

EXTENSION UPDATE

**Sarah Purcell, Extension Educator
Nebraska Extension in Otoe County
Syracuse, NE 68446
402-269-2301**

A HAPPIER NEW YEAR

There is still time to put together a New Year's resolution or two! New Year's resolutions don't have to be huge to reap big benefits. Even small steps can lead to a longer, healthier, happier life. The following are some ideas to get you going.

Try something new. Starting a hobby, taking fun classes or revisiting old favorite pastimes keeps your mind active and boosts your overall sense of well-being.

Repair a damaged relationship. Research on forgiveness suggests it can lead to better health. Conversely, holding a grudge can be bad for your heart.

Have your blood pressure checked. It's often free, and it's the only way to know whether your blood pressure is elevated.

Cut your cholesterol. Here's a simple strategy: choose low-fat dairy products and lean meats.

Walk for 30 minutes each day. Exercise is great for your health, plus it will help ease your stress load.

Quit smoking. It's never too late. According to the Surgeon General, smokers who quit live longer than smokers who don't, regardless of their age when they quit. You might need help to quit smoking. Ask your family for support and make an appointment with your family physician.

The following are several steps to help your New Year's resolutions survive until next December.

First, be realistic. For example, quitting smoking, losing weight, and exercising more are the three most popular New Year's resolutions, but it may be unrealistic to try to do them all at once.

Second, divide and conquer. Break larger goals down into doable steps. For instance, rather than try to lose 20 pounds outright, make your goal five pounds, then another five pounds, then another five and finally another five pounds.

Third, write it down. Writing out your goals helps you remember them better and increases your level of commitment.

Fourth, don't despair. If you slip or don't reach your smaller goals, don't beat yourself up. Remind yourself that every day is a new day and a new chance to start again.

Fifth, get a buddy. Team up with someone else who is trying to stick with their goals. You'll keep each other honest.

Sixth, hang in there. Remember it takes 30 days for a change in behavior to become a habit, six months for a habit to become permanent.

Finally, reward yourself. You'll motivate yourself to accomplish your goals!

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Sarah Purcell is a Nebraska Extension Educator for Otoe County and Southeast Nebraska. She can be reached at 402-269-2301 or via email at spurcell2@unl.edu.