

Ross' Precision Health & Fitness Newsletter

Issue #6 – 1/1/2007 – New Year's Resolutions

Now that the holidays are over and 2006 has come to an end, things will hopefully start returning to normal and you can rededicate yourself to health and fitness (if necessary). Traditionally this is the time of year to reflect on the past and think about your future. Of course when thinking about health, fitness, and a brand new year, one of the first things that comes to mind is New Year's resolutions.

New Year's resolutions are all about making improvements in your life and virtually everyone is interested in improving their health and fitness. If you made resolutions this year or in years past, chances are many of them involved exercise or nutrition. Now, take a minute to think about your previous resolutions and how successful they were.

If you have been good at sticking to your resolutions in previous years, then keep it up in 2007, but if you are like most people, chances are your resolutions were not very successful. People generally start off strong, but once they lose their initial momentum and their motivation fades, they almost never fully recover. At this point, accomplishing the resolution is unlikely and it may not even be seriously thought about until its time to make resolutions for the following year.

Unfortunately it is also common for people make resolutions they really want to accomplish, but don't actually believe they will accomplish. It is almost as though some people make resolutions and put forth some initial effort just to say they gave it a shot. If you have a history of unrealized resolutions, the first thing to ask yourself is why will this year be more successful than previous ones?

If you don't have a good answer for this question, it's time to rethink your approach to resolutions or possibly do away with them altogether. Otherwise you may have the initial motivation, ability, and dedication required to achieve your resolutions and still end up falling short. Usually this is because the resolutions are missing one critical element: planning.

Resolutions can be beneficial if they are accompanied with a solid plan, but a list of resolutions by itself is really just a wish list of things you want or hope to accomplish. For example, consider the popular resolution of losing fat. Fat loss is not something that you just do; it's the result of doing specific things (eating healthy, exercising, etc.). Having a vague general resolution like losing fat is not very helpful, unless you also make resolutions do all the things necessary to accomplish your primary resolution.

Personally I would suggest forgetting the whole concept of resolutions and concentrating on setting goals instead. Resolutions and goal setting may seem similar, but resolutions typically take a let's start something and see what happens approach, while goal setting is about planning a specific path to success. Most people are familiar with setting goals, but few actually utilize them to maximize their results. For this reason, I made goal setting the topic of this issue's article.

Featured Article

The Foundations of Effective Goal Setting

Goal setting is one of the most effective tools you can use to help stay motivated and ultimately reach your goals. However the quality of your results will be greatly affected by the specific goals you create. For best results, goals should be appropriate for your ability level and they need to be both challenging and attainable. Otherwise your goals can actually decrease your motivation and impede long-term progress.

If you set goals that are unrealistic or unattainable, you can start feeling as though you are failing when you are actually making progress. For example, if your goal is to lose 5 pounds of fat in a week (unrealistic for almost everyone) and you end up losing 1 pound of fat, you may believe you failed and lose motivation. In actuality a 1 pound fat loss is realistic for most people and this achievement means you are on the way to reaching your ultimate fat-loss goal.

On the other hand if your goals are too easy, you may complete every one but you won't have a sense of accomplishment, especially after your initial successes. If you don't feel as though you had to overcome an obstacle or apply more effort than usual, it will not increase or even sustain your current level of motivation. In general the more difficult it is to accomplish a goal, the more motivated you will become.

In addition to having challenging yet attainable goals, you also need to have different types of goals, specifically: short, intermediate, and long-term goals. It is a good idea to start with figuring out your long-term goals, because they will directly affect your short and intermediate-term goals.

Long-term goals can be anything you want to achieve that requires effort over an extended period of time. They can take anywhere from a few months to many years to complete or they may even be things you want to work on throughout your lifetime. Goal setting is all about creating a path to success and a long-term goal represents the end point of the path. You should always know where you want to end up before trying to figure out how to get there.

The next step is to develop intermediate-term goals, which typically represent important milestones that occur on the way to reaching a long-term goal. For example, if someone weighs 200 pounds with 40% body fat and has a long-term goal of weighing 150 pounds with 25 % body fat, they could have intermediate-term goals such as weighing 175 pounds or getting down to 35% body fat.

Whatever your intermediate-term goals are, they should be important to you. They often involve doing things that you have not done for a while, such as fitting into a particular piece of clothing or achieving a physical feat (e.g. finishing a half marathon). Reaching these milestones will provide you with a sense of accomplishment and reinforce the fact that you are making significant progress towards long-term goals.

There is no universal rule about how many intermediate-term goals you should have, but if you expect to take a long time to reach your ultimate goal, you should have more intermediate-

term goals. After you determine your intermediate-term goals, you should write them down in the order in which you expect to reach them. If done correctly you should have a good idea of what it will take to get from where you are to where you want to be.

For many people, listing all the intermediate-term goals is the first time where they really start believing their long-term goals are attainable, because they can visualize a path to success. The next step is then to estimate how long it will take to reach each of the intermediate-term goals. In general, intermediate-term goals can be spaced from a few weeks to a few months apart.

Now that you have long and intermediate goals, you need to create some short-term goals. These will make up the bulk of your goal-setting program and they should occur frequently and be relatively easy to accomplish. Unlike your other goals, short-term goals are less about developing a sense of accomplishment and more about creating positive habits and taking the small steps necessary to reach your intermediate and long-term goals.

Additionally, short-term goals don't have to be planned out far into the future, because they can change frequently. Also, many of these goals will be reoccurring, such as drinking at least 8 glasses of water per day or exercising at least 4 times per week. Once a recurring goal becomes an everyday habit, it can be removed from your goal list, because it shouldn't require much if any additional effort to keep it up.

Short-term goals are also useful for stopping bad habits that will sabotage your success. It's a good idea to look at your intermediate and long-term goals and figure out the potential roadblocks in your path to success. Then create short-term goals to deal specifically with those problems. For example, if you have trouble losing fat due to eating a lot of junk food before bed, try thinking of some simple things you can improve.

If you typically sit down with a bag of chips and start eating, an easy change is to take a couple handfuls of chips and put them on a plate instead of taking the bag with you. This will improve portion control and decrease the calories you will store as fat. Just be sure to avoid making initial changes that are too drastic. If this happens it can become too difficult to stick to the changes. Instead, start with simple changes and become stricter over time. In this case, you could change your goals from 2 handfuls of chips to 1 and eventually replace the chips with a healthier food that will less likely be stored as fat.

Short-term goals should be specific. If you are trying to improve your eating habits, having goals such as not having any sugar for the whole day or not having any fried food for three days are much better than just having a goal to eat better over the next week. Having specific goals makes it easier to monitor your progress and determine when you need to change your goals.

As you can see, creating appropriate and effective goals requires thought and effort. It may be difficult at first, but once you go through the process of figuring out your initial long, intermediate, and short-term goals, you will have the makings of a great plan for success. Plus, going through this process will make it much easier to adjust and improve your goals as your progress with your health and fitness program.

Goal setting is without a doubt one of the greatest tools you can use for increasing motivation and success, but there is one additional requirement for goal setting to be effective. You must understand what is necessary to get from where you are now to where you want to go. Sometimes this is easy, but in the case of health, fitness, and especially fat loss, what you believe you need to do may be very different from what you actually should to do.

For instance, there are still many people who believe that the fewer calories they eat, the more fat they will lose. Cutting calories can help you lose fat, but if you don't eat enough, your body will start conserving fat and burning muscle instead. This is one of the worst things that can happen if you are trying to achieve long-term fat loss. If short-term goals are created under the assumption that fat loss is maximized by extreme caloric reduction, then intermediate and long-term goals will be flawed as well and long-term fat loss will not be achieved.

If you know what you need to do to accomplish your goals, I urge you to give goal setting a try and take the time and set up your long, intermediate, and short-term goals, if you have not done so already. If you have any questions about goal setting or are having difficulty setting creating your specific goals, let me know and I'll do what I can to help.

WRAP UP:

I hope you all had a great year in 2006 and are excited and determined to make 2007 even better. This issue is all about taking the time to formulate a plan, harness your post-holiday motivation, and make the most of the new year. Even if you don't create a full goal-setting program, be sure to make at least a few specific goals and a basic plan to achieve them. This will save you a lot of time and energy over the long run.

This issue not only marks the changing of the year, but also some changes to my newsletter. Most notably, the Precision Health and Fitness Newsletter will only be published once a month, with each new issue scheduled to be sent out on the first of the month. This decision was the result of multiple factors.

For one, creating these newsletters is quite time consuming and if I continue creating two per month, the quality will start to suffer. Also, as I am getting busier, spending extra time on the newsletter would mean having less time to spend on my clients (creating programs, etc.) and they are my first priority. The final factor is simply that there has not been enough interest or feedback to suggest that two issues per month is necessary.

This may of course change in the future as I already have a couple possible changes in mind, but this is the plan for now. If you have any comments or suggestions, please let me know.

Thanks and best wishes for 2007,

Ross