

Healthy living beyond the New Year's resolution

January 4 2012, By Casey Bayer



Greg Cloutier in the Bouvé College of Health Sciences offers advice on how to successfully stick to a New Year's resolution to lose weight or eat healthier. Credit: Mary Knox Merrill.

Some of the most popular New Year's resolutions are to lose weight, eat healthier and work out more. Greg Cloutier from Northeastern's Bouvé College of Health Sciences shares his exercise physiology and nutrition expertise to help people turn their New Year's resolutions into permanent lifestyle changes.

When people are looking to take on a New Year's resolution to better their health and fitness, should they focus more on diet, working out or a combination of the two?

When starting a New Year's resolution with a goal to maintain or lose weight, it is best to think of exercise and diet as a combination rather than each one alone. If we only diet, our weight loss will have a higher portion of muscle loss, versus a muscle-sparing plan of exercise in conjunction with healthy eating. If we only exercise, we will gain muscle, which helps to boost the metabolism to burn more calories, but we can eat many more calories than what we burn. For example, we may need to run a marathon in order to burn off grandma's holiday meal. We really need to balance our food intake with calorie expenditure. I would like to think of the holidays as a time we take out a calorie loan with good faith that we will pay it back with interest after the holidays. The bottom line is, exercise combined with a healthy, goal-specific eating plan is the best way to lose the unwanted body fat weight.

What can people do to keep their resolutions going, to make them more of a lifestyle change? Are there any "don'ts" that often contribute to people's resolutions being short-lived?

Setting a new goal for healthy eating, exercise and physical activity for the New Year requires a plan. One of the best things to do is to schedule this plan into your day like a real appointment — and keep it. Start this plan slowly and tighten up the diet and increase your physical activity over time. Too many people fall into the pitfall of starting off with too strict or too intense a program. It at first seems manageable, but then we start to experience injuries or find our results are not as fast or sustainable for the amount of effort we are putting into it. Thus, we give up or find excuses not to follow this plan for the long haul and fail to make it a lifestyle change.

New Year's is a popular time to start a new diet or

new fitness plan. Can tackling a resolution to eat better, lose weight or hit the gym be more successful when you do it with friends, coworkers or peers?

Through practice and research, we now know that those who commit to a friend, family member, group or any support team fare much better at reaching their fitness and [health](#) goals compared to those who do it alone. When we make a commitment to someone else we feel that it is more of a contract to the group. On those cold windy days we may think twice about sleeping in when we know someone is waiting out in the cold for us.

One great way to incorporate a small or large support group for wellness and fitness is to involve co-workers. Use a planned pre-work, lunch break or post-work time on most days of the week to get together for a walk, run or cycle ride. In fact, here at Northeastern, I have had a great time doing charity and training rides with a cycling group this summer. This was such a great way to maintain fitness, reduce stress, have fun and meet and network with some great people at Northeastern. We support and discuss healthy eating strategies with each other, to learn what makes them successful and to gain strength in our health and wellness goals.

Provided by Northeastern University

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