

Naturopathic Doctor: 3 Practices to Make Your New Year's Health Resolutions a Reality

We've all heard about, and perhaps experienced, the negative side effects of financial debt. But do you have "wellness debt"?

Over time, you may have neglected physical wellness: exercising and eating correctly. You've "talked it" but not actually "walked it." Excuses become routine. Fatigue begins to increase, along with the numbers on the bathroom scale. As a result, your ability to handle life's stressors decreases. You find yourself feeling on edge more often than not.

On the outside, you glare at yourself in the mirror and realize the person staring back at you doesn't look as healthy or vibrant as you'd like. You might think, *I really need to start exercising*. Or you might even declare, "I'm going to start working out next week." But next week never arrives.

Just like financial debt, wellness debt didn't accumulate overnight, or even in a month. In the same way, you should realize you'll need patient, sustained changes to improve your wellness.

When setting goals and making plans, you'll need to simultaneously give yourself a break and be lovingly honest with yourself. Give yourself a break and recognize that short-term "fixes" won't work. So don't try another crash diet or an unrealistic exercise plan. Be lovingly honest with yourself by not being brutal. Don't beat yourself up, but face the facts. You're worth investing in!

Facing the Facts

We ask patients the question, “Do you believe the foods you normally eat are good for you?” The answer is usually no.

Then we continue, “OK, we both agree. Do you love yourself? And do you love your family?” And the answer, at least to the second question, is a confident yes.

“Do you give your children ice cream?”

“Yes,” they whisper.

“Is ice cream good for you?”

“No,” they exclaim.

“But you just said it wasn’t good for you. Why would you want to hurt yourself and your family, even a little bit?”

At that point, people either make the connection or try to steer the conversation toward the nearest exit. People know what is inherently good or bad for them. What most don’t understand is why they intentionally sabotage their health.

We all need to come face-to-face with the truth. When you face the truth you have an opportunity to make a decision. It’s an opportunity to choose freedom.

So, the person with an emotional attachment to certain foods—in this example, ice cream—must ask himself or herself, “What would it be like to *not* want ice cream? Can I imagine that? What would it be like to *not* comfort myself with food?”

Do you love yourself enough to stop hurting yourself?

Start Simply to Failure-Proof Your Goals

You have to failure-proof your goals, especially as you begin. In society, and maybe in your experience, failure is almost expected.

For example, when we're trying to change the food we eat, we may set a goal to eat one serving of fresh vegetables every day. That's not hard. Or an early goal might be to bring two bottles of water to my desk every day and drink them instead of sugary drinks. Simple.

The point is to develop a habit of forward progress and minimize setbacks. Even in the examples above, the amount of joy and satisfaction you'll experience with "small" successes will surprise you.

We've told patients, "In 30 days you'll be in a different place, your blood pressure will drop and start to normalize, your excess fatty tissues will begin to drop, and you'll be using new, smaller loops in your belt."

One goal we often suggest to women is to select an outfit they want to wear and hang it in the closet where they can see it. When they are too small for their current wardrobe, they can give their clothes away and make someone's day. By the way, if you keep clothes that are too big, you're subconsciously setting yourself up to fail. We want you to set yourself up to win!

Your Really, Really Real Reasons for Wellness

You may want to lose weight, feel better and enjoy exercise. But we all need our own deeper reasons for wanting to be well. And these reasons are connected to the life we want to live, the person we want to be and the example we want to set.

God created you with a very specific purpose for this particular time on the earth. Understanding these three aspects of your being will help you set goals—and hit them!

No. 1: Your Unique Design

Every person is born with natural aptitudes and innate gifts. These have been present in you from birth. Many people find it

helpful to go back in their memories and remember what they enjoyed doing most during age 4 to 7.

Even if your favorite activity was to build forts out of discarded Christmas trees or ride a bike or play dress-up, those play activities likely provide a window on what you truly *enjoyed* doing and on what you had no doubt about being “good at.”

When you combine what you’re good at with what you truly enjoy, you can live more intentionally in your purpose.

God gifted you for a reason. Enjoy rediscovering the many gifts God placed on you.

Take a moment to write down your understanding of your unique design and the gifts God has given you. Here are three examples from our patients:

–From the time I was a little girl, I loved to teach my dolls and stuffed animals, to talk to other people about ideas, and to read and write. I grew up knowing that this is why God put me on this earth. At present, I am a teacher, and I write and publish fiction during my summer months away from the classroom.

–God gave me a logical mind, capable of dealing with principles, step-by-step procedures and also good eye-hand coordination. I do well in things like woodworking and building. You guessed it, I work as a building contractor and a master carpenter. I specialize in building churches.

–I was never an indoor kid. I liked being outdoors, and by the time I was 5 years old, I had a “garden” growing in my mother’s flower bed. Instead of a tricycle, I had a riding toy tractor. I knew by the time I was a teenager that I was going to be in some area of agribusiness the rest of my life ... and I am. It is what fits me.

If you're like most people, your current circumstances include a mix of areas you are gifted in and areas that drain you. Clearly defining those is a powerful first step in setting the right goals.

No. 2: Identify an Area of Service

Your highest purpose—and the path to a fulfilling, energizing life—is to serve others.

Ask yourself, *Who needs what I have to give?* Write down several people or groups of people you might help in practical ways in the next 90 days. This may be a person with health challenges, a neighbor who needs help around their house or someone who needs a (healthy) meal.

No. 3: Establish Goals

Once you're on the path toward personal wellness, and on the path of purpose and service, it's time to set some goals and make some plans.

Identify two or more big goals you want to achieve in your lifetime. Focus on *who* you want to be as much as on what you want to *do*. Focus on your purpose and gifts, not on the material rewards or the compliments from others.

Identify at least one goal (separate from your big life goals) in each area of your life: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. You must be specific.

Create “sub-goals” for each of your major goals. These sub-goals are incremental and, in most cases, sequential. Think of them as “baby steps” toward your big goals.

Put your goals on a timeline. For example, if your physical “big goal” is to lose 20 pounds, break this down into incremental goals of losing four to eight pounds per month for the next three months. This gives you a goal of losing about two pounds a week, which is a good weight-loss pace that most

people can maintain.

Reward yourself for reaching incremental goals, but don't reward yourself with something unhealthy. In other words, don't reward yourself with a big slice of cake for losing two pounds. Equally important—don't beat yourself up emotionally if you fail to reach an incremental goal. Simply readjust your timeline and keep going.

Enjoy Setting and Reaching Your Goals

Recognize that it takes about 90 days for a habit to truly take root. Some say it only takes 20 or 30 days, but that's not realistic in our experience. It's generally much easier to "get back on the wagon" if you stay focused on a 90-day goal.

Let's be honest. It isn't possible to stay at peak motivation all the time. Give yourself a break occasionally. Relax and enjoy the present moment. Spend time having pure fun with people you love. As many elementary school teachers know, students are often more interested in learning after they've calmed down from "recess" than they are 10 minutes before a break.

Focus on total-being results. Change even one thing in your life for the better, and you'll reap total-being results. The more you tap into the goals that motivate you to develop self-discipline, the more your entire life will benefit. Wellness is a win-win-win-win proposition.

Tap Into Brain Power

Your own brain is your greatest ally when it comes to making lasting changes in your life—whether it's related to physical health or to the other three areas of intellectual, emotional and spiritual health.

Neuroplasticity is a new area of medical research. Generally speaking, neuroplasticity proposes that with each new brain

experience (a thought, a stimulus, a perception or an experience), the brain rewires itself slightly, and the end result is a restructured physical brain. This process takes time.

You've heard the saying "practice makes perfect." The same is true here. Thinking practice makes thinking perfect. Your new thinking can become automatic and therefore the new normal.

The bottom line is that the brain allows us to learn to like new foods, develop new tastes, generate new ways of thinking, become more creative in certain areas of our behavior and change our overall emotional orientation toward what is "good for me" rather than what only "feels good."

Exercise promotes the release of hormones in the brain called "nerve growth factor." These hormones are needed to keep our brains from *shrinking* as well as to keep areas of the brain well-connected. Our bodies and DNA were designed for movement. With less exercise, people lose strength, their muscles atrophy (shrink) and their joints become stiff. In addition, the brain doesn't receive the necessary hormones to stay healthy.

We know what you're thinking. *I know people who have forgotten to exercise their minds and have lost them.* Be nice now, friends. We all have room to grow.

The best way to keep both your body and your brain strong and well-connected is to exercise regularly.

This is important: People who fail to write down a vision don't really have vision. Write down your goals today. {eoa}

Mark Sherwood, *naturopathic doctor (ND)*, is on a mission to help you achieve wellness in every area of your life. Dr. Mark and his wife, Michele L. Neil-Sherwood, DO, have a successful medical practice, the Functional Medical Institute; have a television and radio program; and provide resources, including

their Amazon bestseller, The Quest for Wellness, nutrition plans, fitness instructional videos, and helpful mental and emotional steps to provide relief from stress and to help people form better habits so they can live well.