

Getting Ready For a New Year:

Making Your New Year's Resolutions to Lose Weight and Get in Shape

It's almost a new year and many of us are looking back on the previous one, reflecting on what we've accomplished and what we want for the future. For many of you, that means learning how to incorporate an exercise program to lose weight and get in better shape. If you made a resolution last year to loose weight and didn't reach it, now's the time to do it.

Set Your Goals

Your first step in getting in shape is to set some goals for yourself. Start with a long-term goal and ask yourself specifically what you want. Do you want to loose weight? If so, how much? Take some time to figure out exactly what you want and exactly what you need to reach that goal. The following tips will help you set your goals for the New Year:

- Make sure your goal is reachable. If you're trying to get back to the weight you were 20 years ago, that may not be possible. You may need to adjust that weight to fit in with your current age and lifestyle.
- Make sure you have a plan. If you want to lose 30 pounds in three months that means you'll be losing about a pound a week. To lose a pound a week, you need to create a calorie deficit of about 500 calories per day with your diet and exercise program. Take some time to look at your diet and figure out how you can reduce your calories.
- Set short-term goals. While your long-term goal might be to lose 30 pounds in three months, that's a long way away. What are you going to do to keep yourself motivated from day to day? Setting weekly goals (i.e. I'll workout at the gym at least three times this week) can help you stay on track and have something to be proud of even if you're not losing weight just yet.
- Be realistic. Weight loss doesn't happen overnight – for some of you, it may not happen for a while. Think of the first three months of your exercise program as a learning period. You're teaching your body how to eat healthy and exercise regularly and your goal should be making exercise a habit. If you can do that, the weight loss will follow.
- Be flexible. You may find that the goal set in January isn't working for you come March or April. If you're not able to reach your original goal, whether it's because you don't have the time or the commitment, don't be afraid to lower your standards a bit and set a goal you *can* reach.

The Nitty-Gritty

Now that you have some idea of what you want to accomplish, you need to figure out how to get there. How much exercise do you need? How much will you realistically do? Setting up a program can be as simple or as complicated as you want it to be. At its most basic, it's as simple as sitting with your calendar and deciding when you're going to exercise.

- Figure out where and when you're going to exercise. You can set up your own program or use videos. Look at your schedule, your calendar, and your budget and map out your plan before you get started.
- Educate yourself. Before you jump into something, take some time to learn the basic guidelines for exercise and weight loss.
- Set up your cardio. If you're a beginner, start with about three days a week for 20 to 30 minutes (or however much you can handle) of your favorite exercise. Sit down with your calendar and plan what you'll do, how long you'll do it and where you'll do it.
- Set up your strength training. It's easiest to start with a full body program on two non-consecutive days a week, targeting all the muscles of the body.
- Change your workouts regularly. To build muscle and lose fat, you need to be challenging your body. That means going faster or longer, adding weight, reps, and/or sets to each workout and finding new activities to keep from hitting plateaus or getting bored.
- Start where you are. The biggest mistake beginners make is taking on too much too soon. That can lead to injury or burnout and you may find yourself struggling to keep up that pace. Start slowly – if you can only exercise for 10 minutes, start there and work your way up. You'll enjoy exercise a whole lot more if you ease into it and gradually work your way up.

Adapted from: <http://exercise.about.com/cs/weightloss/a/newyear2004.htm>