

New Year's resolution? Here's how to make it stick

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It's clear that these last couple of years have been tough for a lot of

people.

So now that it's the week when people make New Year's resolutions, go easy on yourself.

If you'd like to make a [resolution](#), start small, the American Psychological Association (APA) suggests. By small, the [goal](#) should be one you think you can keep.

For example, if you want to eat healthier, don't make your diet a form of punishment—try replacing dessert with something else you enjoy. If your goal is to [exercise](#) more, schedule three or four days a week at the gym, not all seven.

"In the past, I've spoken to people about setting realistic and practical New Year's resolutions," said Jessy Levin, a senior psychologist at Northwell Health in Lake Success, N.Y. "I've discussed SMART goals and how creating goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound will have the greatest likelihood of success."

That was prior to the pandemic and more recently Levin said she is encouraging people to set resolutions that "offer themselves grace and self-forgiveness."

"We have all been through a tremendously stressful past couple of years. We have watched waves and variants. We have changed how we live our day-to-day," Levin said. "This is not to say that setting goals, especially pro-health goals, are not important. With our lifestyles shifted, improving our diets and activity are important. But so are our mental health goals."

For those who are setting more standard resolutions, change one behavior at a time, the APA recommends. Replacing unhealthy

behaviors with healthy ones can be done over time—and one at a time—similar to how unhealthy behaviors develop over time.

Share experiences with family, friends or possibly even a support group to help reach goals such as [quitting smoking](#). This makes the journey to a healthier lifestyle easier and less intimidating, according to the APA.

Know that perfection isn't attainable and minor missteps are normal, the APA said. Ask for support from those who care about you to help strengthen your resilience, or consider seeking professional help if you feel overwhelmed and unable to reach your goals on your own.

Levin suggests a goal that's more specific to these challenging years, such as a self-forgiveness goal where you allow yourself to be a little late to a meeting so you can finish your coffee before starting work, or pause when you think a family dinner needs to be "just right."

Another goal could be gratitude-focused, such as writing down three things you are grateful for each week, Levin recommended. It could be calling or texting someone you haven't talked with lately.

Levin noted there are increased rates of [depression](#), [anxiety](#) and [substance abuse](#) as the pandemic continues.

"People are searching to find mental stability amid a changing environment. So this year, let us not be our harshest critics," she said.

"Let us offer ourselves kindness, grace and forgiveness. Let us set those as our resolutions."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [coping with stress](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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