

RESOLUTION BLUES?

With the coming of a new year there comes a promise to improve oneself. Shortly thereafter, there comes the guilt of falling short on these promises. It happens to everyone. One person wants to quit smoking, another to lose weight, another to start a fitness regime, another to stress less over work or spend more time with family, drink less, exercise more, on and on. The key to success in making positive change to one's life is to set oneself up for success by setting realistic goals and then following through with an action plan. Too often the goal is lofty, but the plan is weak. Sweeping changes are difficult to implement and likely short lived. Although it sounds boring, one of the keys to lasting self improvement is **moderation**.

Having worked with many clients over the years, I've been witness to many failed attempts at improving one's health through an overzealous fitness and diet regime. Many people set themselves up for disappointment by trying to accomplish too much in too short a period. The novelty of their plan loses its luster soon after the New Year's confetti is cleaned up and the client has fallen back into old habits. Following is a list of five guidelines one can follow in setting up a 'doable' goal in order to improve one's fitness level. It doesn't matter if you're starting your goal today or modifying a goal set at the start of the New Year, (perhaps after too much bubbly).

1. Find something you love.

If you enjoy solitude, perhaps a walking program would be of interest to you. If you're a 'people person', perhaps the energy of a fitness class is what you need. You must enjoy the actual activity you're about to undertake in order for you to keep at it. Knowing that exercise has many health benefits is not enough to keep you at it if you really don't enjoy it. There are plenty of options to getting fit; it's not a 'one size fits all' approach.

2. Carve out some time and schedule your fitness activity.

It seems obvious, but fitness will not just happen. It needs to be scheduled just like you would schedule anything else. Also, the time commitment need not be enormous. Too often clients think they need to find an hour a day to devote to a fitness regime. This is far too much time, especially in the beginning. Who has an extra hour a day? One can improve one's fitness level with as little as 20 minutes three times a week. As your fitness level improves and this 20 minute time block is engrained in your schedule, it's much easier to find more time to devote to the pursuit.

3. Get a training partner.

Sometimes being accountable to someone else helps people adhere to their program. It makes training more fun and often clients can feed off of the energy of each other to get them through their workout.

4. Hire a personal trainer.

It seems like an unnecessary expense, but hiring someone to set up a program can have a priceless payoff. Sore or strained muscles can result from improper technique and be the end of training while injuries heal. This can be avoided if a trainer is consulted to ensure exercises are done properly. Furthermore, a personal trainer can help develop a reasonable program with individual health concerns in mind in the first place.

5. Go easy on yourself.

This is not a prescription to slack off. In fact, isn't the goal to improve oneself and not let oneself get away with slovenliness? However, if one undertakes too much too soon, it's too easy to just throw in the towel. Setting moderate goals over a long period of time is the key. Trying to quit smoking, diet and start exercising all at once is too much. Making smaller lifestyle changes that are easier to implement is the way to lasting self improvement.

Although the above guidelines may seem like common sense, it's surprising how they escape the grasp of many people as they set off on their self improvement path in early January. If you are one of the overzealous resolution makers and breaker, consider this information. Get back on the bandwagon, but modify your plan. Let 2006 be the year that you make lasting changes to your life to make it the best year yet.

Shawna Kaminski

(Shawna is a long time resolution maker and personal trainer. She can help you develop the program you need. Check out how she's helping many with their fitness goals at: <http://members.shaw.ca/shawna.kaminski> . She does one-on-one personal training or she can work with you online by going to the 'online training' page on her website.)