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## Motivation and the Power of Not Giving Up

Have you ever set a goal for yourself, like getting fit, making honor roll, or being picked for a team? Like lots of people, maybe you started out doing great, but then lost some of that drive and had trouble getting motivated again.

You're Not Alone!

Everyone struggles with staying motivated and reaching their goals. Just look at how many people go on diets, lose weight, and then gain it back again!

The reality is that refocusing, changing, or making a new start on something, no matter how small, is a big deal. But it's not impossible. With the right approach, you can definitely do it.

Making a Change Module Button  
Getting – and Staying – Motivated

So how do you stay motivated and on track with your goal? It all comes down to good planning, realistic expectations, and a stick-to-it attitude. Here's what you need to do:

First, know your goal. Start by writing down your major goal. Your major goal is the ultimate thing you'd like to see happen. For example, "I want to make honor roll," or "I want to get fit enough to make the cross-country team," or even, "I want to play in the Olympics" are all major goals because they're the final thing the goal setter wants to see happen (obviously, some goals take longer and require more work than others). It's OK to dream big. That's how people accomplish stuff. You just

have to remember that the bigger the goal, the more work it takes to get there.

Make it specific. It's easier to plan for and master a specific goal than a vague one. Let's say your goal is to get fit. That's pretty vague. Make it specific by defining what you want to achieve (such as muscle tone and definition or endurance), why you want to get fit, and by when. This helps you make a plan to reach your goal.

Make it realistic. People often abandon their goals because their expectations are unreasonable. Maybe they expect to get ripped abs in weeks rather than months, or to quit smoking easily after years of lighting up.

Let's say you want to run a marathon. If you try to run the entire distance of 26.2 miles tomorrow without any training, you're unlikely to succeed. It takes the average person 4 months of training to run that far! But the bigger risk is that you'll get so bummed out that you'll give up your marathon dreams – and running – altogether.

Part of staying motivated is being realistic about what you can achieve within the timeframe you've planned. Competing on the Olympic ski team is a workable goal if you are 15 and already a star skier. But if you're 18 and only just taking your first lesson, time isn't exactly on your side.

Write it down. Put your specific goal in writing. Then write it down again. And again. Research shows that writing down a goal is part of the mental process of committing to it. Write your goal down every day to keep you focused and remind you how much you want it.

Break it down. Making any change takes self-discipline. You need to pay constant attention so you don't get sidetracked. One way to make this easier is to break a big goal into small steps. For example, let's say you want to run a marathon. If it's February and the marathon is in August, that's a realistic timeframe to prepare. Start by planning

to run 2 miles and work up gradually to the distance you need.

Then set specific daily tasks, like eating five servings of fruit and veggies and running a certain amount a day. Put these on a calendar or planner so you can check them off. Ask a coach to help you set doable mini-goals for additional mile amounts and for tasks to improve your performance, such as exercises to build strength and stamina so you'll stay motivated to run farther.

Reaching frequent, smaller goals is something to celebrate. It gives you the confidence, courage, and motivation to keep running – or doing whatever it is you're aiming to do. So reward yourself!

Check in with your goal. Now that you've broken your goal down into a series of mini-goals and daily tasks, check in every day.

It helps to write down your small goals in the same way you wrote down your big goal. That way you can track what you need to do, check off tasks as you complete them, and enjoy knowing that you're moving toward your big goal.

As you accomplish a task, check it off on your list. Tell yourself, "Hey, I've run 10 miles, I'm nearly halfway to my goal!" Reward yourself with something you promised yourself when you set your goal. Feel successful – you are! Now think ahead to accomplishing the rest of your goal: "What do I have to do to reach 26 miles? How am I going to make the time to train?"

Writing down specific steps has another advantage: If you're feeling weak on willpower you can look at your list to help you refocus!

Recommit to your goal if you slip up. If you slip up, don't give up. Forgive yourself and make a plan for getting back on track.

Pat yourself on the back for everything you did right. Don't beat yourself up, no matter how far

off track you get. Most people slip up when trying to make a change – it's a natural part of the process.

Writing down daily tasks and mini-goals helps here too. By keeping track of things, you'll quickly recognize when you've slipped up, making it easier to refocus and recommit to your goal. So instead of feeling discouraged, you can know exactly where you got off track and why.

What if you keep slipping up? Ask yourself if you're really committed to your goal. If you are, recommit – and put it in writing. The process of writing everything down may also help you discover when you're not really committed to a goal. For example, perhaps you're more in love with the fantasy of being a star athlete than the reality, and there's something else that you'd rather be or do.

View slip-ups as lessons and reminders of why you're trying to make a change. When you mess up, it's not a fault – it's an opportunity to learn something new about yourself. Say your goal is to fight less with your brother or sister. You may learn that it's better to say, "I can't talk about this right now" and take time to calm down when you feel your temper growing out of control.

Keep a stick-to-it attitude. Visualize yourself achieving your goal: a toned you in your prom dress or a successful you scoring the winning soccer goal. Self-visualization helps you keep what you're trying to accomplish in mind. It helps you believe it's possible. You can also call up your mental picture when willpower and motivation are low.

Positive self-talk also boosts your attitude and motivation. Tell yourself, "I deserve to make the honor roll because I've really been working hard" or "I feel great when I swim – I'm doing well on my exercise plan!"

Share with a friend. Another boost is having supportive people around you. Find a running buddy,

a quit smoking buddy, or someone else with a similar goal so you can support each other. Having a goal buddy can make all the difference in times when you don't feel motivated – like getting up for that early-morning run.

If you're not getting support from someone when you really need it, you may need to take a break from that friendship and surround yourself with people who want to help you succeed. For instance, if you've been going to your friend's house to study together every Thursday after school, but now your pal is turning on the TV, IMing friends online, or gabbing on the phone and ignoring your pleas to get down to work, it's time to find another study buddy. You can't stay focused on your goal if your friend doesn't share that goal – or, even worse, is trying to hold you back. Seek out others who are on the same path you are and work with them instead.

Don't Give Up!

Ending an unhealthy behavior or creating a new, exciting one is all about taking responsibility for our lives. Finding the motivation to do it isn't necessarily easy, but it is always possible. You can stay motivated by writing down your goals, sticking to your schedule, and reminding yourself of what led you to set your goal in the first place. Change is exciting – we'd all be very bored without it.

Good luck in reaching your goals!

This information was compiled by  
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