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## NEW YEARS RESOLUTIONS

Did you make any New Year's resolutions this year? Some of the most popular ones are: "Loose weight", "Exercise more", "Get out of debt", "Quit drinking/ smoking/ (enter unhealthy habit here)", "Spend more time with family", "Reduce stress level". If you're like most people, you probably had at least one or two in mind, and now, in mid-January may be wondering if you can really do it. If that's the case, don't give up. Changing a habit involves more than a verbal commitment; it involves rewiring your brain. Sounds complex? Don't worry, this doesn't require brain surgery!

Our brains' neuron connections are like complex road systems which our mind's energy travels on. How we react to things and general daily behaviors over time become hardwired in our brain – the roadway is solid asphalt. New research about how our brains work indicates that it is possible to change that wiring, but it takes effort and time. By setting a goal to make a change, you are basically laying a pathway for a new neuron connection. The trick is that your brain is used to sending energy down the old road and it takes extra energy to remind itself to go down this new one.

Part of the retraining trick is to spend as little energy as possible on that old path. Avoid analyzing or ruminating about the problems associated with it or beating yourself up if you slip up – any attention you give to what you're trying to stop is actually sending a signal to your brain to send the energy down that old path. **INSTEAD, FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON WHAT YOU WANT.** Repetition of the new behavior and feedback about the change will begin to strengthen the new wiring, while the lack of attention will deconstruct the old wiring. Dan Siegel, author of [The Developing Mind](#), explains that it takes 1 – 3 months for a new neuron to grow and fully integrate with the rest of our brain patterns. **STICK TO IT!** And by summer, these new pathways will be the hardtop roads that your brain chooses first!

There are a lot of resources on setting achievable goals, including these two online articles: <http://healthyminds.org/resolutions.cfm> and <http://pos-psych.com/news/kathryn-britton/2007010726> but behind any goal setting and change lies that brain re-wiring, so be patient with yourself and keep working on that new pathway!

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