

MAKE OVER YOUR YEAR

MONTH-BY-MONTH CHANGES YOU'LL WANT TO KEEP

If your new year's resolutions are falling by the wayside just days into 2012, you're not alone. By taking small steps, rather than making a life-sized overhaul, you can strengthen your resolve to stay on track



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January's optimism is almost as high as the number of people joining boot camp in the new year. Unfortunately, most resolutions have dropped off the radar come Australia Day. Psychologist Victoria Kasunic says over-ambition – the type that sees us taking big, but unsustainable, steps – is common at this time of year. Instead, she advocates a slow and steady approach. "It is always better to properly integrate one change into your lifestyle before introducing another," she says. "Small, consistent steps make the most dramatic changes in the long term." So, for a successful 2012, consider these tips for tackling those changes, bit by bit.

JANUARY

REFOCUS YOUR GOALS

New year's resolutions do one thing right: set targets, which is the most important step in achieving success. So, now you've begun 2012 with the best of intentions, improve your aims by following the SMART method, advises Kasunic. That means making each goal Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. Then, sustain your resolve with image association – focus regularly on what it would feel like to achieve your aims. Hard part done.

FEBRUARY

NURTURE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Make your Valentine's Day a happy one by reviewing your relationship. Meredith Brown, from LifeWorks Relationship Counselling in Victoria, suggests you sit down with your partner and individually reflect on what you've been grateful for; your happiest memories of the past few months; how you'd rate yourself as a partner; and what you want more of. Then share your results. "Next, develop simple rituals, like exercising, commuting or even doing chores together, to strengthen your bond," adds Brown.

Valentine's Day

MARCH

MAKE YOUR JOB WORK FOR YOU

Say no to multi-tasking. A 2007 study by the University of Illinois showed that it takes about 15 minutes to return to serious mental tasks after a small distraction, like reading an email. "Multi-tasking can contribute to a constant state of low-level stress that saps your energy," confirms Louise D'Allura, of Revamp Professional Organisers. "With the brain switching between jobs, your productivity takes a dive." Allocate set times for responding to calls and emails, and group to-do lists according to the length of time each task should take.

APRIL

8
Easter
Sunday

PICK THE RIGHT PORTION

Never fear – you don't have to give up those Easter treats. Instead, says Kirsty Lerm, director of Dynamic Nutrition, swap big bunnies for mini eggs, and choose a fruit platter or mini muffins for Sunday brunch. If sweet treats are your downfall, consider this: "Nutrient deficiencies, including B vitamins and magnesium, can cause sugar cravings, and low-kilojoule diets can make them worse," warns Lerm. Fight the urge to chomp on chocolate by including wholegrains and leafy greens in your diet.

"Small, consistent steps make the most dramatic changes in the long term"

Victoria Kasunic, psychologist

MAY

IMPROVE FAMILY TIES

Whether family gatherings make you shudder or you feel guilty for not spending time with your folks, interactions with relatives can often be improved. Brown suggests keeping contact "simple, personal, authentic and regular". She adds: "Never underestimate the value of a handwritten card and the personal touch it brings to a relationship." Having a hard time with a loved one? Look at what you could do to make things easier, advises Brown – which can be as simple as picking up the phone. ►