Seven secrets to avoiding fitness failure

By Jay Blahnik

Have you ever met someone who is ALWAYS consistent with his or her exercise program? Or someone who has had lifelong success sticking with a fitness plan? Ever wondered what their secret is? Well, every person I have met or trained who has an extremely high level of consistency in their training almost always follows one or more of these seven simple strategies:

1. **Smart, consistent scheduling** – Keeping a regular workout schedule that fits into your life makes it easier to stick to your program. Instead of just “finding time each day” to work out, you should already know the exact time, and don’t change it unless absolutely necessary.

2. **Proper pacing and progression** – Pacing yourself, listening to your body and not overdoing it help ensure you don’t get too tired or injured, and this makes it easier to stay consistent. When you add a new activity, exercise or sport to your routine, take time for your body to adapt before you push yourself 100 percent.

3. **Shorter workouts when necessary** – Even if you are consistent, life has a way of throwing curve balls into your schedule, and you may not always have the amount of time you had planned to work out. However, even a little exercise is better than no exercise, and a shorter workout now and again is better than skipping your workout altogether.

4. **Well-timed workout “vacations”** – To avoid burnout, it is important every now and again to take workout “vacations” – one day, two days … maybe even a week where you don’t work out, giving your body a break from your usual routine. Not only will this give your body a little rest, it will also help keep you engaged and interested in your workout routine.

5. **New adventure workouts** – Trying a new activity, sport or challenge can be a great way to keep your training interesting and fun. Rock climbing, hiking, water skiing, yoga, surfing, Pilates … anything new or unfamiliar will help your body get past plateaus, reduce boredom and put a jolt of excitement into your regular workout routine.

6. **Strength AND flexibility training** – Fitness fanatics tend to be “cardio junkies” and spend most of their workout time challenging their heart and lungs. However, a well-rounded workout program should also include strength-training and stretching. In fact, including strength-training and stretching in your exercise routine helps increase your odds of consistency by reducing your risk of injury. You also improve your opportunity to achieve results and help keep your body balanced.

7. **Workout buddies** – The single best way to boost your workout consistency is to find someone to work out with you. A fitness buddy can help keep you motivated, ensure you show up for your training sessions and make your workouts engaging. Even if you can’t exercise with a buddy all the time, meeting him or her at least once a week is a great way to check in and keep each other accountable.

Remember, you don’t need to incorporate ALL of these tips. Just try the ones that appeal you. Sticking to a consistent workout program is difficult for everyone. However, these tips can make it easier and more fun, and put you on the road to lifelong success!
Fitness programs: Staying motivated

Are you having trouble sticking with your fitness program? Stay motivated with these simple tips.

Set goals
Start with simple goals and then progress to longer range goals. Remember to make your goals realistic and achievable. It's easy to get frustrated and give up if your goals are too ambitious.

If you haven't exercised in a while, a short-term goal might be to walk five minutes once or twice a day. An intermediate goal might be to work up to 20 minutes of walking three or four times a week. A long-term goal might be to complete a 10K race.

Consider your personality
If you prefer solitude, walking, biking or in-line skating may be good choices. If group activities are more to your liking, try a class at a local fitness or martial arts center or join a volleyball or softball league. Involve your kids. Walk or bike with a group of friends.

Start slowly
If you push yourself too hard at first, you may be forced to abandon your program because of pain or injury. It's better to start slowly and progress gradually.

Think variety
Vary your activities to keep boredom at bay. Alternate walking or biking with swimming or a low-impact aerobics class. When the weather cooperates, do your flexibility or stretching exercises outside. Play soccer with your kids. Join a health club to broaden your access to different forms of exercise.

Have fun
You're more likely to stick with an exercise program if you're having fun. If you're not enjoying your workouts, try something different. Exercise doesn't have to be drudgery.

Make exercise part of your daily routine
If it's hard to find time for exercise, schedule workouts as you would any other important activity. You can also slip in physical activity throughout the day. Be creative! Take a walk during your child's music lesson. Take the stairs instead of the elevator at work. Pedal a stationary bike while you watch TV at night.

Put it on paper
Are you hoping to lose weight? Boost your energy? Sleep better? Manage a chronic condition? Write it down! Seeing the benefits of regular exercise on paper may help you stay motivated.

Seek support
You're not in this alone. Invite a friend or co-worker to join you when you exercise. Work out with your spouse or your kids. Take a class at a local fitness center.

Track your progress
It may help to keep an exercise diary. Record what you did during each exercise session, how long you exercised and how you felt afterward. Recording your efforts can help you work toward your goals — and remind you that you're making progress.

Reward yourself
After each exercise session, take a few minutes to sit down and relax. Reflect on what you've just accomplished. Savor the good feelings that exercise gives you. This type of internal reward can help you make a long-term commitment to regular exercise. External rewards can help, too. When you reach a longer range goal, treat yourself to a new pair of walking shoes or new tunes to enjoy while you exercise.

Be flexible
If you're too busy to work out or simply don't feel up to it, take a day or two off. Be gentle with yourself if you need a break. The important thing is to get back on track when you feel better. Now that you're enthused again, get moving! Set your goals, make it fun and pat yourself on the back from time to time. Review these tips whenever you feel your motivation sliding.