

A Healthy Start



A young man turns to his friend at a New Year's party and asks for a cigarette. The friend says, "I thought you made a New Year's resolution to stop smoking?" "I did," the man replied, "I'm in phase one." "What is phase one?" "I've quit buying."

Traditionally, the New Year is a time to make new resolutions and plan for a healthier and more prosperous New Year. It is a time to set goals and make changes. If you want to develop a healthier lifestyle in 2007 there are ways to get beyond "Phase 1" and develop healthy habits. Even though making changes can be challenging the tips below will help you get started.

Identify your goals and break each goal down into small manageable steps. Is your goal to stop smoking, exercise on a regular basis, lose 20 pounds, or eat healthier? For example, instead of attempting to run 5 miles your first day of a running program, start small and gradually build up to running 5 miles (or more, depending on your goal) since muscle soreness and fatigue can cause you to lose interest quickly.

Make a plan and set a date to begin your lifestyle change. If eating healthier is a goal, clean out your cupboards, make a list of the healthy foods you want to incorporate into your diet, and go shopping. Even small changes can add up over time to improve your health. If your goal is to stop smoking, throw out all cigarettes, lighters, etc.

Track your habits by keeping a log of personal habits (food intake, activity level, and smoking habits) to help you identify stressors that may tempt you to want to revert back to an old habit or to not pursue your new activity. It can also be a boost of confidence when you are reminded of your successful days, or a boost of motivation for those not so successful days.

Overcome obstacles that might keep you from obtaining your goals. Know in advance what you will do should you be faced with a difficult situation. If invited to a function where food will be served, plan in advance what you will and will not eat. If it is a rainy day and you happen to exercise outside, have an alternative exercise plan already in place.

Reward yourself with something you enjoy when you have achieved a goal. Make sure this reward encourages rather than undermines your new healthy habit. For example, if your goal is to lose weight, don't reward yourself with a piece of cake. Instead, treat yourself to new running shoes, etc.

Be sure to check with your healthcare professional before beginning any new exercise plan, weight loss plan, or before taking any new medications to help with smoking cessation.

References: <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3039981>

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