

# Shrink Rap: New Year, Fresh Start

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Let's face it: New year's resolutions are so last millennium. The new year is just an arbitrary but very convenient turning of the calendar to remind us that time is passing. Animals have no idea what year it is – all they know is that the seasons are changing and they had better be prepared for what's coming around the survival-challenging bend.

What does the changing of the season and the calendar year mean to you? What do you do to prepare for/adjust to it? Bring out your winter clothing? Begin an exercise regime to lose that holiday indulgence weight gain? Make a batch of healthy stew to comfort you through the cold and rainy nights ahead? What are your habits for easing into the new year?

While thumbing a list of resolutions on your Blackberry may make you feel organized and help identify areas of desired change, research indicates that most of us fail to live up to resolutions and abandon our efforts within a month or two. This is because lasting behavior change requires more than simply good ideas and lofty intentions. It requires a willingness to suffer some discomfort and that's usually more than we're willing to sacrifice.

But that doesn't mean we can't use the new year to give us a fresh start, a new hope in our lives. We can view the new year as a mind-set of possibility and opportunity rather than as a demand for change. We are continually choosing to either repeat old behaviors or try out new ones. Why not think of the new year as a chance to try out some new ones? The advantage of thinking about new behaviors you'd like to try rather than thinking about outcomes and all the steps leading up to them is that you are free to imagine without any pressure to perform.

The new year can help get us in touch with our hopefulness about the present and future. We can use it as a time to think optimistically about what good things can happen in our lives this year for ourselves and others. This fresh start mentality can help neutralize our anxiety, sadness, or worry about the what's coming around the bend.

In a world in which we are bombarded with a thousand reasons to be negative, pessimistic or depressed about the course of our lives and humanity as a whole, new year hopefulness may help us neutralize any tendency to get caught in pessimism and dread.

Can you name three things you're hopeful about this new year? What keeps you vitally interested in your own life? What plans have you made that you are looking forward to actualizing and that push you forward into the new year with excitement, energy, and optimism?

For a number of reasons, it's easier to fall victim to fear, depression and hopelessness in the winter as compared to the other seasons. Use the mantra of "new year, fresh start" to help combat any seasonal negativity you may feel. And consider the following:

- Make sure to get adequate exercise and enough sleep. While we don't need to hibernate like bears, we do need to be respectful of our natural inclination to turn inward in the winter.
- Use this turning inward to be more aware of your thought process, including your dreams. Allow for reflective time and consider beginning a journal if you have an interest in writing.
- Resist the temptation to eat unhealthy "comfort" foods as a way to soothe yourself through the season.
- Reach out to those around you who can provide emotional nourishment.