

Making Your Food Resolutions Stick Setting Specific Goals Key to Success

by Paul Arco

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It's that time of the year again where we pledge to do better. We're talking about New Year's resolutions.

Some people will promise to quit smoking, exercise more frequently or maybe plan to reunite with long-lost friends or loved ones. But about this time every year one of the most talked-about resolutions is to improve our diets and perhaps lose weight.

While most people are more than ready to put 2020 in the rearview mirror, what are the best ways to go about making our food-related resolutions attainable as 2021 quickly approaches?

“We have to make them realistic,” said Adam Schafer, Dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “A lot of times people say I want to eat healthier or be healthier. There are no specifics to that. We need to make sure resolutions are very specific and that you can measure it rather than throwing something out there that has no real meaning to it.”

The keys to sticking with your food resolutions include setting specific goals, measuring those goals, and having a plan to meet those goals. Schafer recommends setting S.M.A.R.T. goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-bound). The best ways to change behaviors is to focus on small, achievable habits and activities that will help improve your health over time.

“I personally enjoy adding in things I can do rather than restricting all the time,” said Adam Schafer, Dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “For example, people restrict calories, can’t have carbs or fat, or something like that. Instead, focus on things you should have. Like ‘I need to drink more water or I need to eat more vegetables’ and focus on the things you can do rather than all the things that you can’t.”

When it comes to eating habits, there are going to be good times and bad. No one is perfect. Schafer says the key is to not beat yourself up over a bad eating day here or there. If you do stumble occasionally, reflect on what you did wrong and move on without any regrets.

“You learn from your mistakes,” said Adam Schafer, Dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “You want to make sure that ‘yeah, it wasn’t great and I totally blew it today eating. What can I do next time so I don’t repeat the same mistake?’ Then actually come up with a solution.”

If one of your resolutions is to lose weight, Schafer recommends thinking about what did or didn’t work in the past before setting your weight loss goal. Rather than concentrating on a certain number, think about things like your clothes fitting better, or your ability to do certain activities easier or better. These milestones will help you maintain a more positive mindset and keep you motivated to stay the course.

“Focus more than just on weight,” said Adam Schafer, Dietitian, OSF HealthCare. “A lot of times we focus on a certain number when it comes to weight loss, but if you’re exercising too you may be putting on muscle. It’s not going to reflect well on the scale and you’re going to assume you’re not doing well and you’re going to quit.”

Other tips include:

Fill up on fruits and vegetables

Drink more water

Watch your sodium intake

Plan your meals

Keep a food log

And if you don't set goals on the first day of the New Year, don't sweat it. There's never a bad time to get started on making healthy lifestyle changes. Proper nutrition isn't a quick fix, Schafer says. It's a habit that we will work to develop for the rest of our lives.

"It's never too late to get started on one," said Adam Schafer, Dietitian, OSF HealthCare. "If you feel like you missed the New Year resolution time frame, there is always time to improve on yourself, whether it's related to diet and health or anything else in life."

For more information on nutrition facts, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).