

# TRANSFORM FIRST STEPS INTO LONG TERM SUCCESS

The Medical Minutes for the first three months of this year have been dedicated to making positive changes in your life. They focused on avoiding fleeting resolutions and embracing meaningful transformation into a satisfying and happier life. If you read and agreed with the first articles, you may have taken some first steps. Let's discuss what elements enable you to change those steps into a permanent part of your everyday life.

Change is difficult. We have the best intentions but making them stick is tough. It's no secret, January 1st is the most popular time of year to join a health club and February 1st is the most popular time of year to leave a health club. Why do we repeat this pattern every year? There are a few reasons.

First, we cannot emotionally or physically feel the pain, boredom, or distraction which led us to give up on our goals. Consider a very difficult experience, like childbirth or starving when dieting, you cannot recall how that actually felt. This is why we can face having another child or starting a new diet.

Secondly, neural pathways (connected nerve systems in our body) are created. When we do something right a pathway is created. Sadly, when we do something which feels negative, we also create a pathway. We build habits this way - good and bad. We begin that new diet for the tenth time because we slip back into existing neural pathways.

Thirdly, we set our goals too high. We hit the gym six days a week for two hours. We begin a 900 calorie a day diet and two weeks later we find ourselves in the kitchen with a big spoon and a tub of mint chocolate chip ice cream.

How do we break those self-defeating patterns so our intentions become reality? Think of the old examples: The Tortoise and the Hare, Slow burning hard wood versus fast burning pine. The path to permanent change is slow and steady. "Baby Steps!"

1. If you make small, even tiny steps and adjust the outcome you will increase success. You want to change your cluttered home so it feels comfortable and clean. Begin with one closet or drawer. Empty and reorganize it. Set yourself a firm time limit and finish it the next day if you are not done. This will work far better than emptying all of the drawers and closets, feeling overwhelmed and giving up.
2. Have a self-caring positive attitude. Whenever you accomplish even a part of your goal, give yourself credit. You stopped negative thinking for fifteen minutes - great. It was hard work. Tomorrow try for another fifteen minutes and then add an additional five minutes. When you give yourself credit, you build a positive experience which is

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easier to repeat. Eventually, quieting negative inner voices will become habit much of the time and you will feel better.

3. Small steps take longer to reach the goal. This gives more time for neural pathways to build and become habits.
4. Be willing to change course. You decided to spend time everyday outside for a half hour after work. You realize this is not satisfying and that being outside for a couple of hours is much more enjoyable. Negotiate with your spouse so that you have part of a day a couple of times a week for yourself. Through experimentation you learn what the right changes are.
5. Associate with supportive people. Their encouragement and ideas make a difference. Distance yourself from the people who bring you down. This may be tricky and take time, but it's an important part of the change.

Adopt these ideas and adapt them to fit your style to succeed. If you need extra support to achieve success remember the therapists at ACS are only a phone call away.