

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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Gary J. Meiers, Ph. D., Jo Ann Hammond, Ph. D.,
& Associates, Ltd.

10009 – 85 Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6E 2J9



Website: drsgaryjoanmeierspsychologists.ca

Phone: (780) 433-2269

Fax: (780) 431-0463

E-Mail: psychrec@gmail.com

Making Your New Year's Resolution Stick

American Psychological Association

It can be daunting when your list of New Year's Resolutions is as long as your holiday shopping list. In addition to the post-holiday slump, not being able to keep your resolutions by February, March or even late January may increase your anxiety. When your holiday decorations are packed up and stored away, the frustration of an unused gym membership or other reminders of failed resolutions can make the later winter months feel hopeless.

However, it is important to remember that the New Year isn't meant to serve as a catalyst for sweeping character changes. It is a time for people to reflect on their past year's behavior and promise to make positive lifestyle changes. "Setting small, attainable goals throughout the year, instead of a singular, overwhelming goal on January 1 can help you reach whatever it is you strive for," says psychologist Lynn Bufka, PhD. "Remember, it is not the extent of the change that matters, but rather the act of recognizing that lifestyle change is important and working toward it, one step at a time."

Start small

Make resolutions that you think you can keep. If, for example, your aim is to exercise more frequently, schedule three or four days a week at the gym instead of seven. If you would like to eat healthier, try replacing dessert with something else you enjoy, like fruit or yogurt, instead of seeing your diet as a form of punishment.

Change one behavior at a time

Unhealthy behaviors develop over the course of time. Thus, replacing unhealthy behaviors with healthy ones requires time. Don't get overwhelmed and think that you have to reassess everything in your life. Instead, work toward changing one thing at a time.

Talk about it

Share your experiences with family and friends. Consider joining a support group to reach your goals, such as a workout class at your gym or a group of coworkers quitting smoking. Having someone to share your struggles and successes with makes your journey to a healthier lifestyle that much easier and less intimidating.

Don't beat yourself up

Perfection is unattainable. Remember that minor missteps when reaching your goals are completely normal and OK. Don't give up completely because you ate a brownie and broke your diet or skipped the gym for a week because you were busy. Everyone has ups and downs; resolve to recover from your mistakes and get back on track.

Ask for support

Accepting help from those who care about you and will listen strengthens your resilience and ability to manage stress caused by your resolution. If you feel overwhelmed or unable to meet your goals on your own, consider seeking professional help. Psychologists are uniquely trained to understand the connection between the mind and body. They can offer strategies as to how to adjust your goals so that they are attainable, as well as help you change unhealthy behaviors and address emotional issues.

"True human enlightenment will only happen when each and every single person on the planet has learned how to regulate their very own nervous system."

PETER LEVINE

IRENE LYON

Calming a Wiggled Out Autonomic Nervous System Using the Vagus Nerve

Innis Integrative Body Mind Therapy

Are you feeling a little out of control? Like you don't know how to calm yourself down? Most of us do, at one time or another. Here are a few tips for learning how to self-soothe when it feels like your thoughts or body have taken over. That out-of-control feeling is usually associated with the sympathetic nervous system.

Our sympathetic nervous system is the part of our nervous system that mobilizes us into action. If our nervous system detects a threat, real or perceived, it will trigger our fight/flight/freeze response. If there isn't a real threat, and we do not need the mobilization of our protective mechanisms, then we need to recruit our parasympathetic nervous system, which is the part that calms us down.

The vagus nerve is the most influential nerve in our parasympathetic nervous system. It functions like your body's natural reset button. Learning how to stimulate your vagus nerve

allows you to bring about the calm, collected feeling we all desire.

Vagus means wandering in Latin. The nerve was named the "wandering" nerve for the meandering path it takes from the brain to all the organs in the chest and abdomen. It is the longest nerve in the body and it influences heart rate, respiration, and digestion.

It monitors activity in the liver, spleen, stomach, pancreases, heart, and lungs. The information from the vagus nerve is bidirectional, which means that the communication is from the brain down to the organs as well as from the organs up to the brain. In fact, most of the traffic in the vagus nerve (80 percent of its messages) travel upstream from the body to the brain.

The tone of the vagus nerve is significant to the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. Heart rate variability is a way to measure vagal tone. As you breathe in, your heart rate speeds up a little. As you breathe out, it slows down a little. The higher your vagal tone, the greater the difference between your inhalation heart rate and your exhalation heart rate. The higher the tone, the more efficient you are at relaxing.

Higher vagal tone is associated with better general health. It leads to better blood sugar regulation, reduced risk of stroke and cardiovascular disease, improved digestion and a reduction in migraines. Most importantly, it is associated with increased emotional stability, resiliency, and longevity.

Lower vagal tone is associated with mood instability, depression, diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, cognitive impairment, chronic inflammation, and cardiovascular disease.

How To Activate Your Vagus Nerve

- Slow, rhythmic, diaphragmatic breathing.
- Splashing cold water on your face, or taking a cold shower stimulates the drive reflex, which is associated with stimulating the vagus nerve. You can also achieve the same effect by holding a Ziplock bag filled with ice cubes against your face and holding your breath. Or submerge your tongue in cold liquid.
- Meditating.
- Do yoga.
- Humming, or making a "voooooo" or "om" sound stimulates the vocal cords and facilitates long, slow, exhalation.
- Valsalva Maneuver: Exhale against a closed airway by keeping your mouth closed and pinching your nose while trying to breathe out. It increases the pressure inside of your chest cavity thereby stimulating your vagus nerve.
- Prosody, the act of speaking slowly, rhythmically, and melodically as if you're soothing a young child or pet.
- Spend time in nature.
- Think positive thoughts about other people.
- Engage in positive social relationships.

- Laugh out loud! A full belly laugh stimulates the vagus nerve and is contagious!
- Engage in prayer.
- Mild exercise stimulates gut flow and the vagus nerve.
- Massages, even gently massaging around the carotid sinus located on the sides of your neck can stimulate the vagus nerve.
- Gargling activates the vagus nerve by activating the muscles in the back of the throat while exhaling slowly.
- Cultivate healthy intestinal bacteria, use probiotics.

Stimulating the vagus nerve stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which in turns reduces our neurophysiological experience of stress. It reduces our heart rate and blood pressure. It influences the limbic system in our brain, where emotions are processed. It stimulates digestion and creates an increased feeling of well-being. Start practicing the art of stimulating your vagus nerve to relieve anxiety, depression, tension, and the general sense of unease when stress builds up. I invite you to practice daily as a preventive measure to ensure greater emotional resilience and improved health.

~HAPPY NEW YEAR~

Net News

Here are some web sites you & your family may find helpful.

How To Harness Your Anxiety

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/well/mind/how-to-harness-your-anxiety.html>

A 15-minute Neurosensory Exercise to Pause and De-stress

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoPOmAb108w>

Six Essential Practices to Improve Listening Skills in Relationships

<https://www.estherperel.com/blog/six-essential-practices-to-improve-listening-skills-in-relationships>

How to Teach Your Child About the Mind-Body Connection

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-teach-your-child-about-mind-body-connection-5186771>

Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous: 780-424-5900

www.alcoholics-anonymous.org

Al-Anon/Alateen: 780-433-1818

Support Network / Referral Line: 211

Distress Line: 780 482-4357

Cocaine Anonymous: 780-425-2715

Access 24/7 – 780 424 2424

Informative Links:

The National Women's Health Information Center:

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/>