



Set a  
Goal? Go  
Small or  
Go Home



# wellness



**Going after big, new goals (like, say, running a marathon or learning to speak Spanish) may be desirable...but it's also daunting.**

If you don't feel like you're crushing it from Day One, you're more likely to give up altogether, says Anna Kress, PsyD, a clinical psychologist in Princeton, New Jersey. Plus, when given a large but vague target (think: be happier this year, get in shape), your prefrontal cortex—the part of your brain responsible for goal-directed behavior—can't tell which steps to prioritize and ends up being less effective in helping you achieve your goal.

Your solve: micro-goals. Setting super-small, stupidly achievable objectives is the key to rocking your 2018 resolutions. Quickly making progress, even if it's in baby steps, is more motivating than achieving something major, according to a recent study in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Fun-size ambitions allow your brain to more effectively manage your mental resources. In fact, your entire noggin *lurves* going micro—whenever you hit a teeny milestone, it releases dopamine, a feel-fab chemical that motivates you to repeat the behavior. “Over time, mini-goals become habits that are rewarding and wired into our brains,” says Kress.

She suggests starting with no more than three specific nano-goals at a time. Keep reading for more success strategies.



## BIG FAIL

**Be asleep by 10 P.M. every night.**



## SMALL WIN

**Get up at roughly the same time every day.**

Let's be real: Sleep is everything. But not everyone's internal body clock allows them to conk out at 10 p.m. on the dot, says sleep specialist Michael Breus, PhD, author of *The Power of When*. If your natural circadian rhythm doesn't align with a certain strict bedtime, you're setting yourself up for failure. Going hard and forcing yourself won't help.

A smaller, easier hack is to set your alarm for around the same time each morning. “The moment you open your eyes, light turns off the faucet in your brain that controls the sleep hormone melatonin, and that helps you wake up,” says Breus. “And when you always get up at the same time, your body will fall into a rhythm that will help you feel sleepy at a consistent time each night.” Start with the weekdays and eventually rise and shine at the same time on weekends too. Doing so will keep your new snooze sched on fleek all year long.

## BIG FAIL

**Live at your standing desk.**

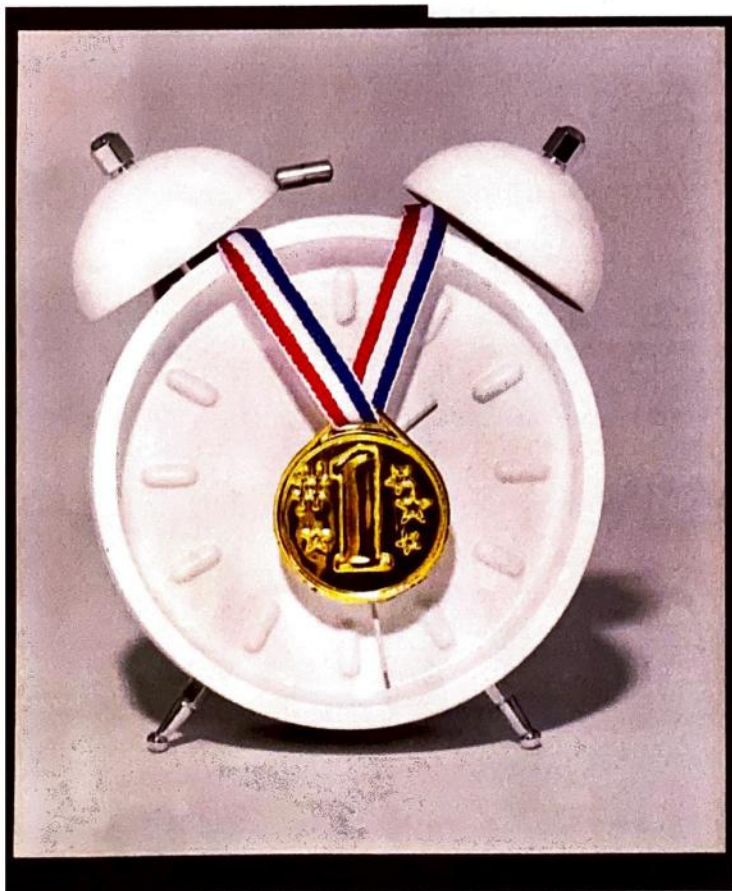


## SMALL WIN

**Walk for 30 minutes a day.**

You've probably heard that constant sitting is worse for your well-being than smoking. But committing to being on your feet 24/7 isn't the answer. “Standing for eight hours straight isn't that much better than sitting for that long, since your body still isn't moving much,” says certified personal trainer Krista Stryker, founder of 12-Minute Athlete.

Better: Ditch your too-intense goal and go on a mission to walk around for 30 minutes every day. “This can make a huge difference in your health by getting you outside and moving,” says Stryker. No need to knock out the full 30 all at once; walking to the grocery store, taking a post-dinner stroll, and cruising around with your pup can all add up, says Stryker. If 30 minutes starts to feel too easy (you overachiever, you), set your next benchmark at one hour and get moving first thing in the morning, during your lunch break, and after dinner to hit your mark.







#### BIG FAIL

### Meditate twice daily.

#### SMALL WIN

### Do a few five-minute guided sessions per week.

Trying to jump-start total Zen can leave you the very opposite of chill, says Kress. For many, meditation—especially sans guidance—can feel beyond frustrating or just straight-up impossible. That you? Start with briefer trials, and enlist some help. Apps like Simple Habit and Meditation Studio offer Bob Ross-esque tutorials for inner peace, enabling you to boost your calm in short bursts. Every little bit counts, says Kress. Lowering your heart rate for five minutes reduces

**“The minute we say that we’ll never eat certain foods again, that’s when we drool over them even more.”**

—KELLY LEVEQUE, RD

your stress hormones. And by kicking off your om habit in a small way, you’ll learn the skill without getting restless, slowly building up your tolerance for longer sessions. When those 5 minutes begin to fly by, you’ll know it’s time to try 10 or even 20.

#### BIG FAIL

### Break up with junk food.

#### SMALL WIN

### Swap in one healthier treat each month.

Going from chip queen to kale fiend may actually make your cravings harder to beat, says certified clinical nutritionist Kelly LeVeque, RD, author of *Body Love*. “The minute we

say that we’ll never eat certain foods again, that’s when we drool over them even more,” she explains. That’s because going cold turkey on your faves can make you feel deprived, which increases cravings, says Keri Gans, RD, author of *The Small Change Diet*. Cue nacho face-plant.

Instead of banning all your junk food baes at once, reduce your intake by tackling one at a time (e.g., soda in February, chips in March), says LeVeque. Replace each with a healthier option (diet soda becomes sparkling seltzer, chips get traded in for flax crackers). Gradually phase out unhealthy eats and you’ll make over your whole diet by the end of the year—without feeling the loss.

#### BIG FAIL

### Work out every day.

#### SMALL WIN

### Exercise 90 minutes a week.

Besides being unrealistic (some days you #JustCant), working out on the daily is bad for your bod. It prevents muscle recovery and ramps up your risk for injury, says certified personal trainer Anna Victoria, creator of the Fit Body Guides. To get after your goals without going HAM, start with 45 minutes of cardio and 45 minutes of strength training per week. You can combo the sessions into 90 minutes or break ‘em up over two days. And yes, you’ll see results, especially if you’re currently doing nada, says Victoria. “Starting small makes hitting the gym easier to fit into your schedule and gives your body time to adjust,” she says. “If you’re consistent, those workouts will add up.” Once you feel like you could do more, add a third sesh to your week, preferably a high-intensity-interval-training one. ■