

HAVE YOU SET A RESOLUTION? GETTY



New year, same you

Most people break their New Year's resolution by the second Tuesday in January, according to Strava research. Here, experts suggest alternative approaches. Words: Anna Paul

If Monday were a month, it'd be January. The season of overindulgence and celebration is over, people are 'circling back' after New Year celebrations and, for many of us, it marks the start of a new routine based on an overambitious resolution.

"The 'new year, new me' narrative is high pressure," explains psychotherapist Eloise Skinner. "It comes at a time when people are often already feeling exhausted, and it can be challenging to start setting new goals."

There's no rush to start on 1 January

Instead, Eloise suggests showing a bit of self-compassion during an already tough month — and even leaving goal setting for later in the year. "Who says you must make a resolution just because a new year has started?" agrees Rex Fan, lead behavioural insights specialist at Bupa Health Clinics. "You can make positive changes at any time."

The case for smaller, sustainable goals

If you've already made changes in January — or plan to — focusing on sustainability is key. "The longevity of exercise and nutrition comes down to setting realistic, achievable goals tailored to your ability and lifestyle," explains Sam Quinn, personal training lead at Nuffield Health.

"These might include building your daily step count, drinking more water or eating a healthier diet."

When shame becomes the motivator

It's worth examining why we set resolutions in the first place.

Many are "linked with reversing lifestyle choices that feel shameful, such as losing weight or cutting down on drinking", says Rex. "But shame isn't always the best motivator."

Ironically, once resolutions are broken, they can leave us feeling even more guilt — and less inclined to continue.

Extreme resolutions often backfire

Many resolutions also fail because they're simply unrealistic. "Alongside busy modern lives, extreme ambitions can be unsustainable," says Sam. "The disappointment of failing can lead to guilt and prevent people from continuing their fitness journey altogether."

Avoid burning out

Emerge CEO and founder Emily Austen knows this cycle well. "For most of my twenties, I'd set aggressive resolutions around work, fitness and 'doing better', believing I could fix everything at once," she explains. "I burned out repeatedly and carried huge guilt when I couldn't sustain it."

She concludes: "Real change only came when I stopped trying to become a 'new me' every January and built systems that respected my energy." Emily has since written about the experience in her book *Smarter: 10 Lessons for a More Productive and Less-Stressed Life*.

It's okay to start again

"If you struggle to stick to your goals, all is not lost," reassures Rex. "Don't see it as a missed hurdle — see it as an opportunity to restart when you feel ready, not when the calendar tells you to."

A breath of fresh thinking



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