

Jan. 7, 2008

It's a brand new year — make it the best ever



"The future is not someplace where we are going to, but a place that we are creating." That quote by Jane Carvey provides a powerful vision for our life and reminds us that we can make a difference in our future. Is this optimism because it is that time of year when we marvel at the enthusiasm of children, believe that wishes could come true and that miracles could happen? Are these childhood fantasies or do you find the New Year full of new beginnings?

Mark Twain quoted "a pessimist (one who is negative) is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities, while an optimist (one who is more positive) makes opportunities of his difficulties." Let's take the view of the optimist as we think about ways to improve our health and life in 2008. The best is yet to come. Why not consider a fresh start to the New Year?

Whether you choose to label a fresh start as a resolution or not may be just a choice of words. The truth is that individual's who make resolutions are ten times more likely to succeed than those who don't reports University of Scranton psychology professor Norcross. He suggests that we applaud people who make resolutions and provide encouragement when we can.

Most of us can relate to how challenging self-improvement changes can be and how we can learn from the success of others. Please read on to learn what the Center for Healthy Aging experts advise. Remember, if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten. Learn from your past experiences and try something different this time. After all, isn't this the mindset of an optimist?

Consider practical changes that will provide the greatest health improvement and that are backed up with good science. Take the 10 Keys to Healthy Aging as one example of a plan that has proven success.

Perform a health assessment using the Prevention and Practice report developed by the Center for Healthy Aging. This report summarizes the 10 Keys to Healthy Aging. It is a tool that will help you identify what you need to do to lower your risk for disease while at the same time provide reinforcement for what you have accomplished.

Repeat this assessment in 6 months or so and see how you have improved. Observing your own success is a powerful motivator. Share this report with your doctor. Call to receive a hard copy by mail or obtain one from our website (412624-3217 or www.healthyaging.pitt.edu).

Reframe your thinking by replacing what you think you should be doing with what you want to do. Keeping positive is important because not doing what we think we should be doing can result in feelings of guilt. Guilt is a



Electronic
Edition
McKeesport, PA

counterproductive emotion and often results in overindulging, feelings of deprivation, or potentially a slip or relapse in the behavior you were trying to change.

Make it happen. Ask yourself if you are ready to begin to try out a new behavior. If your answer is yes, get started. Prepare a plan in writing that details what you will do. Share this plan with a few interested people who will support your efforts and strengthen your resolve. The Nike advertisement says it best with their "Just do it" motto. If this is not a good time to initiate a behavior change, consider what will need to be done to change in the future. An example might be that you are caring for a sick family member and you want to wait until their illness has passed. When that time comes, most likely you will be able to take action.

Do what you like to do. Make one small change at a time. Be specific as to what this change will be. Pick something that you know you can do and that you will enjoy doing. This is key to making lifestyle changes that will last. Remember its quality not quantity.

Also, rather than starting with the result you want, it's best to focus on the small steps that will get you to where you want to be. An example is not to focus on weight loss in pounds, but to consider what you need to do to get to that goal. An example would be to put a 15-minute walk on your calendar on specific days. The calendar can become a great way to keep track of the changes you are making and allow you to monitor your progress.

Self improvement provides an opportunity to celebrate, honor, and show respect for your life. Now is the time to prepare ourselves to live a "Healthier Tomorrow." The "10 Keys to Healthy Aging" Ambassador classes are being scheduled.

It's not too late to sign up for the class at North Versailles Library. Call the Center for Healthy Aging at 1-866-350-6509 to register or for more information.

This column was written by Carole Milas, MS, RD, LDN, Co-Program Director of the Center for Healthy Aging. For more information on this article, please call 412-624-3190.

CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Centers for Disease Control. For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit www.healthyaging.pitt.edu.