

How to keep New Year's resolutions

Bethany Bray

— As the clock struck midnight and the ball dropped in Times Square on Dec. 31, millions of people vowed | as they do every year | to exercise more or stick to a diet. Now, three weeks later, it's becoming harder and harder to maintain a regimen of celery sticks and long jogs on the treadmill.

So, how do you stay the course?

Local exercise gurus say having a health plan that works is more than just crash diets or an all-or-nothing gym manifesto | it takes perseverance and self-awareness to know what works for you.

"On Jan. 1, everybody looks to that day as a magic day and they set unrealistic goals for themselves. Then they get frustrated when they don't achieve them. You have to set realistic goals, that you can achieve and you can measure," said Laura McKellar, co-owner of the North Andover Curves fitness center. "You've got to learn that if you fall off the wagon, it's not a disaster, but just a disappointment. Tomorrow is another day, just keep going ... You're never going to have 100-percent high interest (in a fitness plan). Set shorter goals to get re-energized." Finding a type of exercise or activity that interests you is half the battle. If your fitness program is not fun, you're never going to stick to it, said Boxford resident Robin Beardsley, a personal trainer and instructor with Stroller Strides, an exercise program for mothers with young children.

"If you don't like going to the gym, don't go to the gym. Find something else to do. There's a lot of other ways you can incorporate fitness into your lifestyle. If you love animals, take your dog for a walk. If you love being with other people, sign up for a group fitness class, or go on a walk with a friend. Incorporating more activity into your routine is going to make a difference. Take the stairs instead of an elevator, park far away when you go shopping. Just getting outside and running around with your kids is great exercise, too," said Beardsley. "I think we all think that we'd like to be a size 4 and weigh 115 pounds, but it won't necessarily make you happy or get you what you want. Being healthy is really what is important."

Barbara Bourassa, a North Andover mother of two, says her fitness regimen | she takes yoga classes with a favorite instructor and cross-country skis or hikes with a friend once a week | works for her because she's found activities that she loves, and makes exercise a non-negotiable part of her schedule.

"I schedule fitness first, and schedule work and other things after. That's the way I have to do it, otherwise it doesn't get done," she said. "I was talking with friend, and we decided we were tired (of) reading about ways to make it work and talking about it (exercise and losing weight). It's a question of just do it, just turning off that part of my brain that says, 'No.' I said, 'I have to stop making excuses. I am the only person in this whole world that is going to get me to change.'"

A fitness plan that works has to become more than a new year's resolution, said Bourassa. It takes a lifestyle change.

"It doesn't have to be tied to Jan. 1. It's an ongoing process, thinking of yourself as a work-in-progress," she said.

Thinking of how good she'll feel when she's done working out is a great motivation, said Amy Constantino, a wellness coach who recently moved from North Andover to Andover.

"Losing interest is only human, especially when you're not doing something you like. Everybody's human, everybody gets off the wagon. I just remember how much better I feel when I'm done, and that alone is my motivation nine times out of 10. Once I get started, I'm so glad I did, and you remember that. I say 'OK, I'll just do 10 minutes, because something is better than nothing.' Half the battle is just getting started. Once you're there (at the gym), you're so glad you went."