

## Want to make changes? Start slow

If your new year's resolutions are failing, we have some tips to get you back on track

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Registered dietitian Gloria Tsang recommends making one dietary change per week.

Photograph by: Lisa King, NOW

Eating healthier, managing money better or finding more balance - whatever's on the 2013 to-do list, the starting point is likely the same.

Be reasonable.

The NOW spoke to experts in a number of fields around making - and sticking to - new year's resolutions, and the single-most common refrain was centred around rational goal setting.

Registered dietitian Gloria Tsang advises her clients to set a specific threshold around the number of goals they're looking to achieve.

"We all know that overambitious choices oftentimes cannot last," the Port Moody resident said. "I often recommend making one change per week and then testing it out for seven days. If you can do it for seven days, the chances are better that you can stick with it for a longer period of time."

Tsang is the founder of [www.healthcastle.com](http://www.healthcastle.com), a website that's maintained entirely by dietitians who provide information and tips on health and diet trends.

According to Tsang, gluten-free and wheat-free diets are the hot-topic trends being discussed by her staff these days, though she maintains she has yet to see any scientific research suggesting either of those methods truly work.

"Many times, when people are on gluten-free diets they will initially see some weight loss because they're not eating the brownies, bagels, cake or cookies that they're used to," she said.

"But if you look at it, a regular chocolate chip cookie has exactly the same fat and calorie content as a gluten-free chocolate chip cookie - it's your healthier choices that help you

lose weight."

Tsang is also hesitant to advise anyone to opt for foods that are billed as fat-free.

"It's probably the No. 1 mistake," she said. "No matter what you call it - healthier food or diet food - fat-free foods are often loaded with artificial thickeners or sweeteners to replace the lost fat and mimic the texture that's been lost. By adding those thickeners, you are adding bad carbs."

Like Tsang, clinical dietitian Jenn Messina recommends S.M.A.R.T. goal-setting. The acronym, which stands for specific, meaningful, attainable, relevant and timely, will play into a workshop she'll be heading up in Coquitlam on Jan. 22 that's geared specifically towards those over the age of 50.

"The biggest thing that I'm focusing on with the older populations is to emphasize foods that contain calcium and encouraging them to have three low-fat dairy products per day," said Messina, who works at an outpatient clinic based at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver.

Outside of that calcium intake, Messina also stresses the need for a diet focusing on whole grains and high-fibre foods. What she doesn't recommend, however, is trying to replace fruits and vegetables with any type of substitute.

"Juice is not healthy," she said. "People will often say to me, 'Well I don't have any fruit, but I drink fruit juice.' But a glass of juice is still adding 150 calories to your day every day and over time that will add up in terms of your weight."

Messina's workshop, Healthy Eating for Weight Management, starts at 1: 30 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 22 at Dogwood Pavilion. Admission is \$6.25 per person.

For Susan Kinross, the key to overcoming a problem starts with a change in perception.

"We think that if we change ourselves in a certain way, like losing weight for example, it makes us a better person - but that in itself is erroneous thinking," said Kinross, a Coquitlam-based counsellor who works out of Port Moody Naturopathic Health & Wellness. "Because what's underlying that is the belief that you're not good enough, not OK, or not lovable just as you are. When you think like that, you're already rejecting yourself. You're coming from a place of being not good enough."

Instead, Kinross said the most vital step in change is adopting self compassion and self acceptance. She also recommends seeking a helping hand along the road towards change.

"I've found that we cannot make lasting changes on our own," she said. "Support is really necessary, whether it's friends, family, teachers, counsellors, coaches or therapists. You have to do the work, but you shouldn't try to do it alone."

January is often a month full of regret and stress for Blair Mantin's clients. Mantin is vice-president of Sands & Associates, a firm that deals with personal finances and bankruptcy.

"We see a spike in our businesses following the holiday months," he said. "While holiday

overspending may not be the sole cause of the debt for most that walk through our doors, it is often what helps push many over the debt edge."

Cutting up credit cards, talking to creditors or simply asking for help are starting points for those who feel financially overwhelmed. Outside of those tips, Mantin also suggests re-evaluating your budget, steering clear of temptation and setting short, medium and long-term goals.

"As nice as it would be, the party can't last forever," he said. "Although the new year may start off a little shaky, with the right efforts you'll be on a solid new financial track. [It's] kind of like reinstating that workout regimen; the first few steps are the hardest but the sense of accomplishment and peace of mind are worth it in the end."

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