



## HealthyLife

Living well in body, mind and spirit

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### Your Best in 2015: No Quick Fix!

Posted on January 7, 2015 | By Carin Lane, Graphic Designer/Health & Fitness writer/blogger



**It's early in the year, and resolutions abound:** To quit smoking, to lose 50 pounds, to stop being so busy and stressed out. Experts say the key to making these changes attainable can be summed up in two words: lifestyle change.

But what does that mean, and how to we do it?

A lifestyle change involves striving for long-term goals in a realistic timeline, says Marianne Romano of Romano Dietetic and Nutrition Consulting on web: romano health coaching. in Albany.

"People want to make changes over time that will lead to optimal lifetime health," she says.

The key to making a lifestyle change is in striving for progress rather than perfection, says Kathleen McAllister, project manager for the Capital Region Eat Smart New York Program.

"Real lifestyle changes take time, support and a doable plan," said McAllister. "It also takes an understanding that it's a journey, and there are often numerous starts, stops and detours."

And to turn it from a dream into an action plan is what integrates it into your life and creates your "new normal," says Phil Rainer, chief clinical officer for Capital Counseling.

"People have a dream or vision: It would be wonderful if I was (fill in the blank). But they never convert it into an action plan and never write down what specifically they need to do day to day," he says.

And so the dream stays in dreamland and nothing changes over the long haul. To make a lifestyle change, you must be committed to a routine that you stay with when you're excited about it and when you're not excited about it.

While resolutions can be short-lived, they do serve a purpose: People who make a resolution are 10 times more likely to change their lives, according to a 2014 study by the Journal of Clinical Psychology at the University of Scranton.



So in 2015, it's about focusing on the long term. Here are tips to support your effort to achieve your resolutions through lifestyle change:

### **Be realistic.**

"We want to set reasonable goals that contain smaller, doable steps," said McAllister. "This will lead to longer-lasting change, and can still incorporate some fun and social aspects."

When making a change for the new year, be sure to think about the reason behind the goal you've set and if it's the right fit for you. It's OK to be selfish in what you're trying to achieve, but utilize your support system. Also, aim for a trend of positive change in your routines.

"Life is a delicate balance, and it's forever evolving," said Chris Viagrande, psychiatric nurse practitioner in Latham. "It's not that you need to hit a grand slam every time you set a goal, but rather work to manage these goals over the course of time."

### **Unplug every day.**

Give your mind some time off from the LED screen by putting your smartphone away at the dinner table or logging off at least one hour before bed.

Research from the National Sleep Foundation shows that light from electronics can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep throughout the night.

"This is going to affect health in a big way, too," said Romano. "It's not just our eating, our choices and exercise, but it's also sleep that can have long-term effects on achieving optimal health."

Unplugging can be a way to relax by silencing the constant ping of e-mail notifications, and it might even inspire some face-to-face conversation with friends and family to unwind as a group, rather than in a group chat.

### **Become a smart shopper.**

"Glance at the nutritional labels and shop along the edges of the grocery store," said Laurie Burton-Grego, a dietitian and diabetes educator at the Center for Preventative Medicine and Cardiovascular Health in Albany.

Fresher products can be found along the edges of the store, while the middle aisles contain shelves of processed foods with less nutritional value.

To make a long-term change, monitor the portion size of each meal to consume fewer calories without cutting out your favorites. Eat more slowly, and you'll find that you're ultimately eating less.

### **Plan things out.**

Using visual aids, such as a whiteboard to track weight loss or monitor eating habits, can help identify which behaviors produce certain types of results.

Charts, logs and diagrams can help show what helps, or does not, in progressing toward a goal, said Viagrande.

Whether you're checking off items on a to-do list or helping map out the bigger picture, tracking progress in a visual way can be a great motivational tool.

Leslie Del Castillo, a territory manager for Weight Watchers based in Clifton Park, suggests small, routine changes when setting goals for weight loss and healthy eating.

Setting out your workout clothes the night before, leaving sneakers in your car for a lunchtime walk or keeping a gym bag packed and ready to go are ways to work your goal into your everyday routine.

"Small, daily changes can add up to big results in the end," Del Castillo said.

**Now what?** *(From Phil Rainer, chief clinical officer for Capital Counseling.)*

» **For starters ...** Have a real plan you can stick with. And be realistic. Don't say you'll go to the gym seven days a week if you can't fit it in your schedule. Start small, taking on one thing at a time. "If people are trying to do a whole lifestyle makeover in the first week of the year, it's really hard to stick with that," Rainer says.

» **Don't get discouraged when ...** you fall off — or eat a pizza. "Sometimes the pizza wins out," Rainer says. It's important not to get down on yourself or panic. As quickly as possible redirect your behavior back to the goal. It's normal to slip; if you're making a change, sometimes you do great and sometimes not.

» **If that still doesn't work ...** Do it with a friend, coworker or a family member. It's helpful to have mutual support, not to mention accountability.

**"Your Best in 2015: A Year of Change":** is an ongoing series of articles aimed at fine-tuning your already fine self throughout our feature sections in 2015. Just look for the red "Your Best in 2015" label. And is there a topic you want us to cover? Let us know by emailing features editor Jennifer Gish at [jgish@timesunion.com](mailto:jgish@timesunion.com)

*(story by Taylor Rao, a frequent Times Union contributor)*

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