Resolution Revolution

This New Year, don’t make grand resolutions that you’ll break. Instead, take small steps toward health.

January 1, 2010 By Laura Whitehorn

Lots of us begin each new year by resolving big changes: I will join the gym! I will not eat sweets! I will stop smoking! And by February or March, we notice that we’re back to our old routine—the very one we resolved to change.

We have a new approach for you: Don’t resolve.

Valerie Wojciechowicz swears by this method. HIV positive since the late 1980s, she kicked drugs and alcohol and, beginning with some muscle building and aerobics, never looked back. “It made sense to me,” she says. “People were dying from wasting, so [I thought] maybe I should add some muscle to my body.”

Today, Wojciechowicz, 46, works as a fitness coach. “People find so many reasons not to exercise—like, ‘Gyms are too expensive’ or ‘I don’t have enough time.’ I don’t accept those excuses,” she says. “[Instead, I suggest] taking one small step at a time.”

It’s a way to encourage progress, too. “If you say, ‘I’m going to work out every day of the week’ and then the very first week you do it only three times, you’re a failure,” Wojciechowicz says. That feeling of defeat can lead you to stop exercising at all. “But if instead you say, ‘I’ll do this one thing,’ doing the one thing becomes a great success.”

Wojciechowicz suggests these small steps for success:

Keep a food diary for one week.
Record every single thing you eat or drink—including the last bite of your kid’s sandwich and the carrots you eat while making dinner. At the end of a week you will have an objective profile of your nutrition. Then you can see that you don’t drink enough water, for example—and figure out where in each day to fit in an extra glass or two.

Control your portions.
If you love potato chips, put a handful in a bowl, then lock the rest of the bag away in the cabinet. That way, you’re not denying yourself something you crave, but you can avoid overdoing it. Use

smaller plates and bowls, and don’t overfill them. In a restaurant, ask for a doggie bag as soon as your food arrives. Put half the portion in there to take home. If it’s not in front of you, it’s easier to resist eating it.

Instead of resolving to join a gym, open the front door and walk around the block.
Two times at first, then three—you’ll see a change in your mood and health right away, which will encourage you to keep going.

Find one way to be active each day.
Maybe it’s climbing a few sets of stairs during a break at work. Maybe it’s doing some vigorous dance steps or a set of jumping jacks while the laundry is drying. Whatever it is, make sure it fits into your regular lifestyle. The next day, increase the flights of stairs you climb or the number of jumping jacks you do. Pretty soon, you’ll be on track to reach your health goals for the new year—and beyond.

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