

Script – Print – A resolute approach to a healthier you

As we usher in a new year, it's that time when we pledge to exercise more, save money, find a new hobby, or, in many cases, make healthier food choices.

Among the top resolutions for 2026 are spend more time with family, spend less time on social media, and, of course, shed a few pounds.

Nicole O'Neill is a dietitian with OSF HealthCare. Her job is to help clients navigate the choppy waters of starting diets, especially this time of year.

"Resolutions are big picture things," O'Neill says. "So, if you have a resolution to lose X amount of weight, go ahead and make it. But then break it down into smart goals, little steps along the way so that you can achieve something and feel like you did something. So, you can celebrate a success. If you just say I want to lose a bunch of weight, it's not good enough. You have to say how much weight and how you're going to do it."

Resolutions aren't for everyone. O'Neill says it depends on the person's personality and what other factors are involved, such as stress, hormones, pain or lack of sleep. If you need a hard start and stop to see results, a New Year's resolution might just do the trick. For other people, however, resolutions are a potential recipe for failure.

The SMART goals O'Neill referenced are specific, measurable, and attainable, realistic and time bound. For example, rather than say you're going to cut out all fast food, why not set a goal for eating at home more, she adds.

"So, if you say I want to lose 100 pounds, well sure we got the 100 pounds part but how are you going to do it? How long is it going to take you, what are all the pieces? Do you need to lose 100 pounds? Well, some people do, and some people don't," O'Neill says. "If you weighed 120 pounds at 18 years old, and you tell me today, I want to be 100 pounds that's not realistic. Even 120 pounds might not be realistic. So, setting up a SMART goal is better than a resolution."

There is no magic wand or secret formula for losing weight. O'Neill says it's a combination of factors that are going to lead you down the path that is right for you on your weight loss journey.

"If you're not drinking enough water, add more water. If you're not sleeping, let's talk about that. If you're super stressed out, see a therapist. If you don't eat any fruits and vegetables, add one. Start with little baby steps and maybe that is the hidden nugget. Do one little thing and see how you do with it and let it snowball into the next thing and into the next thing instead of trying to tackle it all at once."

If you're still struggling to find success, O'Neill recommends having a conversation with your provider who can recommend other options such as medication management or counseling.

After all, what do you have to lose?