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Q: Can an app help improve my overall well-being?

A: January is typically the time of year for our annual “do-over” – a time to make a fresh start and think about self-improvement. If you want to improve your well-being but have no idea how to start, it may be as simple as tapping into web applications, or “apps.” These can benefit your wellness journey, but keep in mind, an app can’t do it all.

You first need to create your vision and goals. Start by thinking about what would happen if you made some successful positive behavioral changes, and lost weight, lowered your blood pressure, or improved your cholesterol. How would you feel? Picture yourself after having met your well-being goals – what would that look like? It’s important to consider your motivation for making changes (longer life, better mood, less stress) and keep coming back to that vision.

Once you have a vision for your improved well-being, apps downloaded to your phone or other device can be helpful and engaging. Sometimes all it takes to make a change is some support and accountability in the beginning. More importantly, wellness-related apps might help you sustain your journey to achieve your desired results, whether for your individual fitness and weight management or your family life and time management. As with any positive behavior change, start with a small goal you are fairly sure you can achieve. It is all about creating a new, positive habit.

There are a number of great apps to improve your well-being through daily check-ins.

Wellness, on Back

GOAL SETTING AND NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS

For many of us, New Year’s resolutions are grandly made and easily broken.

Why? Because a resolution is just that – a decision. To make a life change, you need more than a decision. You need a plan.

The plan is the guide to put your decision into action so that you can reach your goal. It’s up to you to take steps to get closer to your goal. Learning how to set goals takes practice.

Whether you resolve to lose weight, save money, or adopt a healthier lifestyle, New Year’s resolutions can be hard to keep. By Valentine’s Day, most New Year’s resolutions are a distant memory. It takes time and commitment to your plan for your resolution to become a habit.

Setting a small goal, like getting up half an hour earlier in the morning so that you can get where you need to be on time, may be challenging – it just takes practice. After a few weeks or months, it will just be a positive habit. Knowing that you can make small changes can give you the motivation and confidence to tackle a bigger goal. An adult may choose to become a nonsmoker or start exercising regularly; a child could choose dribbling a soccer ball or practicing multiplication tables on a daily basis.

Setting realistic goals can lead to a healthier lifestyle and improved self-esteem. The temptation to make New Year’s resolutions can be strong, but you can set all kinds of goals at any time during the year. Pick a day that’s meaningful for you – your birthday,



your anniversary, your child’s birthday, or any personal date.

Children also benefit from learning how to plan and reach goals. It helps them learn how to manage their time and make good decisions – skills that can have a lasting and positive impact on their future. Together with your child, set a healthy goal and create a plan! Working toward goals can improve your life in many ways. Once you’ve accomplished a goal, be it big or small, you’ll know it can be done and you’ll have confidence for your next goal.

Resolutions, on Back

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Wellness, From Front

If physical fitness is your primary mission in 2018 and your budget allows, I recommend investing in a fitness band. I use Garmin products and recently upgraded to Garmin Vivosmart HR, which tracks heart rate and sleep data. The Garmin app allows you to set goals for number of daily steps, weekly intensity minutes, and can map your walks, runs, or cycling routes using a built-in GPS feature. Some free apps, like Map My Fitness, use your phone to measure distance and pace when you go for a walk, run, or bike ride, or you may be interested in other activity-tracking bands with corresponding apps, like Fitbit, Moov Now, and TomTom.

Many fitness apps integrate well with nutrition apps, like MyFitnessPal. MyFitnessPal and Fooducate also have their own activity tracking

programs that calculate how many calories you've used.

One of my other favorite well-being apps, Happify, includes a number of habit-forming features to work on positivity and gratitude. According to the Harvard Health Journal, gratitude is linked to greater happiness, improved health, and stronger relationships. Happify walks you through activities that help you practice elements of gratitude (daily track selections include Savor, Thank, Aspire, Give and Empathize). You can also watch video blogs, read inspirational messages, keep a gratitude journal and upload photos to attach to your entries.

A mindfulness practice can also help with long-term wellness, stress management, and brain health. There are many quality meditation apps, but

one of the best is Insight Timer. I like it for its flexibility and variety of choices for meditation activities. You can explore popular meditations, meditate to music, listen to talks, or choose from popular teachers who offer guided meditations. There is also a feature to set a timer for the amount of time you have available and pick the sounds you want to hear during meditation. In addition to meditation, you can keep your brain sharp and improve cognition through a brain-training app like Lumosity.

So this resolution season, create your vision for improved wellness, establish some long- and short-term goals, and download a few new apps to serve as part of your accountability team. Be well!

Resolutions, from Front

The following tips can help you and your children successfully plan and achieve your goals:

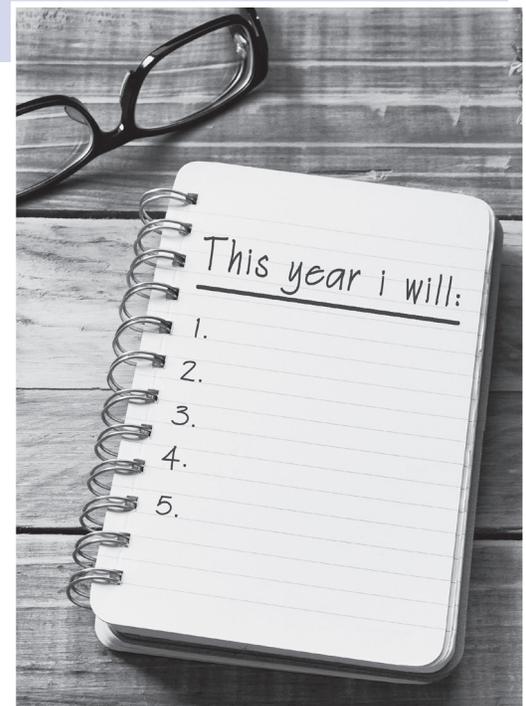
- **Be specific.** When thinking about goals, be as exact as possible. People who set specific goals are more likely to succeed. For example, instead of saying that you want to save money, set a specific goal to save \$20 (or whatever your goal amount is) per week.
- **Put it in writing.** Write down exactly what you want to achieve and post it in a place where you will see it every day. This will help remind you of what you're working toward. When you write, use positive terms. For example, instead of writing, "I will stop eating junk food" re-word your goal in more positive terms: "I will make healthy food choices."
- **Set realistic goals.** When you think about setting goals, make sure that they are within your reach. Be mindful of your finances, schedule, and other personal affairs. Remembering these important factors will help you set realistic goals. It's unreasonable to expect to make a lot of big changes at the same time.
- **Develop an action plan.** Create a timeline with steps toward your goal. Set deadlines for each step and cross them off as you go. Sometimes just crossing things

off and watching your list get smaller can give you a sense of accomplishment and help you stay motivated.

- **Believe in yourself.** Stay positive about your progress. Share your goal with a friend and ask him to help keep your spirits up. To quote Henry Ford, "If you think you can or you can't, you're right."
- **Be flexible.** Keep in mind that setbacks can happen. Don't get discouraged and give up. Try again! Your hard work will pay off!
- **Ask for help.** If you get stuck or need a little encouragement, don't be afraid to talk about it. You might be surprised what kind of support people offer.
- **Reward yourself.** Acknowledge your achievements, even the small ones. Reaching a goal takes hard work and you should be proud of your efforts. Celebrating could mean sharing an apple with your child or taking some time for yourself.

Having clear goals and a plan can bring your family together and help you be healthier all year. All positive changes – tiny or drastic – can improve your everyday life. Make this New Year count and create a plan to follow through on your resolutions!

Source: *WellnessProposals.com*

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