

So-You've Decided to Get in Shape-Again (Part One)

Every day I receive emails from people around the world who want exercise advice, weight-loss advice and general health and fitness advice. I am perpetually answering the same questions about the same issues. As you may or may not know, I've written a few books (big and small) on such matters, so I have decided to be a little lazy for a day or two and revisit some of my key getting-in-shape principles (suggestions, rules, guidelines... call them what you will). Remember, this is general advice only and is not a personalised program or prescription. If you are over thirty five, have a pre-existing medical condition/s or are unsure about your current health status, take a visit to your doc (please). The following are some common sense suggestions based on twenty five years of helping people create positive physical change.

1. Go into the getting-in-shape process with the best possible attitude. There is an undeniable relationship between attitude and outcome. Many people don't want to hear that transforming their body is more about attitude, commitment and self control than it is about finding the right program, gym, diet, trainer or miracle-pill. Good attitude typically equals a good outcome. I have watched thousands of people sabotage themselves with a negative attitude; they whinge, complain, blame, rationalise, justify, and procrastinate... and then end up back where they started anyway (or worse). Conversely, I have watched thousands of people with limited genetic potential, time, money and resources create (and maintain) amazing results because they got their head where it needed to be. Amazing results are about attitude and effort; not genetics.
2. Get in shape for life, not an event. Too many people spend their life getting in shape for summer, birthdays, weddings, school reunions and other significant social occasions. Like athletes, they peak for an event... and then get fat again. Sad really. Creating your best body is about the next few decades, not the next few weeks.
3. Make some tough decisions about you. Your lifestyle, your habits, your diet and your exercise habits. You know these decisions; the ones you keep avoiding, the ones that make you uncomfortable. The decisions you should have made a long time ago; the scary but necessary ones.
4. Don't start something (exercise program, diet) that you can't or won't finish. Every day around the world squillions (it's a word!) of people start programs or routines which they will never maintain. They make decisions that they don't follow through on. They join gyms but rarely go. They start running programs that last a week. They go on diets and then go off them. Some people spend their life getting on and off the body-transformation merry-go-round. Don't be one of them. Start realistically and progress sensibly. Don't try and undo twenty years of bad behaviour by next Tuesday.
5. Stop looking for the magic pill. For most of us, the simple reality of getting in shape is a bit of sweat, a bit of discomfort, a bit of tiredness, a bit of inconvenience and the odd sore knee. The sooner we get that and accept it, the sooner we'll get where we want to go. Look for the effective option not the easy one. By the way, easy or hard is largely about perception and attitude.
6. Give your body a reason to change. When we get fitter, stronger, bigger, smaller, more flexible, lighter or leaner we are experiencing physiological adaptation. Our body will only adapt when we give it a reason to do so and the truth is, many people don't. To keep it simple, we will discuss two types of exercise programs; the progressive program and the maintenance program. A maintenance program is when we typically stimulate our body the same way day in, day out and generally we'll see little or no change (but we'll keep what we've got - which is fine if you're happy with your body). A progressive program is exactly what it sounds like; a program where the variables are manipulated (intensity, frequency, volume, workout format, sets, reps, recovery) in order to stimulate the body to change. Most people in most gyms are following a maintenance program but don't know it. As a result they get frustrated, lose interest and throw in the towel. Remember: if nothing changes (training stimulus) nothing changes (your body).
7. Find the best program for you. I'm always amazed when I see different people, with different goals, different body types and different fitness levels doing the same workout. If your goal is to create the best results in the shortest time (without compromising your health or safety of course) then you need to ensure that the program you follow is specific to you; your fitness level, your body type, your age, your personal limitations (injuries and medical conditions) and your goals. The generic program ripped out of the magazine may be better than nothing but we don't want average; we want to provide ourselves with the best chance to create the best outcome. Hit and miss training generates hit and miss results.
8. Consistency is the key. As suggested in point four, consistency is crucial if your goal is to create forever results. The number one reason people don't get in shape and stay in shape is... they don't finish what they start! It doesn't matter how much potential you have, how great your intentions are at the outset or how many resources you have at your disposal, if you don't consistently apply yourself (even when it's not fun) you won't get where you want to go. It might surprise to learn that about eighty-five percent of people who have a current gym membership don't go! Tomorrow we're gonna talk about the fun stuff; food. And I'll give you my rules.... er, suggestions.

About the Author

Diet, Health, Fitness, and Medical cartoons by Randy Glasbergen. Featuring cartoons about dieting, exercise, cartoons about doctors, cartoons.

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