

Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog

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Attaining fitness goals is a matter of effort and dedication. Gaining muscle or losing fat require substantial calorie output, as well as thoughtful calorie intake, specific exercise choices, and good old-fashioned mindfulness.

When pursuing any goal, including exercise/weight management, it is imperative to remain positive. Negative thoughts, such as “I can’t do this,” will only serve to deflate and discourage.

According to the National Council on Strength & Fitness (NCSF), “Many people love to entertain the thought of pursuing such goals, but when it comes down to taking on the actual work that must be engaged, as well as setting realistic objectives—the allure of the challenge can quickly dissipate. Poor exercise adherence or completely giving up on a fitness goal is often based on physiological and psychological factors that limit success,” they wrote.

But maintaining a successful exercise regimen is hard. The following are five reasons why exercise regimens routinely fall short.

Setting unrealistic goals is one of the most common missteps when commencing an exercise routine, per the NCSF. When considering what is possible regarding weight loss, for example, keep in mind that one pound of weight loss per week equates to 500 kcal/day, or 3500 calories for the week. In addition, long-term goals—including substantial weight loss—prevail in increments and not leaps.

Pro tips from trainers at the American College of Exercise (ACE) address how to deal with unrealistic explanations.

“Our solution to working with clients with unrealistic goals involves helping them discover parallel goals that are of a more immediate nature that are connected to how they feel on a consistent basis—to feeling a sense of accomplishment, success and confidence. Once the client is on his or her way, feeling consistent and doing well, we then can look for opportunities to address the less realistic nature of the original goal,” they wrote.

They added: “Depending on the client’s personality, you can either address the goal head on and illustrate how unrealistic it is or you can ask the client how practical he or she thinks the goal is. At this point, the client may ‘know’ that it is unrealistic, but [may] feel a lack of ability to adjust the goal to a more realistic one. The stage is now set for you to teach the client about a more realistic version of the goal because he or she is now in a far more receptive place to hearing that such an adjustment to a goal is necessary.”

When pursuing any goal, including exercise/weight management, it is imperative to remain positive. Negative thoughts, such as “I can’t do this,” will only serve to deflate and discourage. Elite athletes routinely employ positive thinking and imagery to enhance performance and training.

According to HealthLinkBC, replacing the negative with the positive is a three-step process: Notice and stop negative thoughts.

Ask about the thoughts. Do they reflect any truth, or are they exaggerated? Do these thoughts merely focus on the negative and not the positive efforts? Is the focus on what should be done or is it on reality? Are things being overgeneralized? After all, nobody can never indulge a sweet tooth or always make their early-morning Sunday run. Finally, avoid an all-or-nothing mentality. If goals are not met for one day, then they can be met on others. Giving up is no way to combat temporary setbacks.

Replace negative thoughts with positive ones, such as “I can do this.”

According to HealthlinkBC, “Keeping a journal of your thoughts is one of the best ways to practice stopping, asking, and choosing your thoughts. It makes you aware of your self-talk. Write down any negative or unhelpful thoughts you had during the day. If you think you might not remember them at the end of your day, keep a notepad with you so that you can write down thoughts as they occur. Then write down helpful messages to correct the negative thoughts,” they wrote.

They added: “If you do this every day, helpful thoughts will soon come naturally. But there may be some truth in some of your negative thoughts.”

Elite athletes often compare themselves with their peers to remain motivated, directed, and mentally tough. Some comparison is healthy, but continually making comparisons with others can lead to low self-worth and exacerbate feelings of failure and depression. Making unrealistic comparisons can also distract from fitness goals and undermine relationships with exercise buddies, family, and friends. Being envious makes it harder to selflessly celebrate personal accomplishments.

Keep in mind that comparisons made using social media are often flawed. Many images on social media are “doctored,” or represent the actions of outliers with “perfect bodies.” The norm should be much more relatable!

Ultimately, everyone’s constitution is different. Some people have an easier time building muscle or burning fat. Instead of comparison with others, self-comparison is key. How does personal performance this week/month stack up with the last?

Much like with negative thinking, eschewing negative thinking involves assessing whether the comparisons are negative, and shifting them if so. It is important to determine whether the comparisons inspire and give hope or deflate.

Comparisons with others to help understand what exercises implement success, for example, is healthy. Alternatives to damaging comparisons include strategies such as empowering self-talk, visualizations, and breathing techniques.

According to ACE, a professional trainer may be the best way to overcome a propensity to make unhealthy comparisons and track self-improvement.

“Having a professional trainer or coach can go a long way toward helping you stay focused on your individual goals. A health and exercise professional can set realistic benchmarks and develop a specific plan to help you reach them, as well as make adjustments and ‘course corrections’ along the way to keep you on track,’ they wrote.

Dedication to a successful exercise regimen takes time and must be prioritized. For example, the time spent binge watching some of your favorite shows on Hulu or Netflix may need to be sacrificed to spend enough free time in the gym. Furthermore, time spent in the gym must be complemented with healthy decisions made outside the weight room such as limiting processed food and alcohol intake. Ultimately, a working game plan is imperative.

The things you do in the gym can be sabotaged by what you do outside of the gym, advised the NCSF.

“Most fitness goals must be tackled with a multifactorial approach, where the workouts themselves as well as optimal nutrition and avoidance of unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, promote victory. Consuming processed junk food and/or alcohol after an intense workout can have a significant impact on the benefits obtained during the training session,” they added.

If it is difficult to maintain a game plan due to time constraints, remember that you can break up time spent exercising into more frequent, but shorter bursts. Additionally, depending on the exercise, it may be possible to increase intensity to make up for decreased time availability.

Having specific exercise goals requires specific knowledge to attain these goals, according to the NCSF. Unfortunately, no one can intuit their way to the optimal body. In the case of maximizing muscle gains, for instance, it is best to exercise the same muscle groups two times a week instead of once a week. Frequency is key to muscle hypertrophy.

And, while, stalls and plateaus are normal, that does not mean they cannot be beat. There are several scientific strategies you can take to overcome these.

Editor’s Note: The Carpe Diem – Seize the Day Blog will be distributed and posted weekly.
Always remember – **CARPE DIEM – SEIZE THE DAY!**

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