



Working together as a family makes it easier to reach goals.

Goal setting a must to keep New Year's resolutions

For many of us, January marks more than just a new year — it's a chance at a new beginning. But, despite our best efforts to alter our ways, within a few weeks of our declaration of change, we often find ourselves no closer to achieving our goals than we were in December.

With intentions so pure, why do we fail at becoming that better image of ourselves? Knowing the answer to this question could help us keep those well-meaning goals; particularly in the area of weight loss and physical fitness.

Kevin Smith, PhD, is a psychologist at the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital and a faculty member at The Ohio State University College of Medicine. He counsels children and adolescents on the psychology behind losing weight and getting in shape, and he says the new year is a great time for children, teens and adults to think about making positive changes.

"For many, the new year represents a new beginning and a new chance to make changes," said Smith. "However, change is hard, no matter the time of year, and children, just like adults, can easily fall off track."

According to Smith, we fall short of our expectations for a number of reasons but often because we fail to set meaningful goals and fully develop a plan of action.

Smith offers a number of tips to help avoid these pitfalls, beginning with seeking the advice of a professional. A primary care physician can provide an expected weight range based on age and height and can help ensure a healthy approach is taken to achieve desired results.

Once a professional has been consulted, set short-, mid- and long-term goals. Make them concrete, and post them where you can see them. For example, a good short-term goal is to pledge to walk for 30 minutes four times a week. A mid-term goal may be to fit into a pair of jeans that are currently one size too small. A great example of a long-term goal is to

get in better shape in order to play on the baseball team next year. Goals provide motivation. Without short-term goals to keep us focused early on, long-term goals can seem tough to reach.

Next, Smith recommends working together to achieve those goals. Working with a partner helps decrease boredom and increase motivation. If your son or daughter has expressed interest in losing weight or shaping up, Smith suggests the entire family work together to make healthier choices and support one another. Older kids or teenagers may prefer to partner with friends.

Don't forget to plan ahead in order to achieve your goals. For example, if one of your short-term goals is to have a small snack between lunch and dinner in order to curb overeating at dinner, then schedule a time to have the snack. Write it down or put the appointment in your planner. Make the snack ahead of time, so it's ready when you need it. The same goes for planning exercise and activities. Don't be vague! Parents can help their children stay on track by helping them develop realistic schedules allowing time for nutritious meals and physical activity.

Remember to reward yourself or your child for achieving goals. Set rewards that hit short-, mid- and long-term goals, but don't reward with food. Instead, choose non-monetary rewards, such as household privileges or small monetary rewards, such as trips to the movies, CDs or clothing.

Finally, when making your new year goals and developing a weight loss plan, don't think of it as a program with an ending. Instead, think of it as a lifestyle change, a new way of thinking about your diet and activity levels and the effect they have on your life. Then develop the healthy habits that you can carry with you through the years ahead.