

THE SECRET TO SUCCESSFUL EXERCISE RESOLUTIONS THIS NEW YEAR: TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS TO BEAT FALSE HOPE SYNDROME

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio – December 2014 – Are you one of the many who pledge to invest more time and energy into wellness each new year? Despite their best intentions, people often find it difficult to change their behavior. A 2014 study by the University of Scranton found that only 8 percent of people are successful in keeping their New Year’s resolution. According to sport and exercise psychology authorities from the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP), the problem may be “false hope syndrome.”

“False hope syndrome is the cyclical pattern where one embarks on a change, succeeds in the beginning, but ultimately fails at sustaining that change,” says Dr. Amanda Visek, a Certified Consultant of AASP (CC-AASP) an Associate Professor of sport psychology at The George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health. “Americans consistently show their resiliency to failure because many will resolve to take on the same goals again next month or next year, only to fail again.”

The key to breaking this cycle of failure is to wipe the slate clean and try again – this time using the following strategies to increase the odds of sticking with your fitness goals:

- **Assess Your Expectations** – Align expectations with what science has shown us is feasible and healthy. Realistically, people can only expect to lose one to two pounds per week. Accept that there will be challenges along the way until exercise becomes more habitual.
- **Readjust and Refine Goals** – Be as specific as possible when developing goals, ensuring that they are measurable and action-oriented, yet realistic. Start by setting small, realistic goals then gradually build towards more challenging ones. If you aren’t exercising at all now, it’s unrealistic to expect yourself to immediately manage working out 5 times per week.
- **Prepare for Action** – Gather what is needed for success – appropriate clothing, fitness equipment, social support, etc. Proper planning is crucial. People don’t typically plan on failing at goals, but they often fail to properly plan.

Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Motivation—Which Works Best?

Promising yourself a new TV or a pair of designer shoes may not be the key to meeting your New Year’s exercise goals. Research shows that extrinsic motivators such as monetary or materialistic rewards are good at getting you off the couch, but their positive effects tend to only be short term.

“One of the keys to sustaining physical activity is to enhance intrinsic motivation, which focuses on physical activity that is fun, inherently enjoyable, and may even provide the individual with a new and exciting challenge,” explains Dr. Brandon Harris, CC-AASP and Assistant Professor of sport and exercise psychology at Georgia Southern University.

Harris suggests people consider expanding their definition of what it means to be physically active beyond running or hitting the gym. For example, activities like walking the dog, golfing without the cart, group exercise classes and other routine outdoor activities such as gardening, provide fun alternatives to “traditional” forms of physical activity and can result in similar physical and psychological benefits.

“Fun is the foundation to maintaining exercise,” Visek says. “New exercisers often don’t know what they like, only what they don’t like. The key is to experiment with a number of different activities and find which one suits you best. It’s all about exercising *your* way. And, you can exercise your way in small increments of time throughout the day. Research shows that moderate intensity exercise accumulated in small bouts adds up to positive fitness gains.”

Harris also notes that it's important to remember that some physical activity is better than none. "We tend to see a lot of individuals who think of physical activity in a very bimodal way: all or none. In other words, if they can't get in an hour's worth of physical activity in a day, they feel they might as well not do it at all," he explains.

Finding Your Motivation and Making it Work

Our authorities shared these tips to finding your motivation and making it work for you:

- Concerned about the environment? Commit to walking or riding your bike to the store, to work, etc. rather than driving.
- Want to spend time with your family? Find activities, such as biking, that you can do with your kids.
- Looking for a sense of accomplishment? Sign up for a local 5K.
- Feeling lonely? Seek social support. It is essential for long-term maintenance of physical activity. For many, enjoyment of physical activity is enhanced when done with others.

Finding a Certified Consultant to Assist You

Do you need professional assistance in maintaining an exercise program? A Certified Consultant of AASP may be the answer. While not all certified consultants specialize in working with exercisers, many have the training and knowledge to assist exercisers with similar athlete issues, such as goal setting, motivation and self-image. To find a certified consultant in your area or more information on exercise psychology, visit www.appliedsportpsych.org.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Since 1986, AASP has been an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 2,000 members in 54 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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