

An Ounce of Prevention

Complimentary

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No More Resolutions

It's *almost* that time of the year: the season of resolutions. New Year, new beginning, a slimmer and healthier new you. Undoubtedly, many of us will, on impulse, make unrealistic weight and fitness goals that will be abandoned guiltily just a few weeks later.

As we once again turn over a new leaf in this seasonal book of self-change, we sooner or later come to realize that this story of resolve and willpower has no happy ending.

In pondering this circular narrative of our lives, it appears that we've embraced the wrong meaning of the right word. Let me explain.

You see, the term resolution has two meanings: the seasonally-familiar meaning of a statement of intent to solve a problem, and the original, historical meaning of analysis and process-focus. The word resolution stems from the Latin verb *solvere* which means to loosen, to dissolve, and to break down. Thus, resolution, in its original sense, is the process of reducing things into simpler form (Online Etymology Dictionary). In other words, a resolution is a process of zooming in to amplify the invisible, a way of distilling the complex into manageable nuances.

With this distinction in mind, it appears that one of the main reasons why diets typically do not work is because they are a sudden and impulsive undertaking. We dive into a complex process of weight management without understanding what's involved. We bank on our resolve and willpower without understanding the variables of success and the skill-power necessary to bring about the desired outcome. And indeed, once we proclaim our intent to slim up and get healthier, we rush off to buy a new book that will tell us what not to eat or we try to recycle an old failed self-restriction solution into a New Year's re-solution.

There is usually no preparation or practice of the new eating skills and habits. We jump into the role of a dieter after reading the script only once, without rehearsing our lines. We go from non-dieting to dieting, from out-of-control eating to over-controlled eating, expecting to have the performance of a lifetime, complete with the standing ovation of envious onlookers.

But the bombastic beginning (the triumphantly proclaimed New Year's resolution) and the vision of the outcome are but the beginning and the end of a journey and not the journey itself! In affirming our commitment to a healthier eating lifestyle, we have to go through the actual process of change, we have to travel the journey of mindfulness and awareness one meal at a time. We have to break down the process of mindless overeating in order to understand the booby-traps of mindlessness. We have to distill the know-how of mindful eating, and in doing so, move beyond promises and willpower to zoom in on the formula of sustainable eating in moderation.

So, if you plan to go on another diet in the future, consider learning how to eat mindfully first. Instead of trying to un-learn your life-long eating habits in a grand gesture of willpower and resolve, take time — maybe a year's worth of time — to learn how to eat mindfully. After all, the solution to the problem of overeating isn't dieting, but eating; not self-restriction, but the presence of Self; not willpower but Skill-Power.

Let it be different this year. Close the scrapbook of snap resolutions and turn over a truly new leaf: set no start dates and make no promises. Take a break from weight watching. Consider yourself to be on a sabbatical from dieting, on a contemplative retreat before your post-holiday-season diet (if, in fact, you are going on one). Let a mindful-not-mouthful approach serve as the grand rehearsal to the "new you." Let the New Year bring a focus on the process, not on the result. Let your New Year's resolution be this: no more New Year's resolutions! And track some mindfults instead!

~By Pavel G. Somov, Ph.D.

<http://blogs.psychcentral.com/mindful-living/2010/12/no-more-resolutions/>

5 Tips for Healthy Goal Setting

You can only become truly accomplished at something you love. Don't make money your goal. Instead pursue the things you love

doing and then do them so well that people can't take their eyes off of you.

~ Maya Angelou

Goals: We all have them. Some are short-term, some are long-term and some are hard to put in a time frame. Whatever the situation, goals are important. They give us something to strive toward, and a reason to pat ourselves on the back when we've reached them.

We determine our goals based on experience and on what we want out of life. Some dream of getting married and having children. Some wish for an academic career or to own their own business. Some want to start a nonprofit organization, or travel, or simply live a healthier life.

No matter what our goals are, comparing them to others' can cause us to have a difficult time focusing on our own needs. We are the author of the chapters in our own book of life. Carefully select the content of your chapters, as well as your co-author.

It is important to consider what you want to achieve or what will make you feel whole. It is not only possible to feel complete as a whole. There can be a sense of completeness in the parts that make up the whole, as well. For example, you may feel complete or accomplished in your career choice but yet still be working on your personal relationships or health. Remember that your definition of "complete," "whole," or "accomplished" can vary from others'.

How you choose to set about achieving your goals is an individual process as well. Some people like to set small, specific goals; accomplishing them brings a feeling of satisfaction. Setting and achieving smaller goals also can help from feeling overwhelmed. And if you are unsuccessful meeting a small goal, you have the opportunity to fine-tune. (It can be hard not to want to pitch a bigger goal out the window if you don't fulfill it.) The best thing about goals is that, once you learn not to see them as being concrete, you are free to tweak them.

Below are some tips about setting and reaching goals:

- **Set small, appropriate goals.**
If you are unsure, seek advice or guidance from someone you trust, or get into counseling so that you can process.
- **Accept that failure can happen and that disappointments are a part of life.**
Don't set yourself up for failure. This does not mean that you must accept failure, but accept that sometimes when we try at something we may not succeed the first time. Don't give up!
- **Be realistic.**
Don't set yourself up for failure. For example, if you have not been exercising, don't expect to run a half marathon with only a couple weeks of running.
- **Understand and accept that your life's path is not the same as that of the person next to you.**
You may share the same goals, but your means for getting there may be different. Work with what suits you. Remember that what makes you feel whole may work for someone else.
- **Ask for help.**
Sometimes we need to get rid of the Superman/Superwoman cape! Some things cannot be accomplished without help. Reach out to someone you trust and who supports you.

If nothing else, have faith and confidence in yourself. You can do it!

~By Karisse Callender

<http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2013/03/03/5-tips-for-healthy-goal-setting/>

Managing Your Stress Through Tough Economic Times

Money is on the minds of most Americans. In fact, according to the American Psychological Association's 2010 Stress in America survey, over three-quarters of Americans (76 percent) cite money as a significant cause of stress. And while the economy appears to be becoming healthier, personal financial problems still worry many Americans.

But, like most of our everyday stress, this extra tension can be managed. There are healthy strategies available for managing stress during any difficult financial time for you and your family.

APA offers tips to help deal with your stress about money and the economy:

- **Pause but don't panic.** There are many negative stories in newspapers and on television about the state of the economy. Pay attention to what's happening around you, but refrain from getting caught up in doom-and-gloom hype, which can lead to high levels of anxiety and bad decision making. Avoid the tendency to overreact or to become passive. Remain calm and stay focused.
- **Identify your financial stressors and make a plan.** Take stock of your particular financial situation and what causes you stress. Write down specific ways you and your family can reduce expenses or manage your finances more efficiently. Then commit to a specific plan and review it regularly. Although this can be anxiety-provoking in the short term, putting things down on paper and committing to a plan can reduce stress. If you are having trouble paying bills or staying on top of debt, reach out for help by calling your bank, utilities or credit card company.
- **Recognize how you deal with stress related to money.** In tough economic times some people are more likely to relieve stress by turning to unhealthy activities like smoking, drinking, gambling or emotional eating. The strain can also lead to more conflict and arguments between partners. Be alert to these behaviors — if they are causing you trouble, consider seeking help from a psychologist or community mental health clinic before the problem gets worse.
- **Turn these challenging times into opportunities for real growth and change.** Times like this, while difficult, can offer opportunities to take stock of your current situation and make needed changes. Think of ways that these economic challenges can motivate you to find healthier ways to deal with stress. Try taking a walk — it's an inexpensive way to get good exercise. Having dinner at home with your family may not only save you money, but help bring you closer together. Consider learning a new skill. Take a course through your employer or look into low-cost resources in your community that can lead to a better job. The key is to use this time to think outside the box and try new ways of managing your life.
- **Ask for professional support.** Credit counseling services and financial planners are available to help you take control over your money situation. If you continue to be overwhelmed by the stress, you may want to talk with a psychologist who can help you address the emotions behind your financial worries, manage stress, and change unhealthy behaviors.

~ Tips made possible by Nancy Molitor, PhD.

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/economic-stress.aspx>

Violence in the Media — Psychologists Study TV and Video Game Violence for Potential Harmful Effects

Money is on the minds of most Americans. In fact, according to the American Psychological Association's 2010 Stress in America survey, over three-quarters of Americans (76 percent) cite money as a significant cause of stress. And while the economy appears to be becoming healthier, personal financial problems still worry many Americans.

Early research on the effects of viewing violence on television — especially among children — found a desensitizing effect and the potential for aggression. Is the same true for those who play violent video games? Psychological researchers are studying the question.

Television and Video Violence

Virtually since the dawn of television, parents, teachers, legislators and mental health professionals have wanted to understand the impact of television programs, particularly on children. Of special concern has been the portrayal of violence, particularly given psychologist Albert Bandura's work in the 1970s on social learning and the tendency of children to imitate what they see. As a result of 15 years of "consistently disturbing" findings about the violent content of children's programs, the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior was formed in 1969 to assess the impact of violence on the attitudes, values and behavior of viewers. The resulting report and a follow-up report in 1982 by the National Institute of Mental Health identified these major effects of seeing violence on television:

- Children may become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others.
- Children may be more fearful of the world around them.
- Children may be more likely to behave in aggressive or harmful ways toward others.

Research by psychologists L. Rowell Huesmann, Leonard Eron and others starting in the 1980s found that children who watched many hours of violence on television when they were in elementary school tended to show higher levels of aggressive behavior when they became teenagers. By observing these participants into adulthood, Huesmann and Eron found that the ones who'd watched a lot of TV violence when they were 8 years old were more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults. Interestingly, being aggressive as a child did not predict watching more violent TV as a teenager, suggesting that TV watching could be a cause rather than a consequence of aggressive behavior. However, later research by psychologists Douglas Gentile and Brad Bushman, among others, suggested that exposure to media violence is just one of several factors that can contribute to aggressive behavior.

Other research has found that exposure to media violence can desensitize people to violence in the real world and that, for some people, watching violence in the media becomes enjoyable and does not result in the anxious arousal that would be expected from seeing such imagery.

Video Game Violence

The advent of video games raised new questions about the potential impact of media violence, since the video game player is an active participant rather than merely a viewer. Ninety-seven percent of adolescents age 12-17 play video games — on a computer, on consoles such as the Wii, Playstation and Xbox, or on portable devices such as Gameboys, smartphones and tablets. A Pew Research Center survey in 2008 found that half of all teens reported playing a video game "yesterday," and those who played every day typically did so for an hour or more.

Many of the most popular video games, such as "Call of Duty" and "Grand Theft Auto," are violent; however, as video game technology is relatively new, there are fewer empirical studies of video game violence than other forms of media violence. Still, several meta-analytic reviews have reported negative effects of exposure to violence in video games. A 2010 review by psychologist Craig A. Anderson and others concluded that "the evidence strongly suggests that exposure to violent video games is a causal risk factor for increased aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, and aggressive affect and for decreased empathy and prosocial behavior." Anderson's earlier research showed that playing violent video games can increase a person's aggressive thoughts, feelings and behavior both in laboratory settings and in daily life. "One major conclusion from this and other research on violent entertainment media is that content matters," says Anderson.

Other researchers, including psychologist Christopher J. Ferguson, have challenged the position that video game violence harms children. While his own 2009 meta-analytic review reported results similar to Anderson's, Ferguson contends that laboratory results have not translated into real world, meaningful effects. He also claims that much of the research into video game violence has failed to control for other variables such as mental health and family life, which may have impacted the results. His work has found that children who are already at risk may be more likely to choose to play violent video games. According to Ferguson, these other risk factors, as opposed to the games, cause aggressive and violent behavior.

The American Psychological Association launched an analysis in 2013 of peer-reviewed research on the impact of media violence and is reviewing its policy statements in the area. Both are expected to be completed in 2014.

Full citations are noted at the following link.

<http://www.apa.org/research/action/protect.aspx>



Self- Help Corner:

Alcoholics Anonymous:	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org	780-424-5900
Al-Anon/Alateen:		780-433-1818
Support Network / Referral Line:		211
Distress Line:		780-482-4357
Cocaine Anonymous:		780-425-2715

Informative Links:

The National Women's Health Information Center:
<http://4woman.gov>