

Your Weight Loss Resolution: Fantasy or Fantastic?

Did you make another New Year's resolution to lose weight? You're not alone.

The wish list looks a little different for everyone: to eat better, exercise more, fit into more stylish outfits, or look great in that swimsuit this summer. Those lovely fantasies have us dreaming big in January, but will we be back to old habits by spring?

I spent years of my life dreaming every day—especially near New Year's Day—about when I would finally lose weight, become fit and everything would be okay in my life. But I would fall off the wagon as each audacious new plan let me down. I became more discouraged each passing year. The problem, I finally learned, wasn't willpower. It was addiction. I didn't understand that I couldn't eat a normal portion of sweets without binge eating out of control. I didn't know I needed help.

Making resolutions and breaking them isn't unique to my story, it's an age-old problem. Yet there's hope, God-powered hope, when we face the truth about food triggers and addictions—then embrace new thinking and new support systems for healthy eating and living.

I found freedom once I finally faced my own food issues and allowed God to fill up my empty places. I was relieved to discover my addiction to sugar and refined carbohydrates didn't have to be a death sentence. I could learn to eat better, live well and create a healthy relationship with food. Thirty years down the road, I am still free, and I want to help you discover this same freedom!

For anyone wanting to change those habits that sabotage their

good intentions, and discover a life of freedom from an unhealthy relationship with food, I recommend these important first steps:

1. Make a decision to change. A decision is an intention and not just a fantasy. A decision requires commitment, passion, desire, and action. It's not a one-time resolution, but a choice you can renew each new day and hour. So make the decision now, and continue to make it again and again!

2. Go a new way; pursue things differently. Remember that what you've done in the past hasn't worked. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results. So it's time to try new things! If you've done the quick weight loss routine and always ended up with extra pounds at the end, try a lifestyle change and slow it down. It's easier to stay the course if you eat healthy, more satisfying meals rather than trying restrictive diets. If you previously chose exercise routines you dreaded, pick something you're more likely to stick with, something you actually enjoy! Whatever new plan you choose, make it sustainable and realistic! 800 calories per day is not sustainable, and if you hate running then what is the likelihood you'll be doing it for long?

3. Learn your triggers and how to deal with them. There are food triggers and there are emotional triggers, and both will challenge your decision to change:

- Food triggers: if you always end up bingeing on certain foods, make a list of those items – then eliminate them from your pantry and eating plan (especially unhealthy junk foods). Cravings often vanish if you aren't playing with the foods that trigger you.
- Emotional triggers: when your trigger foods seem to be calling your name, or you simply feel the urge to overeat, stop for a minute! Ask yourself, "What am I really hungry for?" Is it love? Attention? Something

interesting to do? Are you looking for comfort? Stress/anxiety relief? You *can* learn to meet these needs differently.

4. Take it one day at a time. Taking things one day at a time means we can't focus on how great we'll look when we lose twenty pounds. We can't worry about what you ate yesterday or stress over how we'll exercise tomorrow. We make the decision *now* to choose activity and foods, and amounts of each, that are good for us. *Will I exercise this one day? Drink the water I should drink for today? Go to the support group meeting today?* Concentrating on what we are doing now is real, not fantasy, and it's powerful!

5. Find support, ask for help. This is a major part of turning a dream to a decision: let people help you! Accountability and encouragement go a long way to sticking with your decision to change. A good counselor or a support group (or both) will provide regular guidance, inspiration, know-how, and support when you need it most. People who have made the changes you are hoping to accomplish may be able to show you the way! Call on them, and know that can be a strength to do so. A proverb says 'a cord of three strands cannot be broken.' That means you also need to . . .

6. Depend on God. With support from others, your own good decisions, and reliance on God, you'll move ever closer to your goal. God wants what's best for us.

- Turn to Him instead of food for the things you really hunger. Go to the Real Source of all life to find what you really need, because it's not in the cupboard.
- Find rest for your weary heart in His presence. That means decide this year to connect more with God in prayer through the day.
- Plan time to hear Him by reading His Word. Make appointments with Him to worship and receive His grace.

I would love to be the first part of your support group for change in 2014! I want to encourage you with my own story of victory over food triggers and emotional triggers that almost destroyed my life. I found hope and freedom and a full life when food left center stage and took its rightful place in my life. You can too!

Rhona Epstein, Psy.D., ., is a licensed psychologist, certified addictions counselor, and marriage and family therapist, and the author of the new book *Food Triggers: End Your Cravings, Eat Well, and Live Better* (Worthy Publishing). For more than 25 years, Dr. Rhona has lead seminars, conferences, and therapeutic workshops to help people overcome food addiction and its underlying issues. She's passionate, from her own personal experience and recovery from food addiction, about addressing the needs of the whole person (mind, body, and spirit).