

Change Your Life— for Good

You swore this was the year you'd stick to those resolutions, but that jumbo tin of caramel popcorn and comfy couch are calling your name. Join the club: About 40 percent of Americans make a life-enhancing vow on January 1—and half “relapse” within the first 21 days. How to sail through that critical launch period and keep on going? Start with these five no-fail strategies. **BY BARBARA BRODY**

1 WATCH YOUR WORDING

Many a resolution have failed simply because they were expressed too vaguely. So rather than saying, for instance, “I will be more organized,” try, “I’ll spend 15 minutes of each day de-cluttering part of one room,” advises executive coach M.J. Ryan, author of *This Year I Will...* Likewise, in lieu of “I want to lose weight,” shoot for “I plan to drop 1 pound a week by cutting out late-night snacking.” Hoping to eat in more often? Commit to whipping up a home-cooked meal just three nights a week.

2 BUILD YOUR CASE

To help clarify your goals and pump up your motivation, make a list of pros and cons, says James Prochaska, Ph.D., professor of clinical health psychology at the University of Rhode Island. So if you're aiming to exercise more, for example, pros would include as many reasons as possible to support that (e.g., you'll lose weight, sleep better, boost your immunity, and lower stress). The cons would identify anything that might stand in the way

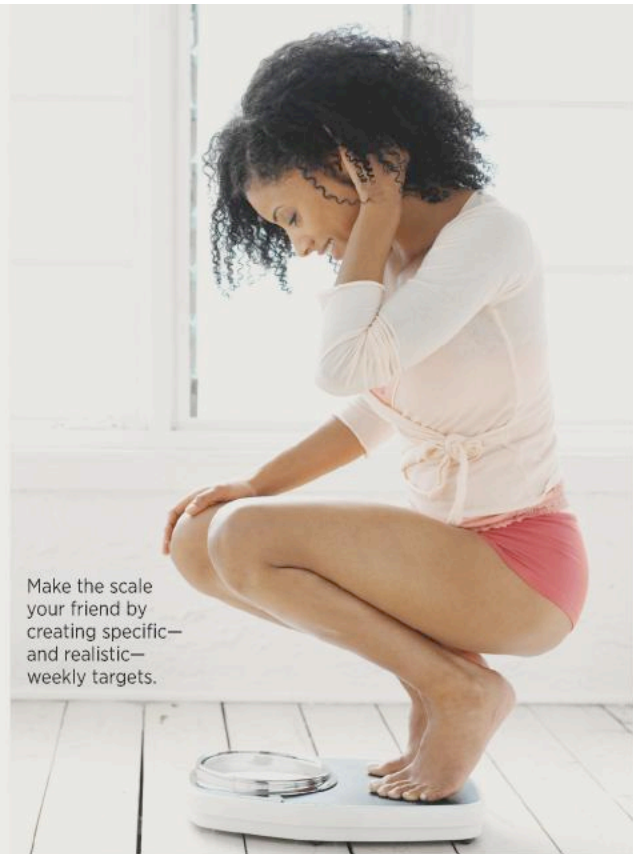
of your success—say, a packed schedule or money issues. Don't even attempt to tackle that resolution until the driving factors dramatically outweigh the obstacles. “If you've got a whole string of pros,” says Prochaska, “you'll be much more likely to stick with it.”

3 SET UP INCENTIVES

The urge to return to your old ways is going to be pretty powerful at times, which is why it's critical to regularly galvanize and even reward yourself, says Ryan. Brought lunch from home for the entire work week? Treat yourself to a lipstick or some new songs for your iPod. For high-tech encouragement, turn to websites like habitforge.com and stickk.com. They'll send you emails with inspirational messages and even let you wager on your accomplishment: You can arrange for your hard-earned cash to be given away to a friend if you don't meet your goals. How's that for motivation?

4 RALLY SUPPORT

“Research proves that people who make healthy changes together are more likely to succeed,” says Miriam E. Nelson, Ph.D., coauthor of *The Social Network Diet* and a professor of nutrition at Tufts University. She adds that the more similar your objectives are, the better you'll all do—so if your close pals aren't up for your brand of self-



Make the scale your friend by creating specific—and realistic—weekly targets.

improvement, keep looking. Check out sparkpeople.com to find a compatible diet comrade, ask someone in your HR department about getting a Weight Watchers at Work program going, or locate a running team in your area through the Road Runners Club of America (rrca.org).

5 PLAN AHEAD FOR SLIP-UPS

Setbacks are inevitable. But you can improve your chances of a quick recovery by visualizing the fallout in advance. Imagine yourself reaching for a cigarette or biting into that forbidden piece of devil's food cake. What will you do to avoid smoking the whole pack or scarfing down every sweet in sight for the rest of the day? Sometimes it's as simple as reminding yourself that a small misstep is just that—a pause in your progress rather than an excuse to throw in the towel—and that you can pick up right where you left off. Enlisting a “backsliding buddy” (a person you call whenever your resolution mojo is faltering) also helps. Says Ryan: “The only difference between people who reach their goals and those who don't is that those who succeed didn't give up.”

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