

# Making Changes



## Tips for Successful Goal Setting

1. Think about your life and what you would like to be different. Specify exactly what you would like to change. If you are feeling happier in 6-12 months time, what will you be doing then that is different to what you are doing now?
2. Write down exactly what you would like to achieve. Be as specific as possible. People who set specific goals are much more likely to succeed than those who set vague goals.
3. Record your goals in positive terms. Instead of stating your goals as "To stop sleeping in", replace it by saying: "My goal is to get up by 8:00 am every morning."
4. Make sure your goals are realistic and achievable. If you set goals that are unrealistic then you might just find you're more likely to fail and be disappointed. To ensure you're realistic you may need to consider your financial situation, time availability and emotional resources.
5. Divide your goal list up into short-term and long-term goals. Be realistic about how long it might take to achieve this.
6. Break down each goal into steps. Set a date for the completion of each step.
7. When you achieve each step or the goal itself, acknowledge it and reward yourself.

## Why is it so hard to change?

We all have habits, good ones and not so good ones. Habits are created by doing something over and over again (approximately 28 times). In addition to doing something repetitively, we are also hard-wired for this.



Dopamine, a chemical in the brain, gets us hooked on everything from food to cigarettes to shopping. Dopamine teaches your brain what you want, then drives you to get it. First, you experience something that gives you pleasure which causes a dopamine surge. A memory is formed which connects the experience with a reward. And then you're hooked. This is why it's so hard to change. Doing so means fighting one of the most fundamental systems in the brain.

But it can be done. The secret is thinking up rewards. The payoff for working out could be a pedicure or tickets to the game. Eating healthy for a few weeks could be rewarded with a massage. Giving yourself rewards for a behavior change engages the dopamine system so your brain will associate the positive outcome with it, which will help form the habit.

