

# WHEENK! HEALTH

## How to Keep Your New Year's Resolutions: Advice From the Experts

About half of all Americans are likely to make New Year's resolutions this year. Their top vows: to lose weight (19%), quit smoking (12%), and exercise more (10%). Sound familiar? A Marist poll taken in December found that while 65% of people who made a resolution in 2008 kept their promise for at least part of the following year, 35% never even made it out of the gate. But consider this: if hard-core addicts can break bad habits - some by moderating, not just quitting - there's still hope for you!

**Don't Kid Yourself:** The most important thing is to be honest with yourself. Successful moderators decide in advance how much is "too much" and stick to their limit, no matter what. The point is to learn how to hold yourself accountable.

**Quit Cold Turkey - Temporarily:** An initial period of complete abstinence can make it easier for people to moderate behavior, by eliminating the habitual, automatic aspect of the unwanted activity. The best way to stay on course is frequent self monitoring, so use as many behavior-modification tools, support groups and programs as you can.

**Do What the Dalai Lama Would Do:** Mindfulness-based relapse prevention uses meditation and other ideas from Buddhist teachings to help people break bad habits. Being mindful may involve traditional meditation, but here it is also used to focus awareness on thoughts and feelings that lead to unwanted behavior. Recognizing the triggers to relapse can help you choose not to give into them. One tactic for resisting those cravings is called "urge surfing". It involves being mindful of the fact that craving is like a wave - it rises to a peak, then falls, whether you yield to the urge or not. Succumbing to cravings only reinforces them, while resisting in contrast, reinforces resistance. Willpower is like a muscle - it gets stronger with appropriate use, but ultimately weakens if overloaded. So set realistic goals that can provide a sense of achievement and success, which in turn can inspire you to take on bigger challenges.

**Don't Try to Scare yourself Straight:** The pleasure of victory is a better incentive than the agony of defeat. Punishment is a poor motivator, and it sets you up for failure. Reward yourself for sticking to your limits and focus on the benefits of changing. Success breeds success. If you stumble, avoid recriminations. If you keep working on it, you will get better over time.

**Get Better Friends:** Consciously and unconsciously, people tend to imitate those around them. So, surround yourself with friends who can also be role models. Social support is critical to changing all kinds of behavior. Good friends can help you through slip-ups, and help keep your New Year's resolution from taking over your life. Instead of obsessing about what you shouldn't be doing, think about things you should be doing. Engage in meaningful activities that give you pleasure, and you'll simply have less time to crave or engage in the behavior that you want to reduce.

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