

Anchor Center Newsletter

Why Your Brain Makes New Year's Resolutions Impossible to Keep –By: Claire Maldarelli, Popular Science

On the first of every year, millions of Americans make a New Year's resolution (or two or three) that they won't keep. Still, despite the ritual's repeated failings, we keep trying. This yearly tradition, which dates as far back as Ancient Rome, is a reminder that humans can't stop believing in new beginnings. Why we keep making resolutions—and why they're so hard to follow—comes down to the way our brains work. And a better understanding of the inner-workings of your noggin can help you follow through on your goals for 2018.

There's one obvious reason why most resolutions fail: We usually focus on goals or tasks that we haven't been able

2018

to achieve over the past year. "You are making it your New Year's goal because you keep failing at it," says Tim Pychyl, a psychologist at Carleton University in Ottawa. The other terrible thing about New Year's resolutions, he says, is that making them requires no action. The simple thought—the idea that we *intend* to lose weight or exercise more—satisfies our instant gratification: In the moment, just thinking about losing weight makes us feel good, and we don't actually have to

go out and do the tasks necessary to achieve that goal. "They make the intention now, but they don't do anything. And people love that. It's like going to buy furniture and not having to pay anything until 2019. Of course I can do that," says Pychyl, "That's the selective nature of it." He adds we would never form a New Year's resolution around tasks we *like* to do. We already did those things the year before, so there's nothing satisfying about pledging to keep them up. This phenomenon—using how we feel in the moment to predict how we will feel in the future—is called affective forecasting.

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JANUARY 2018



Special points of interest:

- Scott County offices are closed on January 1st in observance for the New Year.
- Watch The Boss Baby and eat hot, buttered popcorn on January 5th.
- Scott County offices are closed on January 15th in observance for MLK Day.
- Birthday Bingo on January 17th.

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Thank You, CMA!!

Thank you from all of us who attended the CMA Christmas party on December 12th! We would like to thank you for hosting the event, and for providing gifts and a delicious meal for everyone. We all enjoyed watching and/or participating in the pageant that reminded us all of the true meaning of Christmas. Thank you for blessing us with hospitality and love.



Fellow CMA members sang Christmas carols before "wrapping" up the party.

Why Your Brain Makes New Year's Resolutions Impossible to Keep

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And it makes sense: When you make a New Year's resolution, you feel good about it at that moment, so you predict that you are going to feel good about it in the future. But when you actually go to do that resolution, the action itself doesn't make you feel good (or at least not as good as sitting on the couch makes you feel). So you put it off. "Humans are predictably irrational," says Pychyl. "Procrastination is one of the number one reasons resolutions fail."

Even as we try to overcome our resistance to our resolutions, something a little more powerful takes over in our brains: The force of habit. In simple terms, habits are connections of neurons that work together that have been beneficial to us over time. The more we execute the habitual behavior, the stronger those neuronal connections in our brains become. Through the course of human evolution, habits have been a really good thing; they are automatic thoughts or actions that have, for example, saved us from predators. Unfortunately for your 2018 gym plans, anything that vital to our survival is extremely hard to shake. The brain's entire limbic system is devoted to this type of automatic thinking, while the prefrontal cortex—the decision-making center of our brain—does its best to determine when it can and should override our baser instincts. It's important to know this going into your New Year's resolution, Pychyl says. By understanding what's going on in your brain, you have a better chance at controlling it. The key, he says, is to loosen the connection between the neurons that form these habits. One way of doing this is through mindfulness. This ancient practice teaches people to view the world and

emotions in an unbiased way. We often associate certain behaviors or actions—like going for a run, eating healthy, or even flossing our teeth—with negative thoughts. Over time, this connection strengthens and the association between anger and flossing becomes an automatic thought. As a result, not flossing becomes a routine habit. But if you give flossing an unbiased second chance, you'll realize you could just as easily associate with good or neutral thoughts.

Flossing doesn't have to have an emotion attached to it—you can just get it done. Pychyl says this same approach can be applied to many common New Year's resolutions, like exercising more or eating healthier. "If you haven't been excited about exercising in the past, you aren't likely going to be in the future," he says. But detaching that emotion from the task makes it easier to just do it.

Science seems to back this idea up: some studies show that even eight weeks of mindfulness meditation can decrease the size of the amygdala and degrade the connections between the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex. "So there are physiological changes in the plastic brain that happen when we develop some ability to bring nonjudgemental awareness to the world," says Pychyl.

But habits take a long time to break, and mindfulness can take even longer to master. To get a jumpstart, Pychyl advises people to take each goal one step at a time. "Some people think about exercise, [for example], really abstractly. Instead, it should be, what's the next action?" There's often a downward spiral when we procrastinate, he says, but in the same light, there is an upward spiral when you get things done.

"Harnessing that is key. There is nothing like the feeling of showing

up."

Something else to keep in mind, Pychyl says, is that the future isn't as far away as you think. Hal Hershfield, a marketing professor at UCLA's School of Management, looked into how our brains think of our present selves compared to how we think of our future selves. With the help of fMRI scans, he found that people associate thoughts about their present selves in a different area of the brain than they process information about their future selves. In fact, the area of the brain associated with future selves in the study is the same area associated with thoughts about strangers. "Neurologically speaking, we think about our future selves as strangers," Pychyl says. In another study, Hershfield had college students look at digitally-aged images of themselves. These students developed more empathy for their future selves, and as a result they were less likely to procrastinate on doing schoolwork and studying for exams. Making our future selves feel less like strangers can actually help us accomplish things in the present.

In the end, Pychyl says, don't let failure deter you from fulfilling your resolution. As you begin work on your goal, always think about the next action: "Life is just one step after another. If your New Year's resolution is to exercise Tuesday after work, then when Tuesday comes along, there is really no decision to make," he says; even if you're not excited about hitting the treadmill.



Katie's Korner

Chicken Bacon Alfredo Roll Ups

INGREDIENTS

Servings: 1

8 lasagna noodles

2 cups cooked, shredded chicken

1 lb bacon, cooked and crumbled

8 oz shredded mozzarella

Garlic Alfredo Sauce

1 Tsp garlic powder

½ tsp garlic, minced

2 cups heavy whipping cream

Pepper

Salt

Pepper

1 cup grated parmesan cheese

½ cup butter

PREPARATION

1. Preheat oven to 350°F/ 175°C
2. Cook the lasagna noodles until al dente, drain and rinse the noodles with cold water then lay the on a paper towel to remove excess water.
3. In a medium saucepan add butter, heavy whipping cream, and cream cheese, cook over medium heat and whisk until melted.
4. Add minced garlic, garlic powder, salt and pepper, whisk until smooth
5. Add the parmesan cheese and bring to a simmer, continue to cook for about 3-5 minutes or until it starts to thicken
6. Pour 1 cup of the alfredo sauce in a 9x13 inch pan
7. Add bacon and chicken to the alfredo sauce, mix together

8. Spread about 2 tbsp. of alfredo sauce mixture over each noodle.
9. Roll each noodle and place seam down in 9x13 pan.
10. Once they are all in the pan pour remaining alfredo mixture over the top and sprinkle mozzarella cheese over the top.
11. Cook for about 30 minutes until it is heated through and cheese bubbles and browns
12. Enjoy!



Different Abuse -By Heather B.

The reality of me is different than yours.
But now you see bruises and slamming doors.
But I hang on with hopeful faith. And try not to harbor hate.
You say why would you endure such pain?
I guess it's because I'm stuck in guilt and shame.
Too broken to work on me.
So I seek out men to fix, you see.
Unhealthy, sick, pathetic I feel.
Pretending each day this is not real.
How could I get so low?
Now realizing I'm risking my life though.
I no longer have respect for myself to show.
My heart is in the right place though.
But it is not my job to show mercy and Grace.
I must surrender him to the Lord for goodness sakes.



Job Club Tip of the Month



Before starting a job search, complete a sample application and have a couple people look it over for spelling and phrasing of sentences. You want your application to be great!

Anchor Center
Canterbury Road South
Shakopee, MN 55379
(952) 496-8666
Scottcountymn.gov

The Anchor Center is a community support program that is part of the Adult Mental Health unit of Scott County Health and Human Services. We have a calendar full of events to help and support adults with mental health issues. We welcome you to join us for a drop in or special event. Check the calendar attached to this newsletter to learn more. We look forward to seeing you again or meeting you for the first time.

Anchor Staff:
Dave 952-496-8463
Ann 952-496-8626
Honor-Ra 952-496-8572

New Year Word Find

Find these words:

- Balloons
- Celebrations
- Confetti
- Family
- Fire Works
- Friends
- Glitter
- Laughter
- Midnight
- Music
- New Birth
- New York
- Noise Makers
- Rejoice
- Resolutions
- Singing
- Toasting

P	B	H	T	R	I	B	W	E	N	A	U	T	R	I	C
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