

A New Year is traditionally a time for resolutions but change can be overwhelming. Last year, the most common New Year's resolution was fitness-related. Roughly 50 million Americans pledged to increase activity and lose weight in 2017.

Despite good intentions, success was hard to come by. Two months after pledging to become more active, only 37 percent of people in their 20s and 16 percent over age 50 had kept to their new fitness habit. Behavior change is tough, even when the benefits of such a change are clear.

There is no question that exercise plays a role in the prevention and treatment of many diseases across almost every system in the human body. Weekly exercise routines have been shown to reduce rates of depression and anxiety, lessen risk of heart attack and stroke, and reduce the prevalence of diabetes, the most expensive disease in the United States, costing more than \$100 billion annually.

Habits account for about 40 percent of our behaviors on any given day so it seems quite realistic that bad habits are responsible for the excess pounds we might want to be shedding. The trick is how do we build good habits that are essential for making progress in our health and happiness.

Here are a few hints I've cobbled together that may be helpful. When most people struggle to stick with a new habit, they say something like, "I just need more motivation." Sorry but that is the wrong approach. Make

the change so simple that you can't fail. Rather than trying to do something amazing from the beginning, start small and gradually improve. Along the way, your willpower and motivation should increase, making it easier to stick to your habit for good.

You put on those pounds over several years so it seems pretty unrealistic that taking them off quickly is going to work in the long run and the long run should be your goal. Success is a few simple disciplines, practiced every day; while failure is simply a few errors in judgment, repeated every day.

The best way to improve your motivation or self-control if you like, is to see how and why you lose control. You shouldn't expect to fail, but you should plan for failure. Take some time to consider what will prevent your good habits from forming. What are some things that are likely to get in your way?

And finally learning to be patient is perhaps the most critical skill of all. You can make incredible progress if you are consistent and patient. New habits should feel easy, especially in the beginning. If you stay consistent and continue increasing your habit it will get hard enough, fast enough. It always does.