



e-quilibrium

- *"electronic briefs on behavior and health"*

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Self-Control

You may be among the many persons who made a resolution for this New Year. If so, chances are good that the resolution involved some change in behavior and/or involves your health. Also, your experience is typical if you get off to a good start, but find yourself gradually having difficulty staying on course.

e-quilibrium is my new monthly e-newsletter that is intended to be a service to anyone who is concerned about having and maintaining a lifestyle that is conducive to health and well-being. Each edition of the newsletter will briefly address a topic from the behavioral sciences that is relevant to health. My hope is that you will find the information useful in your own life, and perhaps applicable in your work with others.

The topic for this month is self-control, also known as willpower. Self-control is certainly an asset when it comes to New Year's resolutions. Recent behavioral science research suggests that self-control is a limited resource that functions like a muscle. Exerting self-control can eventually exhaust the resource... until it is replenished.

Self-control is necessary for all of the following:

- Overriding an automatic tendency or habit
- Establishing a new behavior or habit
- Managing negative emotional states (depression, anxiety, stress, etc.)

- Self-control can be replenished with:
- Rest (sleep)
 - Practice (as a new behavior becomes a habit, less self-control is required)
 - Positive emotion

Following this perspective on self-control, there are several points to remember regarding New Year's resolutions:

- Because self-control is a limited resource, avoid attempting too much change all at once.
- Avoid attempting a major behavior change during periods of significant negative emotion.
- When making a behavior change, try to minimize other expenditures of self-control.
- When making a behavior change, get lots of rest and attempt to frequently be in situations that foster positive emotion.
- Continue to practice the new behavior... gradually less self-control will be necessary to maintain the behavior.

Happy and Healthy New Year!

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