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Approach the New Year a Happier, Healthier You

Faithfully each year, I make my New Year's resolution. I am committed and work at it for a month or two. Then all of a sudden the resolution begins to slip away. What can I do to be better to myself?

On January 1, many of us will once again vow to lose weight, stop smoking, be healthier, or improve our finances. And while the intentions are often genuine, with most people starting out strong and committed, these commitments often fall by the wayside by February. The winter blues set in, you've only lost two pounds in two months, the gym will once again be a place that you struggle to get to and is overcrowded by others making similar commitments, and ... there is always next year. Take charge of your life this year by initiating a lifestyle change. A mindful approach and compassion for yourself will leave you revitalized, positive and ready to take on almost anything. How do you do this? It is not easy, but it is something you will be able to embrace and keep as a part of your daily life unlike the trendy resolutions that usually fail.

The first step is mindful self compassion. The foundation of emotional healing is being aware, being in the present moment when struggling with feelings of inadequacy, despair, fear, anger, shame and other forms of stress. Having self compassion entails responding with kindness and understanding to one's self, which often leads to greater ease and well-being in our daily lives. There will be times in your life where you experience physical pain, but if you embrace the practice of mindfulness you will learn not to "throw yourself away in the hopes of becoming someone better."

Mindfulness is clearly seeing and accepting what's happening right now—without judgment. The idea is that we need to see things as they are, no more, no less, in order to respond in an effective manner. When something goes wrong, we need to stop, acknowledge that we're going through a difficult time and recognize that we deserve to respond to our circumstances in a caring way.

Self compassion is a form of acceptance. Accepting a feeling or a thought. Every person with a desire to do so can develop and strengthen these skills and bring them into their everyday lives. In practicing self compassion, you can better accept the person you are and continue to move forward and grow.

Be a detective. Catch yourself if you are:

- Comparing yourself to others and putting yourself down
- Giving up on doing something because you feel it's hopeless
- Worrying about what might happen in the future
- Being a perfectionist

These tendencies do not promote self-compassion; rather, they give fuel to your "inner critic." By noticing your tendencies, and being mindful of the circumstances that trigger them, you can get more of your life back.

Take charge - you have a choice. We're not talking about denying or shoving down your emotions, but rather about noticing them and consciously choosing how you want to react. The simple act of taking a few deep breaths gives you a chance to calm the body, reclaim the mind and look at things in a fresh way. It's what allows you to respond, rather than just react. The steps are simple in nature but hard to consistently enact. We suggest that you live in the moment, be mindful of your emotions and to consciously choose how you are going to respond to them. With a little practice, you'll be amazed how good it feels! Best wishes for 2012. We hope you'll choose to fill it with conscious, healthy choices and to be kind to yourself in the process.