

Making that first step stick

By Stu Yellin, Wnbf Pro Bodybuilder and Nutrition Coach

Finally making that commitment to “exercise and eat right” is always the first step in any positive body transformation success. Some people get there solely with the goals of feeling better and cutting a more impressive figure in their favorite clothing, while other are already entertaining daydreams of bodybuilding success. Of course taking that initial step and being able to not just maintain the lifestyle, but maintain it in a healthy manner that doesn’t completely derail your career, relationships, and even your sanity isn’t always the easiest task.

In my years coaching, I’ve worked with all sorts of people, from professional NFL athletes, to stay at home moms who simply felt they couldn’t lose weight for whatever reason. One of the constant points I would routinely stress to them, is the importance of balance. If you are unable to find a healthy balance between what you need to do to reach your goals, and everything else in your life, then you will quickly realize that you will not long be able to sustain such a commitment. This is very often why so many gung-ho “I’m gonna finally get in shape!” people quickly sputter out after a relatively short duration.

In terms of nutrition, I always like to suggest the “90% rule.” What this means is simply that you don’t have to be obsessive compulsive about every single meal you eat during the week. So long as the *good* choices each day far outweigh the bad ones (within reason of course!) you’ll still be making progress in terms of the big picture. Be careful though, this is *not* an excuse to go out and intentionally cheat 10% of the time. Instead it’s about focusing on doing the right thing much more often than not, while not having a complete panic attack if the *occasional* mistake happens. For an average person who eats four meals a day, that means that you can mess up three meals during the week, and if everything else is on point, you’re still doing great. Contrast this with the individual who “screws up” one meal, and then considering everything ruined and they deliberately go off plan the rest of the day, weekend, or even week! That’s like getting one flat tire so you deliberately puncture your other three.

As to the exercise side of the equation, often the saying of more not always being better couldn’t be more accurate. This may sound like sacrilege to some hardcore, and serious trainers, but in most instances, subjecting your body to strenuous training every day for weeks, even months on end, can be counterproductive.

The human body is an amazing thing. It may not appear to enjoy certain things you ask it to do, but with repeated bouts, those tasks can actually become easier. In some instances, this can lead to enjoyment of activities that were originally seen as chores. As positive changes are noted, it is quite common for people to crave even more. “If I’m getting such great results going to the gym four days each week, imagine how quickly I’ll look amazing if I go every day!” The reality of such an approach, however, can be not only not helpful, but actually counterproductive.

Human beings only have limited recovery abilities, and individuals must address much more than time dedicated to exercises a few times each week. Stresses at work, lack of sleep due to family commitments, even just mental weariness from thinking (worrying?) about everything you need to get done each day can contribute to stresses that make inroads into your body’s daily recuperation. Finding that balance between what you ask of yourself each week, and what you can physically deliver is something that must be considered carefully. Even the best athletes, with almost inhuman discipline towards their nutrition and rest habits can only do so much, for so long before they break down like any machine would.

Excessive training can also potentially lend itself to a diminishment of motivation. Even for the most enthusiastic gym goers, working all day, dealing with the stresses of a career, school, friends and family, sometimes that feeling that you absolutely must go to the gym can make what was once viewed as a pleasurable, healthy pursuit into something you struggle to adhere to. If you've got a case of "the blahs" when it's time to train, perhaps it's a sign that you should re-evaluate your program and see if you're actually trying to do too much. Never feel like you're doing something wrong just because you're not at the gym every day.

The real bottom line concern with both nutritional and training components of any protocol is always that of sustainability. You found the most training and diet perfect plan ever, but can you keep it up? Will you still be inspired to give your all a few months from now? If you are indeed serious about that first step, try to maintain a healthy perspective on what you're doing. You'll thank me for it.

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