



Achieving Your Fitness Goals

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Photography by Scott N. Atkinson

Well it is that time of year again. While the ski season is still quite a ways off for most people, it is time to make a New Year's resolution to enter the 2009 season in the best shape of your life. Here is a recipe for success.

Our bodies are machines. The more they are used, the more efficient they become. When you are sore the day after an activity, your muscles are rebuilding and growing. If you do an activity and are not sore, chances are you have not pushed yourself hard enough. Our bodies adapt to whatever it is that they do most. To me this is another form of efficiency. For example, in the beginning of the water ski season, we become very sore the days after skiing. Every skier can relate to this feeling regardless of ability. But something strange happens not too far down the road; we can ski five days a week and never reach the level of soreness

felt in the first month of the season. Our body is adapting to its new program. This is something to keep in mind when setting up fitness programs. To get the most out of your program, keep it evolving and stay away from the easy road. Also, keep in mind that we as water skiers are looking for a high strength-to-weight ratio. What this means is that we want to reduce body fat while increasing muscle. I find that I ski much better when I carry between 5-1/2-to-7-1/2 percent body fat. When I have dropped below 5-1/2 percent, I feel a lack of energy and I feel fragile. As soon as I get over 7.5 percent, I feel strong, but I just can't run as many buoys. Your doctor can advise you of your recommended percentage of body fat as it changes with age.

Now that we have the vision of working our body into a lean, mean fighting machine, it is time to set some realistic

goals. Just like with skiing goals, we should set achievable short-term goals, desired one-year goals, and a long-term wish list. For a skier that is 30 pounds overweight, an example would be to lose 5 pounds in 30 days; lose 10 pounds by June 1; lose 15 pounds by Jan. 1, 2010; and a three-year goal of losing 30 pounds. Once the goals are set, it is time to get lost in achieving the short-term goals. Never lose sight of the long-term goals, but since the short-term goals are more readily achievable, let's focus on succeeding on those. Nothing in this life comes easy, so realize that you need to work hard everyday and limit the slip-ups. I like to live by the motto, "Everything in moderation." Don't beat yourself up if you have to miss the gym one day or if you over eat at a company party. Those things are going to happen; simply do not let them happen on a regular basis.

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one month. When we achieve this, we can increase the next short-term goal to three or four per day. Before you know it, you will reach your optimal water intake. Your doctor or a nutritionalist can help you find that optimal number. The idea here is that most people do not drink enough water. Another advantage to increasing our water intake is that water is filling. For those of you that are looking to lose weight, drink a glass of water when you get the urge to have a snack. If you substitute three high-calorie snacks with no calorie water...well you can do the math.

• **Eat Healthier.** The food that you put into your body is fuel. I cannot exaggerate this enough. Food is not for comforting. Food is not for passing time. Food is for replenishing the energy you have used throughout the day. If you get up in the morning, drive to your job where you sit in front of a computer all day, and then come home in the evening to sit on the couch to watch television, you have not used very many calories. Thus, you do not need to eat very many calories. We put on weight by eating more calories than we expend in a day. If you do this on a consistent basis, you can expect that area around your belt line to grow. For most of us, this type of job is what we are trained and skilled at and is a reality. There are still ways to make the most of a desk job. Here are a few things that come to mind: Park farther away from the entrance to your job. The walk to and from work will burn more calories. Take the stairs instead of the elevator (great way to get a leg and abdominal workout in). Sit on a medicine ball instead of a comfy chair. The ball is just as comfortable on your rear end but requires some abdominal muscle engagement to keep you steady. You should bring a healthy lunch to work instead of eating out. Most fast food is high in calories and offers very little nutrition. Besides, you will save money by bringing a lunch. Cut down on processed foods such as soda, chips and cookies. Your palate has become used to high sugar foods that offer very little nutrition. If you need a snack, try fruits and vegetables such as apples, oranges, carrots and celery.

• **Eat slower.** I read somewhere a while back that for every bite of food we take, we should chew 18 times before swallowing. Try this on your next meal. You will be surprised at how long this takes. By chewing

this much, you help to break down the food you are ingesting, thus making the process more efficient. Also, you will be able to judge when you are full more accurately. Most of us wolf down our food and go far past our optimal intake. Chew more and stop eating when you feel full (no matter how good it tastes!).

• **Do more aerobic activities for longer durations.** I recommend at least 40 minutes of aerobic activity at least four days per week on top of your daily routine. Try brisk walking, jogging, biking, rowing, Nordic skiing, step and elliptical machines or any activity that gets your heart rate up and keeps it up for at least 40 minutes in duration. I recommend wearing a heart rate monitor so that you can set beat per minute goals. Your doctor can tell you what your recommended heart rate for your age and fitness level is. Your heart is what keeps you alive and is a muscle. It should be exercised just like any other muscle in your body. The more in shape your heart gets, the more blood it can pump per beat. Thus, it needs to beat less per minute to get the same job done.

• **Join the Gym and get a trainer.** While no exercises in the gym can prepare you for the soreness of beginning the water ski season, a solid muscle foundation can help with preventing a water ski injury. This is something that I overlooked for a long time. Now that I am in my 30s, a gym regimen is part of my weekly routine. I work with a trainer who knows about water skiing and who knows how to push me to the appropriate levels. Find a program that works for you and stick to it. Also, weight loss does happen while working out. You want to focus on all aspects of your body. The exercises you like the most are probably the ones you need to do the least. For example, most gym rats much prefer to bench press than do squats. Both are important exercises and should be done equally. Remember that our goal is not to get big, but to get lean and mean. If you get too big, you will lose vital range of motion.

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Here are some things that have helped me in the past to achieve my fitness goals:

• **Drink more water.** Our body consists mostly of water, so it makes sense that we should drink a lot of it. If you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated. Water is a natural cleanser. By staying hydrated, your body can flush the toxins out better. The more toxins we can flush out of our body, the more efficient our body will run. In the summer months while in Florida, I set a goal to drink a gallon of water a day. I know a lot of you almost fell out of the chair you are reading this from. I know that seems like a lot, but with the heat and humidity in Florida, I will sweat at least that much out per day. Some of you are also saying, "I could never drink that much water. I rarely even have one glass of water in a day." Well, let's set a short-term goal to drink two eight-ounce glasses of water a day for