



Action plan

Tips for getting a healthy start on the New Year

It's that time of year again. The holiday season is over, and we're looking to make healthy changes in our lives. New Year's resolutions can be tough to stick to if your goals are lofty and you don't have a plan to achieve them. Being more physically active is a common lifestyle goal, but a many people don't know where to start.

Research shows that planning can help people achieve their physical activity goals. So, we've developed six tips and ideas to help you do just that in 2011. Here they are:

1. Make a schedule

Just like you schedule time for a doctor or hair appointment, the key to success is making and keeping your physical activity appointments. When does it make sense for you to go to the gym? If you aren't a morning person, don't force it; you won't enjoy it. Consider trying to work it into your work day, after work or before heading to bed for the night.

Once you've figured out when physical activity fits into your schedule, make sure to mark it down on your calendar, so you don't double-book yourself.

2. Make it interesting

There are many ways you can add physical activity to your day, so choose one that interests you and work on putting it into your plan of action. For a well-

rounded workout, it is best if you can find activities that include a cardiovascular or endurance component, muscular strength and endurance, and stretching and flexibility. For example, for your cardiovascular or endurance workout, you may choose cross-country skiing and aerobics. For your muscular strength and endurance component, try a boot camp or strength class. Yoga and tai chi are activities for stretching and increased flexibility.

3. Location

Now that you've decided what type of physical activity you'd like to do, you need to decide where you are going to do it. It is important to consider convenience when you are looking at location. Is it close to your home, work, daycare? Is it near your regular bus route or is parking available? If the location is far away or hard to get to, it may reduce your chances of going regularly. When choosing an exercise facility, there are a few things you may want to consider, in addition to location:

- **Cost** – Is there a start-up fee, what are the monthly fees and what do they

include? Do you have to pay extra to attend classes?

- **Contracts** – How long do they require you to sign up for, and can you cancel your membership for any reason (e.g., you are unsatisfied, move, or your financial situation changes). And will there be an additional fee to cancel your membership?
- **Professional staff** – What level of training do staff have? The best facilities employ staff with kinesiology or related degrees (e.g., physical education).
- **Equipment** – Do they carry the equipment you are looking for, and do they offer free orientations?
- **Programming** – Do they offer the programming and classes that you are interested in, and are they scheduled at times that work for your schedule?
- **Cleanliness** – Are the facilities clean?
- **Outdoor locations** – You may want to try some outdoor activities. Seek out winter walking trails, outdoor skating rinks, disc-golf courses and cross-country ski trails. Check out www.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/ParksandFields for locations in your neighbourhood.

4. Equipment and clothing

The type of physical activity that you've chosen will determine what types of equipment and clothing you will need. When you are just getting started, you may want to find out what is required to participate and what is just recommended



Set SMARTS goals

Research shows that setting specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, timely and self-determined (SMARTS) goals will help you achieve your physical activity goals. Write down your goals, post them where you can see them on a regular basis, and revisit them frequently. Here are the SMARTS guidelines:

Specific

Specific goals are better than "do your best" goals. Set goals that are straightforward, clear and that outline what you want to happen.



Measurable

Write your goals down and describe how you will track or measure your progress (e.g., minutes, distance, days at the gym).

Adjustable

Set goals that can be adjusted in case something comes up, like illness, injury, or a personal issue that may make it harder to reach the original goals you set. Evaluate your goals every couple of weeks and adjust them if you need to.

Realistic

Set goals that are challenging, yet achievable. Realistic goals will motivate you to continue to work hard, whereas unrealistic goals may be discouraging.



Timely

Decide on a timeline or deadline for achieving your goals and then come up with your action plan to reach them.

Self-determined

Effective goals are decided upon and set by you. Setting your own goals as they relate to your needs will help you stay motivated.

Visit www.winnipegmotion.ca/resources/year_round for examples of trackers and planners that you may use when setting goals.



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Bring a Buddy!

and therefore could wait a few weeks, minimizing start-up costs. Most physical activities require good footwear for your enjoyment and success. If you are heading outdoors you will need to ensure you are dressed for the weather and the activity. For more information on dressing for outdoor physical activities, visit www.winnipeginmotion.ca.

5. Support

You may want to get support from your family and friends. Gaining support will help you stick to your physical activity goals over the long term. Family and friends can provide assistance around child care, car pooling, or they may make a great exercise “buddy.” Having an exercise “buddy” can help you stay motivated because you’ll have someone holding you accountable to whether you show up or not.

You may also want to enlist the support of an exercise professional or kinesiologist. Working with an exercise professional can be a great way to get started with your exercise program, stay motivated or spice up what you are currently doing. But it is important to know how to choose your exercise professional to ensure you are getting an educated, qualified, and experienced individual.

Currently, anyone can call themselves a “personal trainer,” but that does not mean they have the recommended education or certifications to do so. Look for an instructor who has a kinesiology degree, and who is certified as a personal trainer. (Kinesiology is the science of human movement, including both its physical and behavioural aspects. In Canada, the recommended personal trainer certification is the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) CPT.)

There is a mixed bag of very qualified and not-so-qualified individuals out there offering personal training or opening gyms, and it is your responsibility to do some research before hiring someone or joining their gym.

Manitoba Exercise Professionals Association (MEPA) has put together a “Questions to Ask” guide to help you navigate the exercise professional/personal trainer world, and find the best professional to meet your needs. If you aren’t sure and would like more information, please contact MEPA at mepa@mepa.ca or visit www.mepa.ca.

Another key area to consider is the individual’s approach to training and their personality. You want to trust that individual, be comfortable asking questions and respect the way in which they motivate you. So, talk to the individual, get to know them and their approach to training before hiring them. You may also want to ask for references from previous clients.

6. What if ...

What is your back-up plan if something comes up – your schedule may change, the weather may be too cold to go outside, or you may go on holidays and upset your routine? Now is the time to come up with a plan to manage all of those situations, so you minimize how much of a disruption they cause to your exercise routine.

Things will come up that may get in the way of your exercise routine, but if you follow the above six steps, you will be more likely to stick to your routine and be successful in achieving your goals.

Deanna Betteridge is a co-ordinator with Winnipeg *in motion*.



Winnipeg *in motion* is a partnership of the Winnipeg Health Region, the City of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba. For more information on how you and your family can be more physically active, call 940.3648 or visit www.winnipeginmotion.ca

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