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Struggling with Weight Loss Resolution? Here's Help!

**By Melanie Reynolds
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After binge eating our way through the holiday season, we shouldn't be surprised to learn that weight loss was the number one New Year's resolution this year. It has been for years on end.

That's according to the Statistics Brain Research Institute, which also determined that about a third of us who make resolutions give up on them by the end of January. A very discouraging statistic, but we still have time to beat the odds!

It takes a lot of willpower and commitment to reach a healthy weight, but we all know it's worth the effort. People who are overweight or obese are more likely to develop diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, and bone disease. People who reach and stay at a favorable weight live longer and have healthier lives. They save money, too, by reducing their health-care costs.

Some of us are tempted to try fad diets in a desperate attempt to shave those pounds off fast. But diets are often hard to maintain in the long run. They can even lead to weight gain if we don't change our behavior, too.

And therein lies the key to losing weight and keeping it off: We need to find small and realistic changes we can make in our lives to help us stabilize our eating patterns. As one British dietitian put it, "Anything that isn't a lifestyle change is not an appropriate weight loss strategy."

Making a lifestyle change is challenging. The American Psychological Association (APA) suggests that we think of it as an evolution, not a resolution. It's a process that requires time and support. The APA recommends starting small and changing one behavior at a time. Recognize that it can take up to three months for a lifestyle change to "stick."

Framing your weight loss goal in positive rather than negative language (I will eat more fruits and vegetables vs. I will not eat sugar) can help curb cravings. Food is not the enemy. Healthy eating really is about moderation, not avoidance.

For years, researchers have been testing ways to help people lose weight. Here are several tried and true steps that have been proven to work:

- **Practice mindful eating.** Increase your awareness of what and how much you're eating by keeping a food diary and writing down what you eat.
- **Drink water,** especially before meals. It can boost your metabolism and help you feel full faster.
- **Eat breakfast.** A good breakfast should include lean protein, whole grains, and fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables. Skipping breakfast may tempt you to make unhealthy choices later to satisfy your raging hunger.
- **Eat at scheduled times and only at the table.** Make mealtime an enjoyable experience; savor every bite of food you do eat. Avoid mindless munching.
- **Use smaller plates.** In some studies, this has been shown to help people eat fewer calories.
- **Measure your portions.** Americans are all too fond of super-sized food portions. Food packages indicate what nutritionists consider to be a serving size. Use measuring cups and spoons to ensure that your serving size is realistic.
- **Chew more slowly.** It can take a while for your brain to register that you've had enough to eat. Some studies show that chewing more slowly can help you eat fewer calories and increase the production of hormones linked to weight loss.
- **Eat whole, single-ingredient foods.** These foods are naturally filling.
- **Share your entree.** When eating out, split an entree with your dining partner. Not only will you cut your calorie intake in half, you'll save money, too.
- **Brush your teeth after dinner.** Then you won't be as tempted to have a late-night snack.

Finally, be patient. According to a study published in *Obesity Research*, people who have lost at least 30 pounds -- and kept it off for at least two years -- say weight loss takes less effort as time goes on.

And no matter what your weight loss goal is, even a modest weight loss, such as 5 to 10 percent of your total body weight, is likely to produce health benefits, like improvements in blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood sugars.

For more scientifically sound information about losing weight, visit:

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: www.eatright.org/resources/health/weight-loss
- National Weight Control Registry: www.nwcr.ws

I also recommend the Inch by Inch diabetes prevention program at St. Peter's Hospital: www.stpetes.org/hospital/medical-services/clinical-nutrition/inch-inch