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## **Planning for a Healthy holiday season and a Happy New Year**

### *Designing a Plan for Change*

MADISON, Wis. December 2008 – Perhaps you have been working to get more fit as part of your plan for a healthy lifestyle, or you just recently started adding more physical activity to your life. The holiday season, which stretches into January, is the perfect time to consider an exercise strategy. Exercise expert and Association for Applied Sport Psychology member Diane Whaley, PhD and Blake Rushin, MS, both from the University of Virginia, offer some valuable tips.

While many of us look forward to enjoying holiday celebrations, which include great food and beverages, they can also undermine a commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Self-regulation skills, self-monitoring, goal setting and social support are key strategies for planning a healthy holiday season and a happy New Year.

#### **Putting Skills Into Action**

Self-regulation is all about the skills you use to control your own behavior. Self-monitoring is how you observe and examine your own health behaviors. The most important steps in this skill are to:

- Recognize the need to make some sort of change in your behavior, and then
- Develop an effective plan for changing or improving a behavior.

For example, Susan often enjoys extra servings of her favorite holiday foods, thinking that she can work it off with more exercise the next day. This year she will focus on a specific goal of having one serving of her favorite food while staying with her normal exercise routine. As a physical reminder, she carries a penny in her pocket that she can touch when she is tempted to go for an extra helping. Susan will also note on her calendar when she meets her “single serving” goal to remind her of her successes. In this way, self-monitoring helps her discover patterns in behavior and identify the behavior that needs to be changed.

#### **Goal Setting**

Goal setting can supplement self-monitoring in helping you achieve specific goals. In addition to avoiding extra helpings, Susan set a goal of engaging in a minimum of 30 minutes of physical activity two times a week until she resumes her regular schedule in January. She acknowledges that it may not be possible to stay with her usual routine during the holidays. Susan also understands that she may have some setbacks to reaching her goals.

#### **Seeking Out and Using Social Support**

Getting support can help Susan achieve her healthy holiday goals. She can let others know that she is serious about staying with her physical activity plan and ask them to try not to talk her into eating more than she planned.

Other ways to enlist social support include forming your own “holiday fitness club” with one or more friends or family members who are willing to join you for physical activities. You could also start more active holiday traditions with your family and friends. For example, participate as a family team in a local Turkey Trot race on Thanksgiving morning. Many Turkey Trots are 5K races and include both runners and walkers of all ages and abilities. Getting support is an enjoyable and fun way to help you stay with your healthy holiday goal plan.

You can enjoy your celebrations with a plan for making the holidays a season for health and fitness. What better thing to celebrate than a healthier, more vibrant 2009!

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## **Tips for Goal Setting to Achieve Your New Year's Resolutions** *Carrying Out a Plan For Change*

### **Set Specific, Measurable and Attainable Goals**

**Solution:** Goals are only as effective as they are specific, measurable and attainable. For example, “My goal is to do my 30-minute workout three times per week for the next 12 weeks” or “I want to increase my strength by 10% every two weeks.” Specific goals give you a target to shoot for; measurable goals give you a way to gauge your success; and attainable goals challenge you but don't leave you frustrated or discouraged. It is also very important to keep a written record of your goals and your goal progress.

### **Set Goals That Relate to the Outcome**

**Solution:** Be sure your goals focus on improvement, learning and health. For example, instead of having a goal of “losing 10 pounds,” focus on your personal performance (“I will increase my average steps per day by 10% each week”) and the process of losing weight (“I will improve my form when doing my circuit workout.”) These performance and process goals will lead you to your outcome, without causing the anxiety and pressure sometimes associated with pure outcome goals.

Athletes know that having goals based exclusively on outcomes (e.g., winning the match) is dangerous. Why? Because in most cases, what we refer to as outcome goals are the most out of your control. It is no different for exercisers. In the case of losing weight, many other factors influence weight loss -your diet, the amount you are exercising, even the type of exercise you are doing, to name a few. Staying motivated is hard enough without limiting our idea of what “success” is!

### **Set Targeted Realistic Goals**

**Solution:** Focus on one or two primary (or long-term) goals then develop a series of short-term goals that can lead to the primary goal. For example, Jane can have a long-term goal of exercising four to five times per week, with a short-term goal of exercising three times this week. By starting more reasonably, she can build up her confidence, and get comfortable with her routine. What is important is that you set yourself up for success, not failure.

*The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,200 members in 28 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, [www.appliedsportpsych.org](http://www.appliedsportpsych.org).*

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