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**Jenna
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**You're poised
to take the
plunge into
your new life.**



Have a Health Epiphany

You—not outside forces or fate—can bring about
a Day That Changed Everything.

Whether you want to swear off sugar or
shake up in your social life, here's your
guide to making positive changes stick.

BY CATHERINE RYAN GREGORY

teresa
Zalewski
scrolled
down her
Facebook
news feed,
and amidst
the usual
vacation
photos and

cat memes was a post that
forever changed her life.
Danny, a friend from high
school who played baseball
and loved to fish, had died
from an undiagnosed heart
defect just days shy of his
24th birthday.

Her mind reeled.
Zalewski, now 30, stepped
onto her back stoop to
collect herself and have a
smoke. But in that moment,
the cigarette—which had
been a source of diversion,
comfort and a quick buzz of
energy for a decade—
repulsed her. She thought of
Danny, who ate healthy
food and exercised avidly
but had been born with a
damaged aorta. She
couldn't imagine inhaling
smoke that would, she
knew, damage her heart.

That was Dec. 10, 2008.
Zalewski hasn't touched a
cigarette since.

Zalewski had tried to
quit on and off since college,
but her resolve always
dissipated and there she'd
be again—puff, puff. Sure,
nicotine addiction played
an undeniable role in her
relapses, but researchers
have discovered that inertia
is a major factor in getting
us stuck doing the things
we don't want to do. But
like Zalewski, you can
unstuck yourself. We'll show
you exactly how! »

THE HOW OF HABITS

LAZINESS ISN'T SOLELY TO BLAME when you're stuck in a cycle that makes you feel like crap; evolution is at fault, too. Engrained habits let the brain run on autopilot—an adaptation that paved the way for higher-level problem-solving. "If we had to think every time we did something routine, like back the car out, we wouldn't have had the energy to invent fire," says Charles Duhigg, author of *The Power of Habit*.

ABOUT HALF OUR DAILY ACTIONS are habitual, so you order chicken alfredo or get lost in the BuzzFeed vortex as a reflex, not a choice. And yet, every day, people like Zalewski bust out of unhealthy ruts. J. Kim Penberthy, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, often sees a "click" of readiness in her patients. "It looks like the shift happened overnight, but it's actually a gradual accumulation of thoughts," she says. "Then you take the leap and decide to change." Ready to feel that click yourself? Grab a pen!

Step 1 FIND THE RIGHT MOTIVATION

» Chances are you've thought about kicking your jelly bean addiction or Internet shopping compulsion oh, about a million times. Good news: Those months and even years of stagnation weren't fruitless; they were laying the psychological groundwork for change, says Carlo DiClemente, Ph.D., professor of psychology at University of Maryland, Baltimore County. "Reframe it as, 'I was putting a lot of reasons in my bucket, and now the bucket is full, so I'm ready to move on and go forward.'"

Identify what prompted each half-hearted vow. Let's say you thought about getting back in shape while you were playing Frisbee with your kid, during your last physical and when trying on dresses for a friend's wedding. Each situation reflects a different motivation, like wanting to keep up with your 6-year-old, fearing your doctor's finger-wagging and picturing yourself turning heads in a svelte little sundress. List every underlying motive, even if you've taken zero actions toward your goal.

Now, review the myriad motivations and underline those that are intrinsic—that is, come from you and not from avoiding punishment (your doctor's tsk-tsking) or seeking a reward (fellow wedding attendees' compliments). Goals that come from within—e.g., wanting to play freeze tag without getting winded—are the surest route out of a rut. The reason: "By nature, we thrive when we work toward self-chosen goals," says Frank

Martela, Ph.D., a visiting scholar at the University of Rochester in New York. "If your motivation comes from the media telling you to be thinner or quit smoking, for example, part of you doesn't want to do it." So you won't.

Among the reasons for change you listed, copy the ones that align with your values (rather than outside messages) onto stickies and post them around the house, or type them into ohdontforget.com to be texted to you throughout the coming weeks. Reminders that you want to be able to feel strong, start a family someday or finally love your body will push you to take the plunge, DiClemente says.

Step 2 OVERCOME YOUR DOUBT

» Listen carefully: Do you hear your inner life coach—or a snarky naysayer? A negative internal monologue reinforces inertia, keeping you trapped in behaviors that no longer serve you. "These thoughts are so automatic and familiar that we assume they're true and just roll with it," Penberthy says.

For each intrinsic motivation you listed above, jot down the self-talk that's holding you back ("I'm too old to lose weight"; "I've never been able to resist a good bear claw"). Then ask if it's true and, if it is, if it could change, Penberthy says. Now disarm that arsenal of doubt: For each negative comment, think about how you'd answer a friend who uttered the same denouncements, suggests Timothy Wilson, Ph.D., author of *Redirect: The Surprising New Science of Psychological Change*. Next to "Baby weight is too hard to lose," you might write, "I gave birth—so I'm strong enough to do anything." Truth!

Step 3 UPDATE YOUR IDENTITY

» Now that you've taken stock of why you want to change, you need to realize you can change. (Don't roll your eyes; researchers agree that self-efficacy—aka belief in yourself—is vital to making improvements that last.)

What you call yourself can make or break your follow-through: In a Stanford University study, people who identified themselves as voters showed up at the polls 13 percent more often than those who said they planned to vote, probably because casting a ballot made them feel like the good citizens they aspired to be. Rather than thinking "I'm going to exercise more," say, "I'm an exerciser," Wilson suggests. Make that concrete by writing it down and even including it in your computer passwords.

Reach back as far as you need to for proof that this positive quality is part of your character. Make another list of, for instance, the strength you felt after a half-hour on the Elliptical in college or the satisfaction of cooking a healthy side last Thanksgiving. Post the tally somewhere you'll see it, along with other visual testaments to your past kick butt-ness (e.g., 10K bib). "The more evidence you can give yourself, the better," Wilson says.



Step 4

CONGRATULATE YOUR SOON-TO-BE HEALTHY SELF

» To solidify that new identity, write a letter to your six-months-from-now self, describing your successes and what you did to get there. "Great job—you completely cut out gluten and feel amazing! Planning the week's meals and keeping healthy g-free snacks at your desk really helped, didn't it?" Even if it feels cheesy (and, um, it will), the exercise brings to life a specific goal you can call to mind when the going gets tough.

What's more, imagining yourself in the future helps you delay gratification, so you'll be more likely to head to a Vinyasa class when you'd rather stay at home like usual, reveals a study in the journal *Psychological Science*. Thinking of the New and Improved 2015 You crystallizes the eventual benefits of your health kick—so the short-term rewards of temptation (say, a temporary sugar buzz) seem piddling in contrast.

Seal your letter in an envelope and schedule a reminder to open it in six months, so you don't forget (you'll be caught up in your newly revitalized life, after all). When you reread it over the winter and realize you've made your dream come true, you'll gain even more confidence and redouble your commitment to your healthy lifestyle.

Step 5

LOCK IN A DATE

» Now you're ready to reform your stagnant ways, so pick a start date within the week. (Any later and your fire will fizzle.) If today is the big one, all the better, but still mark it on your calendar (in pen!)—it will serve as a reminder of your commitment. "If you don't set a date, you'll say, 'Oh, not today, I had a hard day at work,'" DiClemente says. If you need to make preparations before diving in (say, buying a sports bra or nicotine patches), schedule those tasks on your calendar, too; it's easy to put them off if you simply add them to your to-do list.

When Macey Snelson, 31, decided to run a marathon after eight years of scant physical activity, she posted plans for her first jog on Facebook. "There was no way I'd go home and share that I hadn't done it," the Portland, Ore.-based designer says. Making yourself accountable ahead of time will solidify your resolve, too.

The last step is also the most fun: Get ready to celebrate your success! Mark your weekly and monthly "rebirth-days" on your calendar even before you start. Set alerts to pop up on your phone ("72 hours since you gave up gluten!") and pencil in an event or treat to celebrate. Planning on making it that far will remove any doubts about your perseverance. "I reward my successes by buying new clothes," says Iris*, who's lost more than 60 pounds after swearing off processed sugar on Aug. 16 of last year. "But the real reward is how great I feel." You will too. Happy thriving!



KEEP THE CHANGE

Don't swear off routine altogether. "Being mired in inertia is great if you've formed good habits," says Wendy Wood, Ph.D., a professor of psychology and business at the University of Southern California. Here's how to do just that.

GET ACQUAINTED

Been avoiding a newfangled salad spot or weight machine? Research suggests that even a little familiarity with a healthy choice makes it easier to keep choosing it. Ask a co-worker to walk you through the ordering process or a trainer to show you the ropes.

BE A BROKEN RECORD

Students with low self-control were better prepared for exams when they used their customary study tools instead of branching out, one study shows. Real-world application: Stick with your trusty veggie-quinoa stir-fry instead of trying a slew of new recipes.

PREP FOR A SHAKE-UP

When you travel or switch jobs, you lose the cues that normally prod you to stick with healthy habits (e.g., passing the gym on your drive home). Seek out consistency when you're out of your element—say, by researching running trails near your hotel if you're a jogger.