

Health Tip: Goal Setting

Each of us has visions about how we would like certain aspects of our lives to look. This is particularly true as we make New Year's resolutions each January. Whether it is losing that extra weight, quitting smoking, becoming more organized, or improving another aspect of our personal or professional lives, we can set a worthwhile goal. The challenge is in summoning the courage for change and maintaining the dedication to carry it out. Thorough preparation increases one's likelihood of achieving the desired results.

As you set goals this year, consider the following tips:

- Evaluate your level of commitment to the goal.
- Express your goal positively, in terms of 'I will do' rather than 'I won't do.'
- Set specific, measurable and attainable goals. Be clear in terms of times, dates and amounts by when and which you will measure your achievement.
- Prioritize your goals when you have several of them to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- Write your goals down to give them concreteness. Keep your notes where you can review them frequently and chart your progress.
- Break down larger or long-term goals into a set of smaller steps. Keep the steps you are immediately working towards (daily or weekly goals) realistic and attainable.
- Build in rewards and plan for an occasional setback.

Setting goals at the correct level may take some practice. If you set your goals too high you may find yourself frustrated with your progress, or lack thereof. In setting and working towards your goal, consider the following:

- Do you have enough information? Make researching the requirements of your goal a part of the process. You may learn that achieving your goal requires gaining specific knowledge, skills or equipment that you did not initially factor in.
- Are you trying to please other people? Consider if your goal is something you want or something your partner wants. It is okay to be inspired by another's needs and interests; however, your goal must be your own. If your goal will impact or involve others, take time to discuss your feelings and plans. Offer to help them with their goal as well.
- Do you expect perfection? Even if you have set a realistic goal, you may face challenges along the way. If you take a step backwards, focus on your next step forward. You may have to modify your expectations and timeline.
- Have you built in time to rejuvenate? Consider the intensity of the plan to achieve your goal. If you start at a sprint, you may tire too fast. Be prepared to work hard and also build in time for rest and relaxation. As you see progress towards your goal, you will likely feel motivated to continue.

For some, the thought of setting a goal may be overwhelming. If you set a goal, yet have an underlying fear, you may not take the risks needed to reach your goals. Trusted friends, family or professionals such as clergy or EAP counselors can assist in helping you craft goals for positive change. Reach out for support so you too can experience the satisfaction of achieving a goal that is important to you.

Working toward your goals presents many opportunities for learning. Try new things and think of self-improvement as a journey.

Sources: LifeWork Strategies EAP: www.youradvocate.com, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The Health Tip of the Week is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Please feel free to copy and distribute this health resource.