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Tips for sticking to your new fitness resolution all year long

Congratulations to all who have resolved to get fit this year, but about half of you will fall by the wayside before 2008 ends. You will become sidetracked...

By Richard Seven
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Congratulations to all who have resolved to get fit this year, but about half of you will fall by the wayside before 2008 ends. You will become sidetracked by excuses, life's relentless to-do list, injury or perhaps just old-fashioned laziness.

It happens every year, and to the most well-intentioned. But it doesn't have to be that way. Some of you will find your rhythm, build a habit and sustain a healthier lifestyle.

Here are some basic tips that might help:

Make an appointment. Schedule your workout for a precise time of day. Treat that appointment as you would any other. While you would love to bag that dentist appointment, you don't because you know it's important. So is exercise.

Make it fun. Obviously, you're more likely to do what you like. Play a game, like soccer, basketball, a racket sport or even "Dance Dance Revolution." Even treadmills can be fun (or less tortuous) if you set goals and compete with your previous bests.

Savor the spoils. Acknowledge the "runner's buzz" after a long jog, or how much more peaceful and supple you feel after a yoga session, or how powerful a thoughtful weight-training session makes you feel. The true benefits of an active life are paid out in the long term, but the daily wins are what keep you going. So pat yourself on the back.

Use the buddy system. Working out with a friend not only distracts from how hard or boring something may be — it can inspire, too. Anyone who has watched a herd of bicyclists chugging down the road can grasp how they seem to pull one another along. And you are also less likely to blow off a workout if a friend is depending on you.

Start small and go steady. Many who have been near-dormant start too fast and get burned out — if they don't get hurt first. Start with a couple flights of stairs or a 15-minute walk or half a fitness video. Go a little farther or harder each time and see how you feel.



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You're more likely to do what you like, such as play a game. Above, pickup basketball at Fremont's Sound Mind and Body.

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Ditch the excuses. Not enough time? Shorten your workout, wake up a half-hour earlier, walk during your lunch break, stop watching so much TV (or work on a wobble board while you watch). Too hard? Back off a little or do something different, maybe easier. Too boring? Go rollerblading, dancing or skating. It's hard to lose when you go outside. Knees hurt? Swim or do an aquatic class. Too tired? Exercise helps cure fatigue.

Remember why. A steady exercise program can help you feel better, live longer, think sharper. So don't get caught up in the fitness- magazine covers, with those airbrushed freaks posing and staring back at you. Don't let the mirror lead the way, either. Physical changes sneak up on the fit.

Be honest. Cedric Bryant, chief science officer of the American Council on Exercise, advises people to understand what they are getting into before taking the plunge. Read a book, surf the Web or talk to an expert before diving into an activity with which you have no or little experience.

Give yourself a break. Don't overdo it. Need a rest? Take one. The last thing you need is another must-do in your life. Yes, you should be exercising, but burnout has ended many a good intention.

Know thyself, especially when gym-shopping.

What will you use, and when would you go? In other words, be realistic about your goals and the opportunities and figure out if they mesh with the gym. Is it in a part of town close to home or work or along the way between the two? Do they have the classes, machines, amenities you would actually want and use? Will you use it enough to make your fees and dues worth it? Maybe you are the type to be motivated because you've already paid your money.

Be a consumer. If you hire a personal trainer, make sure he or she is qualified. Dan Tripps, director of Seattle University's Center for the Study of Sport & Exercise, says consumers should ask whether trainers have completed a curriculum in physiology, exercise science, athletic training, kinesiology or a similar field.

Ask about first aid and CPR certification, liability insurance and a documented policy explaining services, costs, cancellations, length of contract, etc.

Join a group. Perhaps the hottest trend within the fitness industry is group personal training, in which as many as four clients work with a trainer at the same time. That defrays the cost and sometimes makes the appointment less intense and more fun. Enlist on a soccer team, a hiking club, a spin class.

Eat well. Probably the most overlooked aspect of people searching for a fitter lifestyle. Always eat breakfast — a healthy one. Try to eat small amounts, especially protein, every three hours throughout the day. "Grazing" helps keep your energy level up and your metabolism humming. Lay off the candy bars, chips and fast food. Think about how one cheeseburger can undo about an hour of calorie-burning.

Get strong, but don't overdo. Resistance training should be a part of everyone's program. That doesn't mean powerlifting. Muscle helps burn fat, but know your limits, think form first, go slow and steady and focus on what a particular lift is intended to accomplish. Don't lurch, jerk or twist. Keep as full a range of motion as possible.

Be creative. You can incorporate some measure of exercise in daily life. Use the stairs instead of the elevator. Park on the far side of the parking lot rather than hunting for the spot closest to the door. Use resistance bands at your desk or while traveling. Take a deep breath once in a while.

Chart a path . Tripps says you should start with a baseline measurement of your weight; resting and exercise heart rates; muscular strength and endurance; joint range of motion; and exercise intensity (distance, pace, time, etc.) relative to your age, gender and health condition. Then set goals and measure your progress. You'll see improvements, but there will be plateaus, so be flexible and modify your path when necessary.

Get the right tools. Get a heart monitor. These are handy training tools and help guide the intensity and



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cadence of workouts, whether you are running, walking or spinning. Also pop for good shoes and have a water bottle handy so you can hydrate *while* exercising.

Do it right. Form is critical. Don't lean, contort or strain. Sure, you ran up the hill, but was your back doing too much of the work? Warm up before you stretch, and cool down after each workout.

Be positive. The road will be pocked with partial failures and disappointments, but Bryant says you should learn from them rather than letting them derail you.

Just do it. Yes, it's a slogan designed to entice you to buy stuff, but it is at the heart of every lasting fitness program. All the intention and knowledge in the world can fall prey to excuses. So just do something.

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