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## Why we should be making mental health New Year resolutions

New Year resolutions often revolve around exercise and diets, but we can also use this time to think about how we can improve our mental health too. So what kind of goals can you set for your wellbeing – and how can you stick to them?

Counselling Directory member Dee Johnson says New Year's resolutions are traditionally about physical wellbeing and contain practical goals, but our mental health is just as important.

"In order to help achieve these we need to remember we are the sum of all our parts. Caring for our mental wellbeing is an essential part of healthcare, surviving and thriving," she says.

Psychologist Lee Chambers adds that setting mental health resolutions is also a valuable investment for the future. "They have the added benefit of positively impacting other areas of our well-being, including physical, financial and emotional," he says. "Mental health goals are often small, positive and manageable changes that we find easier to integrate into our lives."

### What kind of goals can you set?

Targets like [exercising](#) more, eating [healthily](#) and quitting [smoking](#) are likely to have a positive impact on your mental health, but there are plenty of other ways to commit to boosting your well-being.

[Daniel Fryer](#), a psychotherapist at [Priory Hospital Bristol](#), says: "You can have mental health goals such as getting your anxiety under control, becoming more assertive or gaining more confidence. Having these types of mental health goals can help with any lifestyle-type resolutions you set yourself too, as when you are in a better headspace, you're more likely to achieve them."

## **Try gratitude journaling**

Chambers advises setting simple, realistic goals, such as taking time to write in a 'gratitude' [journal](#). "Take a few minutes to write down a few things you are grateful for, and why you are grateful for them. Gratitude is a skill you can cultivate and will, in turn, shift your mindset towards seeing more positivity and optimism," he says.

## **Schedule self-care meetings**

Another idea is to schedule non-negotiable self-care meetings, in which you check in with yourself about how you feel.

"In our busy lives, we can so often neglect our own self-care," Chambers explains. "While our own self-care habit is individual, we should be looking to book it in like a meeting with ourselves that we don't miss."

Johnson also suggests making time for 'mindful moments' throughout the day. "It's a great goal that takes two minutes and can refocus and calm you," she says. "It might be noticing something that is in front of you, focusing on what you can hear, smell and feel, listening to a tune, or doing slow, deep breathing."

## **Be kind**

A small act of kindness every day doesn't have to be a grand gesture. "It's a simple idea, but so powerful," he says. "Make a conscious effort to be kind to yourself if you're having a difficult time or something hasn't gone to plan. Boost this by being kind to others, checking in on friends and family, smiling at people you meet."

## **Put your phone away**

Sometimes, even small actions can make a big difference to the way you feel, like avoiding checking your work emails after a certain time or limiting the amount of time you spend on [social media](#).

"In an ever-connected world, we are likely to find ourselves consuming content in every available gap," Chambers says. "It's becoming increasingly clear that this impacts our psychological well-being: being increasingly mindful of our social media and news consumption can have significant benefits to our emotions and thoughts."

## **Set boundaries**

Johnson recommends setting boundaries to protect your wellbeing too, such as stopping work at a set time – perhaps especially important if you're working from home, without a daily commute to act as a divider between your working day and your personal time – or saying 'no' more often if you're a people pleaser.

"By taking regular guilt-free breaks, you can decamp and refresh, and feel sharper and more confident. Think of your [mind](#) as an engine that needs care, maintenance, the right fuel and rest, otherwise it will [burn out](#). Think of one action – nothing too big – that you need to change daily. It might be to finish work on time or have breakfast."

## How to stick to mental health resolutions

It's never easy to stick to any New Year resolution or goal, but there are steps you can take to stick to them.

### Create bite-size targets

"Break the goal down into specific actions and schedule them in, making them a priority," Chambers advises. "Turn these actions into a plan, and you have a blueprint for the steps you need to take and the agency to get started.

"It is essential to track progress and to find ways to celebrate the small wins along the journey. This will give you the feeling of progress, the ability to see progress made, and increased motivation as you focus on the actions rather than the outcome."

### Speak to other people

You may benefit from accountability or support, as it's often easier to keep consistent when you have others who will remind you, prompt you and talk to you.

It can help to seek professional support too. If you're living with [depression](#), anxiety or any other mental health problem, it's important to speak to your GP who can provide advice on the best course of action for you.

"Talk to a [therapist](#) about your belief systems, self-sabotage or low motivation and what you want to achieve, as having that objectivity is really insightful and helpful," Johnson says. "Therapy does not always have to be about being in a crisis; it can be part of essential mental fitness and help achieve your resolutions."

## **Think SMART**

To stick to any goal, it can help to think about the acronym SMART - which stands for:

**S**pecific.

**M**easurable.

**A**chievable.

**R**elevant.

**T**ime-bound.

"Saying 'I want to be less anxious' is not a SMART goal," Fryer explains.

"Instead, a SMART goal would be - I want to be less anxious about giving presentations at work, I want to do this in time for my presentation on the first of March, or I will start therapy to help me with that on Monday 11 January."

## **Don't pressure yourself**

Sometimes we forget to do things, or simply don't feel up to it - and that's absolutely fine. It's important to be compassionate with yourself. If you feel pressured, take a step back and simplify your goal. Think about what it is that you're finding difficult and steps you can take to make it more achievable.

"If you miss a day, acknowledge it and get back to those small actions," Chambers says. "These small actions compound and you've only missed one day. Prioritise it, and you will be straight back on the path to your goal."

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