

## How to put your best foot forward

— Here are some tips from local fitness and nutrition gurus to help you stick with your new year's resolution:

Know yourself and what will work for you, said Shirley Pantoliano, a registered yoga instructor and registered dietitian from Boxford. Sticking with it takes more than just the willpower to make it to the gym.

Realize what thoughts keep you from going to the gym, or why you eat what you do.

"If you can figure that out, then most of the work is done," she said.

Do you use food to suppress a certain emotion or to relax?

"You could do a diet for (the) short term but not long term without figuring that out," said Pantoliano. "Change your mind before you change your actions, and look at the body as a whole."

If you take a class with friends, or get to know the staff at your gym, you'll be more likely to go, said Bobbi Berkenbush, senior physical director at the North Andover/Andover YMCA. You're less likely to skip a workout session or fitness class if you know people are going to say "We missed you last time!"

"People always think it's because they're not successful, but the biggest reason they leave a gym is because they haven't formed relationships. If they're feeling very alone, not part of the crowd, that's when they drop off," she said.

Make working out a family affair. The YMCA offers programs for children through the afternoon and evening that are specially designed so that parents can go and use the gym while their children are occupied, said Berkenbush. Or, find activities that your children can do with you, like taking nature hikes or riding bikes.

Start small, said Andover resident Amy Constantino, personal trainer, lifestyle coach and founder of T-Ripple-E, a holistic health, nutrition and exercise practice. An "all or nothing" attitude never works, she said.

"Think of it as a daily resolution or a weekly resolution, not a once-a-year thing. If you change your mindset, then the days turn into a week, and the weeks into a year, and the next thing you know, it's a lifestyle," said Constantino. "We all have daily to-do lists; add your wellness items to the list.

"Health is moderation, it's all about balancing. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. Start with one small goal each day, like eating one salad, trying a new vegetable, drinking more water, or eating only half a dessert. A resolution is nothing less than a goal. Be specific, but don't go to nothing but celery sticks," she said.

Set goals that mean something to you, said Boxford resident Robin Beardsley, a personal trainer and instructor with Stroller Strides, an exercise program for mothers with young children.

"I always recommend that people set goals that are specific, are measurable and have a timeline," said Beardsley. "Instead of concentrating on numbers on the scale or clothing size, pick something that is more meaningful to you | like having the energy to chase your toddler around, instead of being a certain size or pre-pregnancy weight. (Pick) something that's meaningful and enjoyable | maybe it's running your first 5K. I once had a client that had a goal of completing the Pan-Mass Challenge.

"Big goals can be really overwhelming, especially if you're just starting out. Break your big goal into smaller goals, and celebrate each small step you make," she said.