

Keeping Your New Year's Resolution

On December 31, we like to reflect on the year that is ending, and make promises about changes for the year about to begin. Now that the 2018 is well underway, and winter has given way to Spring, it seems like a good time to reflect on our resolutions.

Did you make any resolutions? Research tells us that 45% of Americans make New Year's pledges. If you are included in this category, social science can provide some insights on how to keep these pledges to yourself.

In one study, economists recruited 168 college students who were given \$75 to enroll and submit to biometric testing. ⁽¹⁾ One third were given an additional \$100 if they returned in one month and five months for additional testing. The second group would be given \$100 if they went to the gym to exercise at least one time during the upcoming month. The third group of students would be given \$100 if they went to the gym at least 8 times during the month. Comparing exercise rates before and after the study, students in the 'no exercise' or the 'one exercise' group did not show an increase in their healthy habits. In fact, some students dropped out after they received the initial \$75 and never completed the study. The students

who were forced to go to the gym twice a week (8 exercise) in order to successfully complete the study showed a significant increase in their exercise routines, and these good habits stayed with the students after the study was completed. Since the amount of money each group was paid to participate was identical, the authors suggested that it was not the money (extrinsic incentive), but that the students in the 8 exercise group had internalized the good habits they picked up. The participants realized they could make time for exercise even after the financial incentives were removed. The authors observed that if we can kick-start a new behavior, we can make it a long-lasting one.

If you are showing symptoms of AMD, taking on new healthy habits is the best option. One good way to start is with your diet. Green leafy vegetables contain Leutin and Zeaxanthin, nutrients essentials to the cells in your retina. For one month, add green leafy vegetables to your diet at least 3 times a week. At the end of that time, you should feel more encouraged to keep up healthy habits and your meals will seem incomplete without greens. One month will turn into 3 then 6, and before you know it, the whole year will pass by and you'll be eating an eye-healthy diet. Walking a little bit each day is another habit that you should integrate into your daily life. Let your healthy habits start today, and if you slip once in a while, that is okay. Sometimes you have to lose a battle to win the war.

1. Charness G & Gneezy U, **Incentives to Exercise**, *Econometrica* 77:909-931, 2009.