First things first. The goal, “I’m going to lose weight” is a nice idea, but lacks the specificity it needs to promote results. It’s easy to throw out favorite foods, eat buckets of kale and exercise like a maniac… for a week or so. But, then what? As professionals, we have an opportunity to share the message that breaking large goals down into smaller goals that are **Specific**, **Measurable**, **Achievable**, **Realistic**, and **Time bound** (**SMART**) can help bring about sustainable change. For example, “Every day, I will include at least one serving of a dried, fresh, frozen or canned fruit or vegetables at each meal and snack.” If this goal turns out to be too challenging, offer some encouragement to help the client examine the barriers and address them, adapting the goal if necessary. Once the goal has been met, encourage him or her to keep it up and try adding a new goal, recognizing that sustainable change is built over time. To help clients and staff set and keep resolutions, here are some basic points that you can share:

- Over time, we’ve come to understand that on the road to health, radical changes, such as dieting, are not effective vehicles. Incorporating healthy habits into everyday living will help get you where you want to go.
- Change is cyclical. It’s normal for a successful change to be interrupted by life’s circumstances and the human “condition”. Setbacks are common and are not an indication of failure. Address the barriers and try again.
- Having a plan in place to maintain healthy habits when circumstances arise can help you stay on track.
- Finding support is key. Discuss your goals with those close to you, including your healthcare provider; don’t be afraid to let them know how they can help.
- Little changes can make a big difference. If it feels like your SMART goals are too small, hang in there. As small changes are incorporated over time, they add up. In the spirit of January, picture a snowball that starts small and gathers strength and momentum as it rolls forward.

Cheers to a happy and healthy New Year!

Rebecca O’Reilly, MS, RD