

Topic: Accomplishing Your New Year's Resolutions

The holiday season is fast approaching and soon many of us will begin declaring our New Year's resolutions. But, most of the time, it's easier said than done. **Michael Kitchens, assistant professor of psychology at Lebanon Valley College in Annville, Pa.**, says the key to accomplishing your New Year's resolutions is self-control.

"The failure to accomplish New Year's resolutions occurs because people fail to effectively engage in self-control. Self-control requires people to exert energy and active attempts to engage in self-control deplete these energy reservoirs," says Kitchens. "Therefore, successfully turning down a sweet, fattening, snack may be accomplished in the middle of the day when we are vigilantly attending to our goal of losing weight, but when we are tired at night, it is difficult to turn down that after-dinner bowl of ice cream."

Kitchens says failure begins with vague or weak goals. Broad goals, such as "I want to lose weight," rarely lead to success.

"In addition, people fail at New Year's resolutions before they ever actively attempt accomplishing them because they don't commit to their resolutions," adds Kitchens. "They make them at the beginning of the year and do little else to actively pursue them."

Kitchens says, "Have a realistic outlook and be prepared for a tough battle. Common resolutions, such as losing weight or stop smoking, will be incredibly difficult to accomplish. It will mean changing your lifestyle and having to constantly fend off these temptations. They will greet you in the morning and tuck you in at night. That is a long battle!"

Limiting yourself to a few resolutions, maybe even one, and being specific are a few things to keep in mind when making your resolutions, says Kitchens. "It is tempting to make a list of 'to-dos,' but that list will easily be over-whelming and you will end up frustrated."

"Set a specific goal, such as 'I want to lose X number of pounds by Y.' People who set high goals tend to accomplish more, but this does not mean that your goals should be unrealistic," adds Kitchens. "This simply means that setting an unreasonably low goal provides little motivation to reach your goal. Set a goal that is challenging, but manageable. That sensitive balance really can only be made by each person."

Kitchens adds people are more successful when they monitor their progress. If your resolution is to lose weight, check your weight regularly. If it's to save money, write down where you've spent your money. "Monitoring those few, challenging goals you set will dramatically improve your success rate. "

Some resolutions include overcoming bad habits, such as smoking, eating or alcohol consumption. These could be difficult to accomplish because they are easy to rely on when stressed out.

"These vices require constant vigilance and deplete our energy resources," says Kitchens. "We not only have to manage our stress, but also have to exercise restraint in accomplishing our long-term goal to stop smoking, for example. In these situations, people tend to think about their immediate state instead of their long-term goals of a healthy lifestyle. "

“While these vices are especially difficult to overcome, they can be beaten,” adds Kitchens. “One of the best ways is to have a social support system. We may find it easy to privately violate our own standards, but it is hard to blemish our public self. Moreover, social support systems are effective and healthy ways to manage stress.”

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Dick Jones Communications helps Lebanon Valley College with its national public affairs work.