

How to Make Any Fitness Goal a Reality

Stay motivated by learning what it takes to achieve your wellness objective

By [Olivia Putnal](#)

Whether you're training for a marathon, trying to lose a few extra pounds or need to lower your blood pressure, setting a goal is a great way to stay motivated on the path to better [health](#). But to get started on your individual fitness journey, you need specific strategies for each objective. To learn how you can avoid falling off the wagon, reach your personal goal and maintain your results, check out the expert tips below.

Goal #1: Lose Weight

Losing weight is a common health goal, but whether you want to slim down for a special event or for serious health reasons, there's a right way to go about it.



How to Do It: “In order to lose the weight (or fat), a person must burn more calories than he or she consumes,” explains Emily Anne Vall, PhD, [employee](#) wellness leader at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta. “To help get a handle on how much you’re actually burning and consuming, it’s important to write everything down.” She suggests keeping a journal, where you can record what you’re eating and how much you’re exercising, to hold yourself accountable. “At least 150 minutes [per week] of moderate aerobic activity such as walking, mowing the lawn and leisurely bike riding, or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity such as running, swimming and jumping rope is recommended for the average adult looking to lose weight,” Dr. Vall says. Another important factor is performing strength-related exercises. “Weight training should be included, as it increases your basal metabolic rate, and any extra calories burned is a good thing,” urges Gina Harney, certified personal trainer and blogger at [The Fitnessista](#).

Avoid Setbacks: It’s easy to step on the scale and give up if the numbers aren’t exactly what you want after a couple of weeks of cardio and strength training. “Don’t be surprised if you don’t lose pounds but your clothes are getting bigger—you are gaining muscle! Muscle takes up less space than fat and burns more calories per pound,” says Missy Groeger, a private trainer at Reebok Sports Club/NY. Another common pitfall is going overboard. “Like anything else, make sure you work your way up and don’t overdo it. Quite often weight loss is jumpstarted with extreme exercise that cannot be maintained, and people tend to give up,” says Dr. Vall. “Start slow—it’s safe to increase your aerobic activity time or intensity by only 10 percent every couple of weeks.”

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Goal #2: Tone Up

Gaining lean muscle and increasing strength are great goals for anyone who already exercises regularly.

How to Do It: “To build muscle, make sure you’re hitting the weights at least three to four times per week. As you’re lifting, make sure the weight is challenging enough—you should have to push yourself to finish the last couple of repetitions for each set,” says Harney. With strength training, proper form is critical, since improper technique can cause injury. “A few personal training sessions with a certified trainer is definitely worth the investment. A trainer can help you set up a program, demonstrate proper form and guide you through the most effective weight-lifting technique for your body type,” notes certified personal trainer Lisa Allen of [Lisa Allen Fitness](#). Another important element to consider is what you’re eating—Harney can’t emphasize enough what a huge impact your diet has on body tone. She suggests drinking plenty of water and eating lots of lean protein, [fruits](#) and vegetables when you’re strength training, and avoiding processed food as much as possible.

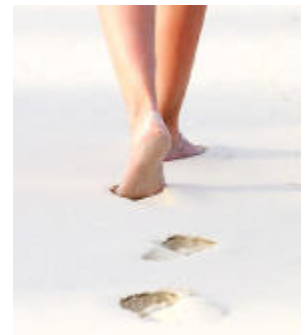


Avoid Setbacks: “Be sure to change your weight training routine at least every four to six weeks. This will prevent cruise control from kicking in, which leads to plateaus,” explains Harney. Another thing to remember is the importance of rest. “Give your muscles at least 48 hours before working them again—this way, they’ll have time to repair, as weight training causes tiny muscle tears.” *Photo: Shutterstock*

Goal #3: Improve Heart Health

Being active is one of the best ways to help lower your blood pressure and improve your overall heart health.

How to Do It: “Blood pressure responds to the exercise you’ve done in the last 24 hours, so small doses of cardio are best,” explains Andrew Wolf, MS, ED, an exercise physiologist at Miraval Resorts. Wolf advises his hypertensive clients to burn around 1,500 calories per week through exercise—the equivalent of walking a little over two miles per day. “For the minutes you’re working hard, you should have your heart rate at 50 to 60 percent of your maximum,” explains Groeger. She suggests using an online target heart rate calculator, like the one at [SparkPeople.com](#), to figure out what your beats per minute range is (you can purchase a heart-rate monitor to wear while working out, if you want to make sure you stay within that range). Wolf recommends logging your blood pressure at home to monitor the impact working out is having on your overall health. “If the exercise is having the desired effect, you want to be able to have detailed, informed discussions with your physician about the drugs you are taking.”



Avoid Setbacks: “Some think you can’t ‘play’ once you’re an adult and they stop including fun activities in their lives. But for lowering blood pressure, fun and relaxation

is just what you need,” emphasizes clinical psychologist Lavinia Rodriguez, PhD. “Any activities that are continuous (aerobic), fun and peaceful (such as rowing, nature walks, gardening and walking on the beach) are considered great for lowering blood pressure.” Always remember, exercise should be enjoyable and lower your stress level. *Photo: Shutterstock*

Goal #4: Increase Flexibility

“Flexibility increases your freedom of movement in every aspect of daily life; everything physical will be easier to do,” says Dr. Rodriguez.

How to Do It: Spending at least 10 to 15 minutes a day stretching will help improve your limberness greatly. “When you increase flexibility, you are remodeling the muscles and connective tissue, so diligence is key,” says Wolf. If you’re not sure about how or what to stretch, a beginner’s yoga class or a personal trainer can really help, says Dr. Vall. The instructors can teach you different poses and stretches you can do in class, at the gym or at home. “A great side [benefit](#) of increasing flexibility is that a lot of aches and pains disappear. Many people report that their back pain decreases or disappears entirely after just a few months of stretching,” explains Allen.



Avoid Setbacks: “Stretching is a common activity ignored by most people. The older you get, the harder it is to get limber again, so it’s best to make it a part of your lifestyle while you’re still young,” explains Dr. Rodriguez. She suggests making it a habit by doing some light stretching first thing in the morning or right before bed. *Photo: Courtesy of Shutterstock*

Goal #5: Increase Stamina and Endurance

When you’re ready to take your walk, run, swim or any other form of cardio to the next level, endurance training is necessary.

How to Do It: Once you starting working out regularly, you'll notice that it's not as hard on your body as it was in the beginning. That's because your body adapts so that the next time you perform those exercises, they aren't as difficult. "When you can do cardio for 30 to 40 minutes straight, it's sustainable and that is not a stimulus for change," Wolf says. "I often suggest my clients do intervals one or two times per week for that reason." “Interval training is short bursts of high-intensity activity followed by a lower, more comfortable intensity,” Groeger says. This approach helps increase fitness level, but without injury. For example, Groeger suggests running at a 7.5- to 8-mph pace for one to two minutes, then slowing down to a jog at a 5- to 6-mph pace for 30 seconds. Repeat this circuit for the duration of your workout. “Interval training should be kept between 15 to 30 minutes maximum.”



Avoid Setbacks: “Everyone is unique, so finding your high-intensity zone and low-intensity zone takes some practice,” says Groeger. When you’re endurance training, stick to your goals and focus on your progress rather than the person on the treadmill next to you. Find the intensity level that’s right for you and you’ll begin to see positive results.

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