

New Year's success guide

Written by Brianna Larson

Friday, 28 December 2012 11:39 -

Starting a fitness program may be one of the best things you can do for your health. The turn of a new year is sprinkled the resolve of many to improve; whether it's decision to lose weight, be more productive, or worry less, this is an ideal time to act! One of the more popular resolutions is to lose weight, and with all the benefits associated it is the perfect start to any person's year! It can be intimidating to take on a change, especially if you do not know where to begin. To make the transition into a healthier lifestyle easier, you can start with 5 easy steps:

Step 1: Get a fitness assessment from a certified professional

Step 2: Develop a fitness program that fits your needs

- Consider your fitness goals. Having clear goals can help you gauge your progress.
- Create a balanced routine. Most adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity per week. Strength training and stretching are needed as well to create a strong fitness base.
- Train at your own pace. If you are new to exercise, start slowly and progress in steps. If you have an injury or a medical condition, consult your doctor or a physical therapist for help designing a fitness program that gradually improves your range of motion, strength and endurance.
- Build activity into your daily routine. Finding time to exercise can be a challenge, so schedule a no-excuse exercise appointment.
- Include enjoyable activities. Different activities (cross-training) can make exercise enjoyable, and reduces your chances of injuring your body. Plan to alternate among activities that emphasize different parts of your body, such as walking, swimming and strength training.
- Allow time for recovery. Many people start exercising with frenzied zeal or to punish their body for holiday indulgence — working out too long or too intensely — and give up when their muscles and joints become sore or injured. Rest is imperative for repair of your body and to avoid being discouraged by excessive soreness.
- Put it on paper. A written plan may encourage you to stay on track.

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Step 3: Equip yourself for success

- If you're planning to invest in exercise equipment, choose something that's practical, enjoyable and easy to use. You may want to try out certain types of equipment at a fitness center before investing in your own equipment.

Step 4: Get started

- Start slowly and build up gradually. Give yourself plenty of time to warm up and cool down with easy walking or gentle stretching. As your stamina improves, gradually increase the amount of time you exercise. Work your way up to 30 to 60 minutes of exercise most days of the week.

- Break things up if you have to. You don't have to do all your exercise at one time. Shorter but more-frequent sessions have aerobic benefits, too. Fifteen minutes of exercise a couple of times a day may fit into your schedule better than a single 30-minute session.

- Be creative. Maybe your workout routine includes various activities, such as walking, bicycling or rowing.

- Listen to your body. If you feel pain, shortness of breath, dizziness or nausea, take a break. You may be pushing yourself too hard.

- Be flexible. If you're not feeling good, give yourself permission to take a day or two off.

Step 5: Monitor your progress

- Have your fitness assessment re-evaluated six weeks after you start your program and then again every three to six months. You will be excited to see how all aspects of your fitness have improved and that will give you an extra boost to continue!

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