**OPINION**

**If You Want 2023 To Be Your Healthiest Year Yet, Rethink Your New Year's Resolutions.**

With the new year quickly approaching and gym membership signups increasing, setting year-long fitness goals may not the best way to kick off 2023.

**By Ty Haney**

January is a season of change, reflection, and forward-thinking; seemingly everyone creates lofty goals to improve their lives, known as New Year's resolutions. However, by March, it is as though no goals were set, and people often fall back into their everyday routines. Waiting until January to set a big new goal has procrastination written all over it; instead, taking small actionable steps throughout the year is a better way to ensure healthy habits are maintained year around.

**History of New Year's Resolutions**

Setting a brand new set of goals each year is a daunting task, and it is essential to take a step back and learn about why society has been setting New Year's resolutions for thousands of years. According to [Sarah Pruitt](https://www.history.com/news/the-history-of-new-years-resolutions), editor at History.com, the ancient Babylonians were the first to make New Year's resolutions over 4,000 years ago. These resolutions were not as vain as the ones now; instead, they were made in hopes of having successful farming seasons. Back then, New Year's resolutions were set for survival.

**Common New Year's Resolutions**

In a study by the [Mental Health Foundation of the United Kingdom](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/articles/body-image-report-executive-summary#:~:text=New%20body%20image%20statistics&text=One%20in%20five%20adults%20(20,ashamed%20about%20their%20body%20image.), researchers found that 20% of adults struggle with their body image, and over a third of adults have felt anxious or depressed because of their body image. The world of fitness and exercise is a double-edged sword. Corporations always encourage people to get outside and exercise daily; however, corporations also have people working over twelve-hour work days. How is it possible to work to maintain a healthy lifestyle when the everyday person rarely has the freedom of alone time to work on themselves?

According to [Statista's Global Consumer Survey](https://www.statista.com/chart/26577/us-new-years-resolutions-gcs/), the most common resolutions for American adults in 2022 were to exercise more, eat healthier, and lose weight. In addition, [Kaitlin Woolley from Cornell University and Ayelet Fishbach from the University of Chicago](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/slightly-blighty/201712/psychology-explains-new-year-resolutions-hits-and-misses) found that 55.2% of New Year's resolutions are health-related.

To many, exercise is a luxury with a hefty price. Gym memberships can range from $50 to $300 a month, and exercise classes can reach $85 a session, depending on your location. Every aspect of fitness has been monetized. People can track their fitness statistics through mobile apps and smartwatches, the latest fitness apparel has been created with world-class engineers to maximize performance, and everyone on social media is a fitness influencer.

**Why Resolutions Don't Stick**

People often set unrealistic and immeasurable resolutions, which makes them more likely not to meet their goals. Making them S.M.A.R.T. (Specific Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goals is crucial in creating habits that will stick. In 1981 [George Dorian](https://cce.bard.edu/files/Setting-Goals.pdf)developed the S.M.A.R.T. goals, a new way of creating realistic goals that people are more likely to reach. For example, a novice runner could set the goal of running a marathon by the end of the year. On paper, this is a great goal; however, a better way to reframe this is to set up quarterly mileage checkpoints to ensure they stay energized before the spring.

Consider the goal of becoming healthier; hundreds of things fall into this category, such as diet, sleep, and exercise. Setting a S.M.A.R.T. goal of moving your body at least once a day or breaking a sweat at least once a day is more actionable and realistic.

**What To Do Instead**

According to [Professor Seppo Iso-Ahola, from the Department of Kinesiology at the University of Maryland,](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/slightly-blighty/201712/psychology-explains-new-year-resolutions-hits-and-misses) only 20% of people get enough daily exercise. Professor Iso-Ahola recently studied why some people work out and others do not; it comes down to how you can bring a set of routines to operate below conscious awareness. In other words, he found that people are more likely to exercise when they do not have to think about exercising; it has become intrinsic to their daily routine. Furthermore, he found that short-term rewards lead to more persistence in long-term goals. The endorphins released after a 30-minute walk are the same as those released after a one-hour personal training session, showing how important moving your body is regardless of the intensity or duration of exercise.

People should not fall into the trap of comparison. Exercise is exercise, no matter what form. Professor Iso-Ahola found that celebrating small fitness victories frequently helps create long-lasting goals and prevents burnout. In 2023, explore which exercises work the best for your body, schedule, and lifestyle. Living a healthier lifestyle is about being in tune with your body, staying true to yourself, and having fun.

Ty Haney is the founder of Outdoor Voices, an activewear and lifestyle company based in Austin, Texas.

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