



The psychology of staying motivated is key to staying fit and losing weight.

# Making 2017 Different

Staying motivated key to losing weight

BY ERIC TEGETHOFF

The most popular New Year's resolutions involve staying fit and losing weight, and chances are good that many people are setting the same goals again.

The psychology of motivation may hold the answer to how people can keep their resolutions in 2017, according to Elliot Berkman, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Oregon.

Berkman says it's important to start with a goal that is less abstract and more actionable than just "staying healthy" - and to start on it as soon as possible.

"What you want to do is to get those immediate reinforcements as early as you can," he said. "So, it's kind of classic advice and it's good advice to start small, and to make sure to reinforce each little step."

According to a Nielsen study, 43 percent of people said they planned to lose weight at the beginning of this year by eating healthier. But more than 75 percent who had that goal had not followed a healthy diet or weight-loss program the year before, so hadn't developed the healthy habits necessary for success.

Berkman said this can be the hardest problem. A person's ha-

bitual behavior, which may not involve regular visits to the gym, is the easiest to fall back on. Following through on a New Year's resolution means rewiring the brain for a new habit - literally. Berkman said people are better off doing something they like and connecting the habit to something bigger.

"Maybe it's connecting it to your family or your work, or earning money," he said. "Whatever is the thing that you really care about, find the way that that new goal is connected to that, and that's going to also serve as a reinforcement for it."

Technology also can be used to keep people motivated. At the University of Oregon's Social and Affective Neuroscience Lab, where he works, Berkman and other researchers are using text messaging to remind people of their goals. He said abstract goals can be hard to keep in mind day to day, especially when concrete temptations exist all around.

"It helps combat fire with fire, a little bit, to get those texts in your daily life," he said. "And so, you don't need to go out of your way to remember why you care about losing weight or exercising more. We're going to remind you, and we'll do it in your own words."

The Nielsen study is online at nielsen.com.

Eric Tegethoff is a reporter with Oregon News Service.

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