

Health and fitness doesn't have to be do or die-t

By NANCY SUNDSTROM

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"I'm going to do it this time — I'm going to lose 10 pounds."

"I promise to eat better and work out at least three times a week."

"I'll give up pop, cut down on caffeine and start drinking more water."

"I will fast one day a week."

"I'll do whatever it takes, but I'm going to get back into my size 10 jeans."

Do any of these declarations sound familiar? Have you, or someone you know, ever made statements like this, and meant it with every fiber of your being, only to succumb within 48 hours of embarking on a plan of new resolve, thrown off course by a bag of Fritos or a glazed donut? Does the old Oscar Wilde quip of "I can resist anything but temptation" ring all too true for you?

Most of us have put ourselves on more diet and exercise plans than we can even recall, too many of which were ineffective or produced only temporary results.

We've tried meal plans based on high-proteins and low-carbohydrates; eating cabbage soups, grapefruit, brown rice and certain sub sandwiches; eliminating dairy products and on and on.

To increase our level of physical activity, we've taken to treadmills and Stair Masters, lifted weights, gone on power walks, joined aerobic classes and invested hundreds of dollars on machines advertised by celebrities on TV to flatten our stomachs and build abs.

Often, in spite of our efforts, the slimmer, trimmer, attractive body we sought has remained as elusive as finding a diet and fitness plan we can incorporate into our daily routine. Yet, we continue to diet religiously in the hope of ending up with the body of a supermodel.

The question, then, is how to stop old patterns of behavior, change attitudes and develop practical, attainable goals to make our body healthy and more fit?

The answer, say those who work in areas of fit-

ness and nutrition, is actually a simple one: it involves a shift away from short-term diets to long-term life goals.

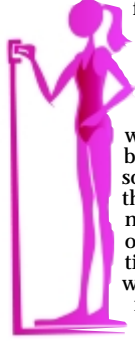
Most diets focus on "don't" instead of "do," set one answer "for life" goals rather than establish flexible, short-term, reachable goals, and emphasize food as opposed to healthy eating and exercise. What successful weight losers and maintainers are able to do, they say, is focus on feeling better, healthier and more energized, which can be easily attained by making better life choices gradually.

Amy Lang, assistant manager and personal trainer at the Fitness Center in Traverse City, said that many people become overwhelmed by the number of options they see for diets and exercise plans, when they don't need to be.

"The most basic formula for weight loss is simply a combination of a low-intensity aerobic work-out, some light strength training to build lean muscle mass and a healthy diet with live, natural foods to build energy," explained Lang. "If you incorporate these three things into your lifestyle, I guarantee that you will lose weight and feel healthier to the point where you'll be ready to take whatever next steps you need to meet your goals."

Lang said that winter is the single most popular time of year for people to have a renewed interest in weight loss. Her advice? Act on your good intentions.

"I tell people to just get their butts in here, and we can help them do the rest," she said. "A lot of people want the structure and ongoing support of a personal trainer, but others just want to have a program designed for them



that they can follow on their own. If you stick with it, even just for a few weeks, it will begin to be something that is so much a part of your routine that you won't feel right if you miss it."

The other

part of the equation is nutrition. Connie Metcalf, a registered dietitian at Munson Medical Center, believes that in a society that promotes weight gain through super-sizing and fast food, self-control and a sensible eating plan based on four key components are crucial to successful weight loss.

The first, said Metcalf, is to increase activity level by aiming for 30 minutes of exercise at least three or four times a week. This should be enough to jump start metabolism significantly to burn more calories. Activity should come in the form of something you enjoy doing. Try taking a walk in the woods or through the neighborhood with a friend if the treadmill seems daunting, for example.

The second step is to establish a diet plan where you take about 500 calories a day off what you

might normally consume. By eliminating calorie-laden beverages, snacks and reducing portions, you don't need to give up all of your favorite foods, said Metcalf.

Employing some form of self-monitoring is the third rule to follow.

"You need some way to not only be accountable to yourself, but to track your good results and take pride in the progress you've made," said Metcalf. "Weight loss all comes down to the calories burned vs. those taken in, and while you can sometimes see results right away, tracking the information can be very helpful."

The final element is getting support for your new regimen from those around you. Professionals who may play a role in your weight loss efforts, or programs and groups such as Weight Watchers or TOPS (Take Off Pounds Sensibly) provide encouragement that can play a powerful role in helping shape attitudes about making lifestyle changes. Metcalf urges dieters to find people to vent to, share frustrations with and get cheered on by.

"This is about choices," Metcalf concluded, "and changes that make your life better. In the end, your approaches determine your results."

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