

The importance of goals, plans and accountability to achieve better health in 2023

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The new year is here, and everyone knows what that means—new resolutions, goals, plans and dreams. Ritualistically, people often treat each new year as an opportunity to pursue an unattainable feat from their past. This may include the improvement of their career, relationship, faith or even their health. It's like drafting the blueprint of a new house. It's a clean slate that gives people the motivation to dream. For many, this dream usually involves their hopes of improving their health in the new year.

Over each holiday break, many people receive or purchase gym memberships, equipment and/or workout gear to inspire and encourage themselves to pursue their goal of getting in better shape. They may also buy cookbooks or start new diets that are trending across the world for their guarantees of success. Seemingly, these trends may or may not be different from previous ones, even though their marketing may be fresh, innovative and catchy. A charismatic personality is also used to sell these trendy diets or workouts such as Billy Blanks, Richard Simmons or Tony Horton. Then there's the never-ending list of diets over the years that promise results such as the Atkins Diet, Grapefruit Diet, Paleo Diet and Keto Diet. Thus, one can safely say that these trends won't end anytime soon.

With health goals being common, especially around the new year, it may be useful to investigate effective, evidence-based methods for achieving health goals. This is important to note, as losing weight isn't a marker of good health. There may be many reasons for a person losing weight, and those reasons may be detrimental to that person. For example, starving your body to lose weight may result in weight loss, but it may also be devastating to that person's mental and physical health. Also, gaining lots of muscle without proper nutrition may also be deleterious to the body. Thus, exploring evidence-based methods for achieving health goals in a healthy manner is valuable.

To be successful with reaching health goals, there are [published strategies](#) that are known to be effective. First, being specific and clear on the intended goal is important. Do you want to exercise two days a week? Do you want to lose ten pounds in two months? Do you want to train for a long distance marathon in six months? Being specific about your goals sets expectations correctly. Once your clear goals are set, the tough part remains—action. Some studies refer to it as the intention-behavior gap. Next, it's important to organize your actions into two categories—approach and avoidance. For example, an approach goal would be the promise of doing thirty push-ups a day, while an avoidance goal would be the removal of potato chips from your diet. One can easily grasp the importance of setting both kinds of goals to increase their chances of being successful.

Another approach to improving your health is the application of performance versus mastery goals. A mastery goal usually involves the person learning a new skill or act, which may include learning new workout routines, nutritional meals and/or thought processes. Differently, a performance goal includes the completing of a health goal such as losing a certain amount of weight in a set amount of time. Research states that both goals should be pursued during one's health journey, while knowing that a person not meeting their performance goal may affect them psychologically and prevent them from continuing to reach their goal. Therefore, it's imperative for people to also set mastery goals to evaluate the health techniques which may include—knowing how to properly lift weights, prepare foods and rest the body along with the appropriate frequency and intensity of these actions.

For those in the public health arena, applying the SMART criteria can also be effective with meeting health goals. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. One can easily see

how applying these criteria to a person's health goals can be beneficial, as this considers each person's current state and mindset. What is attainable and realistic to one person won't be the same for someone else. Therefore, it's important for people to be honest with themselves when crafting their health plans. In addition, [research](#) also states that having a workout partner is also known to help people achieve their health goals, as people are more likely to be consistent and feel motivated when exercising with someone else. Workout partners are also more likely to hold each other accountable on goals or markers that were developed from the very beginning. Thus, don't be afraid to ask your friend or partner to help you in your pursuit of better health.

In summary, many people will seek better health in 2023 and rightfully so. However, it's essential for people to set goals (both approach and avoidance goals), ensuring any benefits gained won't be nullified by any bad habits in motion. Then, establishing both mastery and performance goals will enhance their chances of not only learning new skills and techniques of better health, but also reaching the desired goal or destination. Following the SMART criteria will help solidify the person's plans and goals along the way with precise and realistic actions and expectations. Finally, having someone with you during this health voyage will increase each person's motivation and dedication with achieving their health goals of interest. Maybe this year, following these strategies will finally resolve your new year's resolutions.