

Don't be critical, track your progress and find a New Year's resolution buddy: Psychologists reveal 6 top tips to help you **STICK** to your 2016 goals

Joining the gym, banishing junk food from your diet and slashing your alcohol intake.

As the clock strikes midnight across the globe, and the world heralds the start of 2016, millions will resolve to make radical changes to their lives.

There will be vows to shed weight, quit smoking and get fit, resolutions to spend more time helping others, take on new challenges and spend more time with loved ones.

But, within weeks, days in some sorry cases, these New Year's resolutions will be broken, discarded and long forgotten.

Is it possible to stick at a resolution - just one? And why do people find it so hard to achieve their well-intended New Year's goals?

The main problem, Dr John Norcross, a professor of psychology at the University of Scranton, told Daily Mail Online, is that people typically fail to remain realistic.

'Largely people are unprepared for change,' he said. 'A fair number just clink the champagne glasses and confuse a resolution with a wish.'

But, while it is rare for people to see their resolutions last into the second month of the year, Dr Norcross and other experts said there are ways to achieve the seemingly impossible.

ONE IN THREE WILL FAIL WITHIN FIRST SEVEN DAYS

Dr Norcross spearheaded a study on the efficacy of New Year's resolutions and found that 40 per cent of adults in the US resolve to make a lifestyle change as the clock strikes midnight on January 1.

A poll of 3,036 adults in the US found that 21 per cent of resolutions revolve around weight loss, 14 percent on finances and exercise and 10 per cent on getting a new job.

Additionally, seven per cent resolve to eat healthier diets, while five per cent seek to manage stress better, stop or reduce smoking or improve a relationship.

Yet, only half of people will be successful in sticking to their resolutions after six months.

Dr Norcross told Daily Mail Online that around 30 per cent will actually fail at their New Year's resolution within the first seven to 14 days.

He said they get caught up with excitement when making the resolution, but lack the skills to follow through.

'They certainly want to be inspired and motivated at the beginning, but when that gives out within the week, they need to be able to [rely on their] skills,' Dr Norcross said.

In one of their studies, Dr Norcross and his research team contacted resolvers every week or two for six months.

They found that 71 per cent were successful for two weeks, while 61 per cent were successful for one month and 46 per cent for six months.

The study noted that those success rates may be higher than average because the constant contact with the study participants may have enhanced their behavior change.

UNDERSTAND THE REASON WHY YOU WANT TO CHANGE

Dr Ellen Langer, a professor of psychology at Harvard University, wasn't involved with the study, but told Daily Mail Online that many people fail at their New Year's resolutions because they don't understand the reasons behind why they want to change.

She said: 'When you make a resolution to do something other than what deeply feels comfortable for you, it's unlikely that you're going to do it.'

‘If somebody is anxious and they eat to make themselves feel good, making a resolution not to over-consume is likely going to fail.

‘Better for the person to recognize their relationship between stress and eating – and deal with the stress.’

ASK YOURSELF THE DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Before a person understands why they do what they do, they won’t be able to change the behavior permanently.

If you want to stop fighting to your significant other, spend some time figuring out why you two aren’t getting along in the first place.

If you want to go to sleep earlier, spend some time figuring out why you stay up late.

It’s only then that the solutions will become ‘obvious’ –which will allow you to be able to change your behavior, according to Dr Langer.

‘If you don’t know what leads to the behavior in the first place, it’s only a matter of time before you’ll break [your resolution] in the second place,’ Dr Langer said.

DON'T BE NEGATIVE - IF A RESOLUTION IS A CRITICISM YOU'RE LESS LIKELY TO FOLLOW THROUGH

Furthermore, many people’s resolutions are a criticism of themselves – such as wanting to kick a nasty habit or change their attitude.

If a resolution is centered around a criticism, a person is less likely to follow through, she explained.

Dr Langer said: ‘Recognizing that everything we do is meaningful in some way – and if we start off from a place of self-respect – we’re more likely to accomplish many more of the things that we’d like to accomplish.’

Some of us could also benefit from merely rephrasing the negative resolution we made.

For instance if you want to lose 20 lbs, rather than focusing on the ‘losing’ aspect – instead focus on the health aspect.

OPT FOR A HEALTHY SUBSTITUTE INSTEAD OF DEPRIVING YOURSELF

Be sure to provide yourself with a healthy substitute instead of drastically ‘ripping out’ an activity you may love – such as indulging in chocolates.

Dr Norcross said: ‘We can [lose 20 lbs] by increasing exercise, which is a healthy alternative.

‘We could also do that by choosing the healthy alternative of not having sugary or sweet foods in the home environment.’

According to the study, people should make ‘realistic, attainable goals’ and develop a specific action plan before January kicks in.

TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

Once the resolution goes into effect, though, people should track their progress, arrange their environment to help (rather than hinder) them and reward their successes.

It’s also fine to occasionally slip in your resolutions, the study said, so long as you don’t allow that to derail you completely.

SEEK OUT A RESOLUTION BUDDY

From February onward, seeking out a buddy to help you stick with the resolution - and avoiding getting negative about yourself or your slips - will help you stick with it.

The study said: ‘Remember that meaningful change takes time.

‘It takes three months before a change becomes a routine.’