

SECRETS TO SUCCESSFUL EXERCISE ADHERENCE: TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS TO BEAT FALSE HOPE SYNDROME

CHAGRIN FALLS, Ohio – February 2012 – Are you one of the many who pledged to invest more time and energy into wellness for 2012? Are you still on target or was your goal sidelined? Despite their best intentions, people often find it difficult to change their behavior. According to sport and exercise psychology authorities from the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP), the problem may be “false hope syndrome.”

“False hope syndrome is the cyclical pattern where one embarks on a change, succeeds in the beginning, but ultimately fails at sustaining that change,” said Dr. Amanda Visek, CC-AASP and a professor at The George Washington University. “Americans consistently show their resiliency to failure because many will resolve to take on the same goals again next month or next year, only to fail again.”

The key to breaking this cycle of failure is to wipe the slate clean and try again – this time using the following strategies to increase the odds of sticking with your fitness goals:

- **Assess Your Expectations** – Align expectations with what science has shown us is feasible and healthy. Realistically, people can only expect to lose one to two pounds per week. Accept that there will be challenges along the way until exercise becomes more habitual.
- **Readjust and Refine Goals** – Be as specific as possible when developing goals to be measurable, action-oriented, yet realistic.
- **Prepare for Action** – Gather what is needed for success – appropriate clothing, fitness equipment, social support, etc. Proper planning is crucial. We don’t typically plan on failing at our goals, but we often fail to properly plan.

Extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivation

According to Dr. Brandon Harris, CC-AASP and assistant professor at Georgia Southern University, people should steer clear of focusing on extrinsic motivators, such as praise or monetary and materialistic rewards. “Research shows that while extrinsic motivation can sustain participation for a little while, it tends to be temporary and less likely to facilitate an individual sustaining their motivation to be continually physically active,” Harris explained. The key, he said, is to enhance intrinsic motivation, which focuses on physical activity that is fun, inherently enjoyable and may even provide the individual with a new and exciting challenge.

Harris recommends that people expand their definition of being physically active beyond running or hitting the gym. For example, activities like walking the dog, golfing without the cart, zumba classes, and even gardening provide fun alternatives to “traditional” forms of physical activity.

It’s also important, Harris said, to remember that some physical activity is better than none. “We tend to see a lot of individuals who think of physical activity in a very bimodal way: all or none. In other words, if they can’t get in an hour’s worth of physical activity in a day, they feel they might as well not do it at all,” he said.

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“Fun is the center stone to maintaining exercise,” said Visek. “New exercisers don’t often know what they like, only what they don’t like. The key is to experiment with a number of different activities and find which one suits you best. It’s all about exercising *your way*. And, you can exercise your way in small increments of time throughout the day. Research shows that moderate intensity exercise accumulated in small bouts adds up to positive fitness gains. ”

Finding your motivation and making it work

Our authorities shared these tips to finding your motivation and making it work for you:

- Concerned about the environment? Commit to walking or riding your bike to the store, to work, etc. rather than driving.
- Want to be a role model for your kids? Find activities, such as biking, that you can do with your kids.
- Looking for a sense of accomplishment? Sign up for a local 5K.
- Feeling lonely? Seek social support. It is essential for long-term maintenance of physical activity. For many, enjoyment of physical activity is enhanced when done with others.

Finding a Certified Consultant to Assist You

Do you need professional assistance in maintaining an exercise program? A CC-AASP may be the answer. While not all CC’s-AASP specialize in working with exercisers, many have the training and knowledge to assist exercisers with similar athlete issues, such as goal setting, motivation and self-image. To find a CC-AASP in your area or more information on exercise psychology, visit <http://www.appliedsportpsych.org/certifiedconsultants/searchconsultant.cfm>.

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,500 members in 39 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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