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Tara Parker-Pope on Health
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Will Your Resolutions Last to February?

Will your resolution to save more last?

Four out of five people who make New Year's resolutions tonight will eventually break them. In fact, a third won't even make it to the end of January.

That's what time management firm [FranklinCovey](#) found when it polled more than 15,000 customers about their planned New Year's resolutions. The top resolutions for 2008 are the old standbys — get out of debt and save more, lose weight and exercise. Getting organized and spending more time with family also top the list.

Nearly 40 percent of those surveyed attribute breaking their resolutions to having too many other things to do, while 33 percent say they simply aren't committed to the resolutions they set. But experts say the real problem is that people make the wrong resolutions. The typical resolution often reflects a general desire, rather than a specific goal.

"Many clients make broad resolutions, but I advise them to focus the goals so that they are not overwhelmed," said New York University nutritionist [Lisa R. Young](#). "Small and tangible one-day-at-a-time goals work best."

Here are some practical resolutions that can help you lose weight, exercise more, get organized, spend more time with family and even save a little money.

Share your entree. When eating out, resolve to split an entree with your dining partner, suggests [Dr. Young](#). This one is a resolution twofer — it will help you halve your calories and your restaurant bill.

Always order salad. Stuffing yourself with salad before every meal is a good way to cut calories. A [study](#) from Pennsylvania State University conducted an experiment during which 42 women were given pasta dinners. Sometimes they were told to finish a salad first, and during other meals no salad was offered. When the women ate salad before the main course, they reduced their calorie intake by 12 percent without even thinking about it.

Revamp one meal. Resolve to improve the health content of just one meal a day. Focusing on one meal is easier than trying to overhaul all of your daily eating habits at once. For instance, if you eat a bagel every day for breakfast, switch to whole wheat toast, suggests [Dr. Young](#). Or at lunch, she suggests resolving to always leave a few bites of sandwich on the plate.

Taste-test whole grains. Tufts nutritionist Susan B. Roberts suggests finding two whole grain products you like. Once you find them, substitute them for some of the white carbohydrates you currently eat. "I think finding products you like is important, and often it is a process of experimentation," she said. "Some whole grain things just don't taste that good."

Exercising with your kids is a great way to multitask.

Play with your kids. Resolving to play with your kids at least one extra day a week gives you more time with family, and depending on what you play, it can also mean more exercise. It's easy to work up a sweat playing tag or soccer in the yard or park. Active video games are also a good way to spend time with kids. At my house we're getting two Dance Dance Revolution pads — it's a game my daughter loves, and for me, it's a way to multitask time with family and exercise.

Do something new with your spouse. Sharing new experiences with your spouse appears to trigger changes in the brain that mimic the early days of being in love. This may be because novelty and new experiences trigger the brain's dopamine system. In one study, couples were assigned a weekly date night. One group did pleasant but familiar activities such as dinner with friends or a movie. The other group chose new activities they both enjoyed, such as going to the amusement park or taking a pottery class. Based on answers to relationship tests, the couples doing new things showed far more improvement in the quality of their marriage after 10 weeks than couples who did the same things every week.

Buy a pedometer. If you attach a pedometer to your belt, you will move more. In November, the Journal of the American Medical Association published a study that showed people who used pedometers to monitor their daily activity walked about 2,000 more steps every day, or about one extra mile, compared to those who wore covered pedometers and couldn't monitor their steps. People who used pedometers also showed statistically meaningful drops in body mass index and blood pressure.

Create a “launching pad” in your home. Professional organizers say every house should have a dedicated spot where the family can drop stuff off at night for pickup the next day. It won't always be pretty, but you'll be more organized if there's only one spot for the things you need when you leave the house, such as backpacks, phones, purses and briefcases, MP3 players, and library books and movies that need to be returned. For more on getting organized, see this [Times story](#) about professional organizers.

Limit your resolutions. Studies suggest that willpower is a limited resource. If you make too many resolutions, you won't have enough willpower reserves to stick to all of them. “People make all these different New Year's resolutions, but they are all pulling off from the same pool of your willpower,” said Florida State University psychology professor Roy Baumeister, who spoke to me earlier this month for a [post](#) about willpower. “It's better to make one resolution and stick to it than make five.”