

# HEALTHY

## Lifestyles

### Get off the resolution roller coaster — make changes that last

By SALLY BAHO

**IT'S THE** time of year when most people think about how they can get healthier, but can we set goals that stick and make changes that become habits?

Considering it takes about two months — 66 days, to be exact, according to researchers at University College of London — for a new behavior to become a habit, “New Year, New You” is not going to happen overnight. The best approach is to focus on small, achievable goals: Find something you like, and check in with yourself and your progress regularly.



Megan Canning

Megan Canning, fitness director at Carmel Valley Athletic Club and a certified personal trainer with the American College of Sports Medicine and the National Academy of Sports Medicine, works with people every day to achieve their

health and fitness goals. Her first piece of advice is to start slow. “You can’t just go all in, because that’s how people burn out,” she said. She tells her clients to start with just two days a week of exercise. Once they’ve committed to that for a few weeks, she suggests increasing to three days a week and then more if they wish.

“Small changes are better than big changes,” she said. Try changing one bad habit at a time. For example, swap a glass of water for one soda or sugary drink every day, rather than vowing to give up sugar cold turkey. Or walk around the block a couple days a week, then increase the

frequency, the distance, and eventually both. Canning emphasized that any exercise is better than none.

She also suggested you find something you really enjoy doing, and, of course, don’t choose something you hate. If running is a chore, try tennis or swimming. If you’re just getting started with a fitness routine, experiment with different types of exercise and find something you like.

“There’s not one way to be fit,” Canning said. Think of cross-country skiers versus gymnasts — both are fit, but they have very different workouts.

It might help to join a club or a gym that has group fitness classes, if that motivates you, or you can just hit the rec trail on your own. Also, try out different instructors or trainers. Maybe you had a bad experience with yoga or kickboxing, but it could be that the teacher just wasn’t for you. Enjoying what you are doing, and the people you are doing it with, will really play a role in developing persistence.

#### More than numbers

Checking in with your goals is essential to achieving them. A 12-month goal set on the first of the year will likely fall to the wayside if you don’t monitor your progress. Using a fitness tracker or making notes on your phone will help you recognize your achievements. If your long-term goal is to lose 20 pounds, maybe start with 5, then 5 more.

But Canning, who is also a lifestyle and weight management coach with the American Council on Exercise, warned about weight-loss goals in general, especially for older people, “the scale doesn’t necessarily tell the whole story,” Canning said. As we age, we lose bone density, but



CVAC fitness director Megan Canning says to start small and build on your successes.



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as we exercise, we build muscle, which weighs more than fat. She encourages people who are trying to trim down to use another measure, such as the circumference of the belly, arms, and thighs. "Or maybe a familiar pair of pants

— are they feeling loose?" she said.

### You've got this

The three factors that lead to success are your ability to endure discomfort (within reason), holding yourself accountable, and seeking — and following — professional

advice, Canning said. You cannot expect to achieve fitness goals if you shy away at the first sign of discomfort.

Counter the feeling with an internal motivator — for example, are you enjoying seeing your progress? Do you have more energy, or find yourself happier after an exercise session? Focus on those positive feelings and be consistent.

Finally, Canning stressed the importance of finding good information. There is plenty of misinformation on social media — especially in the comments sections — so find a reliable source for your health and fitness information. Contact a certified trainer or coach, or use reputable online resources such as the Mayo Clinic, WebMD or the Harvard Health Blog, to name a few.

You can absolutely achieve a "new you" in 2022, but remember that the year is long, and every day is the best day to get started or keep up with your goals. After all, as the Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu said, the journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step.

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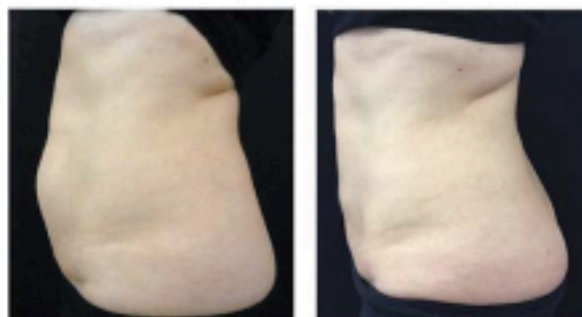
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