

“Fitness Fright: How to Completely Fail Your New Fitness Program”

by Mike DePalma

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Not meeting your fitness objectives after the holidays? You're not alone. Few New Year's resolutions will succeed. Some fall to the evils of a busy schedule. Many hideously crash and burn trying the latest *crash diet*. More often than not, people fail at their new fitness programs because they go through the motions like fitness zombies.

Failing to meet your fitness goals is not only frustrating and depressing – it's downright frightening. You may be haunted by stares you're getting in public, but forget how everyone at the gym is seeing you. Just imagine, for a moment, what your personal trainer's thinking!

Don't board up the windows and lock yourself in the house quite yet – they're here to help. It's tempting to surrender to *the horror*, but personal trainers from the active state of Colorado are ready to share their cautionary tales with you. There is hope in fighting the power-walking dead. Avoid falling victim to these three ghastly fitness habits.

Bad Timing

Workout time can have a big influence. All our trainers agree that Monday gym nights are the busiest, for example. Keep putting off a workout until later in the day, and you could find yourself jockeying for equipment, if you show up at all. Ed Scadutto, 37, is a 10-year veteran of personal training who suggests a morning workout is best for maintaining consistency. “It may not be the optimal time to workout, but it's probably the best time. Physiologically, the body's not quite ready for working out when it's just jumped out of bed. But it's still very effective,” he says.

Holidays get the attention, but aren't necessarily the best time for a workout routine. Patricia Wilson, 27, is a former college athlete with two years of personal training experience. When asked the busiest season at her gym, she replies, “New Year's. You can barely find a place to *stand* in that gym.” She suggests experimenting to find the *off hours*. Fewer people can mean a more briskly completed workout.

Scheduling is important to success, as 33 year-old trainer Julien Stoutt indicates, succinctly. Explaining why people fail, he declares bluntly, “They stop showing up.” That means not only gym presence, but being vigilant away from the gym. Wilson laments when her clients aren't showing progress. “It always boiled down to the basics: they weren't eating properly, and aside from the time they were with me, they weren't doing anything,” she attests.

Bad Confidence

Too little confidence can keep people from working out in public. Scadutto recalls a woman in particular who sat in her car crying, attending the session only because she knew she had an appointment. Trainers then must meet the clients on their terms, telling them they have as much right to exercise as the imposing body builders. Stoutt has worked for years with athletes, but wants everyone to feel they deserve fitness. “I tell them 'You're no different. Everyone is in here for the same reason.'”

At the start of a program, Scadutto and Wilson steer away from free weights, which are intimidating to beginners. While gym machines aren't as beneficial, they still serve a purpose. Scadutto explains, “It's training wheels, it's getting them to feel comfortable in the gym – giving them that security and confidence.”

Across the board, the one phrase trainers don't want to hear is, “I can't.” Stoutt insists, “It's not in my vocabulary...It's the defeated attitude. It's the attitude of saying, 'It will never happen for me.’” Trainers look for clients that are dedicated to their goals, not just going through the motions.

“There's people that make it a part of their routine logically,” Wilson refers to keeping appointments, “and then there's people that become emotionally invested in it. Those are like the 'it people,' the people that are actually ready to devote their energy to it.”

Some clients don't lack confidence, but humility. With Internet searches, many show up thinking they already know all they need, which can be frustrating for fitness professionals. Wilson's voice trails off as she muses, “Chances are if I've got 3 *nationally recognized* certifications....”

Overconfidence can also lead to injury, so the supervision of a trainer is important. According to Scadutto, a survey conducted by his gym found that within the first month of starting a program, roughly 50 percent of clients hurt themselves and

stopped their regimen. Poor form, or prematurely attempting unsupervised advanced exercises, were often the culprits.

Bad Influences

Media outlets sensationalize weight loss. Scadutto is noticeably frustrated as he observes, “It's in a sad state. Everything's marketing. We've got a TV show about people losing the most amount of weight. It sets the client up to come in with unrealistic expectations. In a way, they're doomed to fail – unless we can change those expectations.” He is not a fan of speed gyms, though he admits they help get people off the couch. For the average 35-40 year-old, Scadutto instead outlines a program with 3-4 days a week of weight training, complemented with cardio on the *off* days.

Stoutt combats media perceptions of beauty by focusing on body fat reduction, rather than weight loss. “People say, 'Oh, I only lost 1 pound,' and I say, 'Well guess what? You lost three pounds of *fat*, but you gained two pounds of *muscle*,’” he notes.

Family, friends or spouses can be just as sabotaging as the media. Social gatherings, large family meals, or just plain jealousy can derail a workout. Losing weight is a life change and commitment that can make a spouse feel threatened, Scadutto warns. He's heard spouses complain, 'Oh, you spend more time at the gym than you do with me.’”

The perception that one person is changing while the other is not can add to the tension. Wilson, whose undergraduate degree is in psychology, ponders, “It's almost like a projection of their own guilt.”

That's when the trainer steps in to be firm, but supportive. Stoutt makes it clear, “I make sure they know I'm the expert, and I'm the one who knows what we do here.” If someone wants to have a buddy system to help encourage accountability in the workout, Stoutt prefers that the friend attend the sessions, rather than giving advice.

But for Stoutt, the most important step in preventing failure is acknowledging you want to change. Despite what 'yes men' family members or friends may be telling you, he asserts, “You know when you're not right. And when you know that you're not right, scream for help.”

Chances are the fitness zombies will hear you, but so will professionals willing to coach you. So you needn't scream in horror.