. Start small: Set some goals that will motivate you but not intimidate you or discourage you. Instead of committing to losing 30 lbs by June, how about just focus on 5 lbs by February?

You might think this is the difference between tomato and tomaato but here are 3 essential ways of these 2 goals differ substantially and how they can make you or break you.

"I want to lose 30 lbs by June has the disadvantages of:

Being an overwhelming and intimidating goal, especially if you have never lost 30 lbs ever before. This alone, can be nerve-racking and I promise you that if you believe deep inside that this goal is unapproachable, then you will make it one. You will continually and subconsciously be coming up with excuses and reasons of why you are not sticking to your workouts or why you're having fast food again for lunch. Research shows that sometimes when we aim to o high, we end up getting more discouraged and end up doing nothing at all.



Lacks instant gratification. As a society we are a bit spoiled and certainly motivated by instant gratification. We want to lose weight NOW and see results immediately, in order to justify our workouts and our diet. Waiting till June is just unacceptable! Your deadline is too far away and that is not very motivating at all... In May we will worry about bikini season but right now when we can hide behind our sweaters, we have much more important things to focus on... and so our wellness vision slips away...

Instead, if you focus on wanting to lose 5 lbs by February you have the advantages of:

a. Dealing with a much more manageable and realistic goal, which is encouraging all on its own.

b. It creates urgency because your deadline is so much closer and it will get your butt into gear and on schedule.

c. You have an ongoing chance to evaluate and regroup every month. Instead of waiting till June to find out that what you have been doing didn't really work, every month based on your results, you can determine what is working for you and what is not. This alone will help you refine the way you eat and tweak your workouts or your schedule to make things even more efficient.

d. Offers instant gratification: small achievable steps offer much more gratification as well as motivation in order to stay the course for the ultimate goal.

So I recommend that if you have already set 5-6 big New Year's resolution goals that you want to accomplish by mid- or end of year, break them down to monthly goals. Convert them into smaller goals that will be feasible and will help you stay more focused and motivated.

2. Plan your roadmap: OK, so now we decided we want to lose 5 lbs by February, now what? Are you going to wing it and just try to get in the gym when your schedule permits or "eat more veggies" and wish for the best?

Setting your goal is just like knowing that you are going on vacation to Florida vs. Colorado. You still have to decide what you will pack, book your flight, reserve your hotel room, take the time off work, find someone to watch your dog and a ton of other things that you need to plan before your departure.

Well it's the same with your weight loss goal. The 5 lbs you have set as your goal is your destination and now you have to put a roadmap together of how you will get there.

Life is busy and hectic and we forget and get distracted with myriads of better or more seemingly more important things every day. Before you know it, it will be February so instead of procrastinating and letting things happen "as your schedule" allows, you want to **break down your bigger goal into small steps** that you can organize, plan and track. Some examples are:

- *Plan your meals* on the weekends so you are prepared during the week



- *Pencil in your actual workouts:* time, day, duration and what you will be doing.
- *Determine a good time* during the day for you to journal your meals and your workouts
- *Write down your grocery list* and schedule when you will go grocery shopping.
- *Get organized in your kitchen*, so it's easier for you to prep your meals and enjoy doing it, instead of having to clean your countertops before you actually start cooking.
- *Plan on eating 5-8 vegetables* a day and plan what ingredients you need on hand or dishes you have to prepare to make that happen.

These are just a few simple ideas to get you thinking. You can decide what you steps and habits you need to integrate in your daily schedule that can help you stay focused and on track.

3. Stay flexible and realistic: Let go of perfection. It's not about being perfect; it is about staying consistent and persistent. It's about making small progress everyday, doing things a bit better today than last week or last year.

You will make mistakes and you will “fall of the wagon” and that is not what makes us fail. What make us succeed or not, is *how we deal with our failures* and disappointments, *how we pick ourselves up* after a “bad” day, *how we recover* and *regroup*.

A good thing to remember here is to **let go of the “never” or “always” approach**; “I will never eat pizza again” and “I will always meditate before I go to bed”. This is just too absolute and it is setting you up for failure.

Learn from your “bad days” and your fallbacks.

What made you go home and finish a whole box of cookies last Wednesday? Were you hungry? Did you skip lunch? Were you stressed? Was there no dinner or any other healthy snacks in the house?

Instead of you condemning yourself of being weak, useless and not-good enough, focus your energy on understanding what happened so you can prevent it and work around it next time.

4. Monitor your progress. This can be as simple as writing down your food or tracking your workouts in a journal. Tracking is important and a proven key to lifestyle behavior change.

Find a way that works for you either on paper or electronically and plan in advance when do you typically have 5 min to yourself to do this everyday. Maybe it is right before you go to bed, or right after dinner. Don't forget to reward yourself for everyday you remember to journal.

As I tell my clients, journaling is probably hands down one of your most essential tools for weight loss. It is the best way to help you visualize every day where you are and where you are going. It is the best way to help you stay on track, motivated and accountable. It is also the best way to optimize your diet and your workouts because by journaling not just what you ate but when and how you felt before and after, helps you build awareness around your habits and your needs



and that is the first step towards change.

5. Find a support group. Stop trying to do it alone, especially if you have tried before to lose weight alone and have failed. A support system can make all the difference in the world for you and your success.

A buddy can offer you accountability. Accountability is one of the most important factors in losing weight or changing any behavior and that is why I mentioned to you earlier that your food journal is also one of the most essential tools. It offers accountability and so does a support group. It certainly is crucial that you are accountable to yourself and you don't make empty promises, which can be discouraging, and disheartening, but having someone else to be accountable too, definitely raises the bar and the expectations.

Furthermore, a buddy, a group or a coach, will also double your energy, your motivation, your commitment and your resources. Think of the ways this could help you.

Would it make a difference to you if you had a buddy or a coach to:

- *Work out together?*
- *Help you plan your meals?*
- *Teach you how to shop or cook?*
- *Learn from, their successes and their fallbacks?*
- *Help you understand the principles of good nutrition and safe exercise?*
- *Inspire you with some fresh healthy snacks to keep handy, new recipes, strategies to avoid your typical pitfalls or tips to get organized in your kitchen?*

We all learn and seek the valued services from experts when it comes to our financial investments, our taxes, our kids education, our car maintenance or the repair of our furnace. We can't possibly be experts at all of these categories and even if we think we are, it is very difficult to do it all alone.

So please don't hesitate to reach out to experts in your community, seek the advice of a personal trainer or the support on a group forum and please don't underestimate the benefit of having a social support system to help get you from where you are to where you want to be. You deserve it and you owe it to yourself.