

## A New Year for the Taking

We usually kick off January with a feature article on diet and weight loss. All of this is great, but I wanted to go a little further this year. Michele Burklund, NMD, had just emailed me about the power of creating rituals and how to keep positive momentum going—not just for the month of January, but throughout the year. I wanted to learn how to accomplish this, and I thought you might too.

One of the stumbling blocks to success, says Burklund, is that many people mistakenly put their focus on the goal itself, rather than the mindset, feelings, and intentions behind it. Don't just have a goal to have a goal—think about what you really want, and then develop a passion and meaningful routine around it. On p. 28, we have nine ways to help you do this, and then you can watch your New Year's resolutions turn into a daily reality.

What would you like to have happen in your life this year? It's a fresh start, a new decade, and a chance to move in the direction of your dreams. Health is a big part of that for most of us. When you feel good—not just physically, but also emotionally and mentally—anything is possible. Wishing you a happy, healthy New Year!

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# NEW YEAR'S GUIDE TO Making Lasting Changes

The New Year is an exciting time, full of possibilities and potential to make a real change in our lives. But despite the best of intentions, many of us have a hard time getting started. In fact, a shocking study from *U.S. News and World Report* showed that 80 percent of New Year's resolutions will fail by February. Why? Because our focus is on the goal itself, rather than the mindset, feelings, and intentions behind it.

This step-by-step guide will give you the tools you need to create lasting change, to replace habits with meaningful rituals, and to thrive in 2020 and all the years ahead.

**IF YOU WANT TO KEEP YOUR RESOLUTIONS THIS YEAR, THE KEY ISN'T TO CHANGE YOUR GOALS, BUT YOUR MINDSET**

BY MICHELE BURKLUND, NMD

**1 Be passionate:** When thinking about setting a goal, ask yourself how much you really want it. Choose a New Year's resolution that is not only practical, but creates positive feelings and emotions. A well-known study from the University of Pennsylvania discovered that "grit" is a key attribute for attaining goals. Grit, which is defined as having both the perseverance and passion for a long-term goal, is an important predictor for long-term success. For example, let's say your resolution is to "get healthy." Now ask yourself how getting healthy will make you feel. What do you see yourself doing once you achieve your goal?

Keep in mind that less is more when deciding upon which goals to pursue. The more goals you choose to focus on at any given time, the more scattered your focus becomes.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Choose one goal. Write down how you would feel when you achieved it, then write down what you would do if you achieved it.



Photo: Monster Zine/istockphoto.com

**2 Define it:** Now that you have a New Year's resolution that you're passionate about, it's time to break it down into small actionable steps that will create profound change over time. The famous saying by Lao Tzu is still relevant today: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step."

Continuing with the example of "get healthy," break this goal down into smaller parts focusing on nutrition, exercise, and overall wellness, making this large goal seem more attainable with a clear plan of action. Some examples could include adding one serving of greens into your daily meals, starting a daily food journal, going for 20-minute walks 4 days a week, working with a fitness trainer once a week, having a nutrient-dense, home-cooked meal twice a week, or practicing mindfulness for 10 minutes each morning.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Write down 5 actionable steps that will help you to achieve your goal.



**3 Set a date:** Having clear and measurable goals will set you up for success. Over 2,000 years ago, the philosopher Aristotle detailed this approach by stating, "First have a definite, clear, practical ideal; a goal, an objective. Second, have the necessary means to achieve your ends: wisdom, money, materials, and methods. Third, adjust all your means to that end."

The modern twist on this ancient method goes by the acronym "SMART," which stands for Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Reasonable, and Timely. A recent study published in the *Journal of Health Education and Teaching* found that the SMART approach was successful in preventing weight gain in a group of college students who used it. The study also confirmed that having a passion or a clear motivation improved outcomes, as did consistent monitoring.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Write down measurable actions to achieve your goals within a clear time frame.

**4 Adjust accordingly:** Reaching a goal is never a straight road. Socrates said, "Falling down is not a failure. Failure comes when you stay where you have fallen." Focus on progress rather than perfection. Allow yourself to approach failure with a new mindset—see it as part of the journey, and continue forward.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Take 15 minutes each week and go over the actions you performed that got you closer to your desired goal. Next, write down the actionable items that you didn't get done, and then write what held you back and what you will do moving forward.



**5 Be conscious:** This is easier said than done because many of our biggest obstacles are unconscious actions, such as grabbing the chips while watching TV or going straight for the soda at the grocery store. Think about the feelings or routines that bring about these unhealthy behaviors. The more you become aware of them, the better you will be at stopping them.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Write down your "triggers" or times/activities that tempt you to veer off course.

**6 Feel grateful:** It has literally been proven that a grateful mindset can improve many aspects of your life, from your stress level and mood to your blood pressure. A study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that a grateful outlook improved both psychological and physical well-being among its participants. Counting your blessings is also an important attribute for reaching your New Year's resolution by helping to keep you positive through the challenges that might arise along the journey.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** List 5 things that you're thankful for each day.

**7 Visualize:** This has long been a secret to success among Olympic athletes, and a study from the *Journal of Sports Science & Medicine* showed that the practice of mental imagery along with physical training was able to minimize the risk of injuries, physiological stress, and overtraining while improving muscle strength. Your brain doesn't know the difference between a visualization and reality.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Take several minutes each day to visualize yourself as if you have achieved your goal, and focus on the feelings that accompany it.

**8 Replace habits with inspiring rituals:** A ritual is an intentional set of actions done with a purpose—something that goes beyond just the action itself. A habit, on the other hand, is an unconscious action done from repetitive actions.

By creating rituals, you're adding more meaning into your life, your focus

is on the power of that moment, you're enjoying and even celebrating each action, and you're mindful during the entire routine. For example, if you find yourself repeatedly hitting the snooze button on the alarm, taking a quick shower and not remembering if you shampooed your hair, or mindlessly eating your breakfast while stuck in traffic, these are all habits that can be replaced with intentional and empowering rituals instead. Try choosing the music or sounds you want to hear as you wake up, begin practicing mindfulness meditation for 10 minutes each morning, place some eucalyptus inside your shower to awaken your senses, make a delicious breakfast smoothie packed with protein and phytonutrients, or practice being present during your morning commute.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Design your morning ritual with purpose and meaning from the time you wake up to the time you begin your day.

**9 Create a mantra:** Mantras have been used for thousands of years to help set intentions, clear the mind, and energize a thought. Creating a mantra to help you reach your goal will help set that intention, keep you focused, and bring awareness to it. In fact, a pilot study from India that evaluated the effect of mantras on overall well-being, stress, and depression recruited students from top-ranking colleges to select a mantra of their choice and listen to it for a period of time. The study found that the students who listened to their selected mantras had both an improved level of psychological well-being and better clarity of mind. For this exercise, a mantra can be a word, a prayer, a statement, or even a sound—something that resonates with you to help you on your journey that you can repeat throughout the day either silently or out loud.

**PERSONAL EXERCISE:** Create your own mantra and repeat it throughout the day.

