

"New Year, New You"

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... a phrase we often associate with this time of year. It's a time where, in the spirit of tradition, individuals all over the globe resolve to make life better in the coming year. It is estimated that 70 percent of people who make New Year's resolutions include some type of fitness goal.⁽¹⁾ However, all too often, what begins as a committed effort toward a healthy lifestyle turns to disappointment when competing priorities sabotage our plans. Over the past several years, I have noticed that in the first weeks of January the gym is packed, filled with new faces excited about the challenges ahead. Then comes February, and the numbers start to dwindle. By the end of February the gym is far less crowded, and I would estimate that about 50 percent of the new faces have disappeared. Within 90 days, life at the gym has returned to "normal". Another New Year's resolution faded. So, enough of the disappointment! Let's discuss some ways we can stay committed which will assist us in meeting these goals for years to come.

First of all, who said resolutions were only meant for the "New Year"? Actually, I quite despise New Year's resolutions because they are so often thrown by the wayside within the first 60 to 90 days. It's so easy for people to say, "Well, there's always next year"; almost as if failure was expected. They laugh it off and chock it up to another good effort. Kind of reminds me of the song "Another One Bites the Dust"! So, why not make life resolutions instead? After all, fitness and health should be lifestyle and not just some goal you set on January 1st along with 70 percent of the masses. Think of physical health as a life goal. It's never too late to make the choice, no matter what time of year. This is your health we are talking about; your quality of life for years to come. Doesn't your health deserve more than just "another good effort?" Ok, stepping off my soap box now!

One great way to keep your fitness commitments is to find an accountability and workout partner. Coordinate your schedules in advance and put this time in your calendar just as you would any other appointment. Agree to a "cancellation policy" with your partner. If one of you cancels without a very good reason, you owe your workout buddy lunch, an agreed upon sum of money, a movie, etc. Be creative!

If making an appointment with yourself and an accountability partner just isn't enough to keep you motivated, you may need to enlist the help of a paid fitness professional. Consider hiring a personal trainer or joining a group fitness program such as Boot Camp Challenge. There is something to be said about putting your hard earned money on the line! With many trainers and group programs, you are required to pay up front. Any missed sessions result in you forfeiting the fee. And speaking of fee, I like to think of it instead as an investment. Investing in your health is probably one of the most important choices you will ever make!

Another important step in keeping your fitness goals is to avoid common mistakes people make that sabotage them. One of the most common mistakes is expecting way too much too fast! When the weight and fat don't come off as quickly as we thought, we become discouraged and give up. It is important to be realistic about how your body will respond. Unfortunately, it takes more time to take the weight off than it did to put it on. Be patient and keep a positive attitude. In addition, many individuals do too much too quickly. They dive in head first and with a vengeance and then burn out quickly. If you have never engaged in an exercise routine, it is best to begin slowly. Let your body adjust to the new routine and then work your way up. Begin with two to three days of activity per week. Once this has become habit, add another day and then another. Also, be mindful about how much time each day you are devoting to this new lifestyle goal. Again, don't be afraid to start with just 30 minutes per session and work your way up. Finally, don't beat yourself up if you fall off the wagon. Although it will be challenging, pick yourself up and get back on as quickly as possible. The more time that goes by, the harder it will be to get back into the swing of things. Refuse to let "failure" be an option!

One last tip for keeping yourself on track is to keep an open mind when it comes to exercise. Exercise comes in many forms, from mowing the lawn to snowboarding and everything in between. If you find it difficult to keep yourself motivated, do something you enjoy, and don't be afraid to try new things. The important thing is to keep moving!

So this year, why not make life resolutions? Make yourself a priority and resolve to begin a journey to a healthier, happier, more peaceful you!

⁽¹⁾ As quoted by Good Morning America, January 4th, 2009