

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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How are those New Year's Resolutions working out for you? Were you looking forward to starting or changing something in 2021? If you have completely trashed your resolutions, here is some information from Science Alert that can help you get back on track. Whatever your New Year's resolutions, there is an evidence-based way to make them stick for longer - and it is all in the phrasing.

Rather than telling yourself you will stop or avoid doing something, tell yourself you are going to start doing something instead. For example: a resolution to stop sitting around so much becomes a resolution to attend a regular workout class.

Follow-ups with 1,066 participants over 12 months found that 58.9% of those with "approach-orientated" goals considered themselves successful a year after making their resolutions, compared with 47.1% of those with "avoidance-oriented" goals.

"For example, if your goal is to stop eating sweets in order to lose weight, you will most likely be more successful if you say, 'I will eat fruit several times a day' instead," says psychologist Per Carlbring, from Stockholm University in Sweden.

"You then replace sweets with something healthier, which probably means you will lose weight and also keep your resolution."

The volunteers in the study were split up into three separate groups at the beginning: those with no support, those with some support, and those with extra support. In this study, support came in the form of asking a friend or relative for help and getting advice and helpful materials from the researchers.

It was the people in the second group – the "some support" group – that had the highest level of success in sticking to their resolutions, even more so than those in the third group, who had the most support.

The success rate difference between groups two and three was not huge though. The researchers suggest there might be a saturation point as far as support goes, or perhaps differences in the way the third group assessed their level of success.

"It was found that the support given to the participants did not make much of a difference when it came down to how well participants kept their resolutions throughout the year," says Carlbring. "What surprised us were the results on how to phrase your resolution." The researchers think theirs might well be the biggest, most comprehensive study ever done on New Year's resolutions.

The new study found that the top resolutions among the participants were around physical health (33%), weight loss (20%), eating habits (13%), personal growth (9%) and mental health and sleep (5%).

Whether those match your own ideas, or you have others, frame them as something to do rather than something to avoid – a strategy that matches up with other research on setting goals. It also helps to use a gradual approach and reward yourself along the way.

Keep this quote in mind. Carlbring states, "You cannot erase a behavior, but you can replace it with something else."

Editor's Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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