

We all know exercise is essential for good health – but it's all too easy to deprioritize. Here's how to build a plan that will work in the long term

By Kat Tancock



Whether you intend to "lose weight," "eat healthier" or "exercise more," health-themed [New Year's resolutions](#) are all too common, signalling a general discontent in how well we take care of our bodies. But if you tend to slip up after a few weeks or months, only to take up the same cause next January, you're not alone. **"People often go overboard at the beginning of the year and burn out quickly,"** says health and wellness expert [Annabel Fitzsimmons](#).

But does that mean you should quit while you're ahead? Not so fast. The New Year is a fantastic time to start a new shape-up plan – so long as you create one you can stick with. Here's how to build an exercise resolution that will keep you going well into next January.

Why resolutions fail

The most common reason people don't stick with their resolutions? According to yoga and cycling instructor Sari Nisker, co-owner of Toronto fitness studio [Spynga](#), it's because **they don't give the goal enough value**. "If we value something as a priority, then it is given attention and time," she says. Fitzsimmons agrees: "Many people start an exercise regime based on what they think they 'should do' instead of choosing something they enjoy," she says.

Another problem, says Fitzsimmons? Thinking too big and vague rather than aiming for something achievable, especially when it comes to scheduling. **"People often have unrealistic expectations of how much time they can actually fit in to exercise each week,"** she says, adding that it's easy to lose motivation "without tangible, specific goals or accountability to a teacher, trainer, coach or workout buddy."

Resolution secret #1: Be specific

First in the list of how to stick to your resolution? **Make sure you know exactly what it is you're trying to stick to.** After all, resolving to "exercise more" isn't very meaningful – how would you ever know if you'd succeeded?

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For a good, doable resolution, [be as specific as possible](#), says Fitzsimmons. For example, "I will swim two or three times a week and do yoga one or two times a week" is easier to gauge than "I will exercise more."

Resolution secret #2: Be realistic

Let's be honest here. Yes, it sounds virtuous to get up an hour early every day and go to the gym. But if you're the kind of person who presses snooze five times every morning before finally crawling out of bed toward the coffee maker, at the very least it's going to be a challenge.

"**Come up with a goal that you can incorporate in your everyday routine,**" suggests personal trainer and running coach [Deirdre Haugo](#) of New Westminster, B.C. "For instance, make the decision to go running at least three times a week, even just starting with 15 minutes of run/walk. Once you have successfully achieved this goal, you can **start adding more goals to your [fitness plan](#)**, such as increasing the length of your run or adding to the number of days in the week that you run."

Resolution secret #3: Build in accountability

Fitzsimmons is a big believer in the [buddy system](#), whether that buddy is a workout partner, a trainer, a coach or a teacher. "Having someone you can share your progress with makes a big difference," she says. "**They can help inspire you when you're feeling unmotivated**, and can give you the extra push when you're tempted to bail on a workout."

Resolution secret #4: Choose something you love

"Choose [an activity you enjoy](#), not what you think you should be doing," says Haugo. "A lot of people are inclined to choose an activity based on what their friends are doing, but in the long term you will end up quitting because you're spending your time doing something you don't want to do."

Not sure yet what it is that you love? Nisker suggests **trying different things to see what sticks** – and maybe committing to trying a certain number of new activities is your resolution. "Stay open to activities, classes, teachers, studios and gyms that you haven't tried," she says. "Always open yourself up to discovering different ways to get physical." Turn your fitness activities into something you look forward to, rather than dreading them.

Resolution secret #5: Be flexible

One reason many people fail in their resolutions? Not realizing that life will get in the way – and finding a strategy to deal with that. "Take it day by day and don't let a missed workout set the tone," says Haugo. Try and make up the session on another day, and if that isn't possible, relax and move on. "Life happens and your fitness goals will still be there. Make sure you get the next planned session in and **get back on track the following week.**"

Sample resolutions to get you started

Unsure of what to do next? Our fitness experts suggest some exercise-related resolutions you can try.

1. Commit to a weekly class

"By signing up to do things we love, we are more likely to follow through on our exercise plans," says Fitzsimmons, who suggests signing up for a weekly preregistered yoga, Pilates or [Zumba class](#) as part of your fitness routine.

2. Set a goal

Interested in walking or running more? [Sign up for a race](#) and come up with a schedule, such as running three times every week, to get you there, suggests Fitzsimmons. "Sign up with a friend and plan to run at least once a week together," she adds. "Find out about free run clubs in your area so you can join a group run if you need some motivation."

3. Resolve to get started

"If you're new to exercise, resolve to work out three days a week for a minimum of 30 minutes," suggests Haugo. "This is a great place to start because it doesn't require a lot of your personal time, but it gets you in the habit of exercising regularly. Eventually you will want to invest more of your time to exercise as you see results and feel the positive effects."