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Welcome to LIVESTRONG.COM

Let Us Be Your Personal Guide To Becoming A Better, Healthier You!

Getting in shape and eating right sometimes seem like lofty, unattainable goals. Working long hours, driving the kids to and from extracurricular activities, doing laundry, and maintaining the house take a lot of time and energy, leaving little left over for exercise and the effort of planning and preparing healthful meals.

With a bit of organization and a lot of dedication, however, you can find quick ways to grab some exercise and nutritious meals without shirking the rest of your responsibilities.

Take some time to put your life into perspective before making long-term fitness [and nutrition] plans. **Be sure that your goals are attainable so that all your hard work will pay off in the end.**

Franci Cohen, owner and CEO, Fuel Fitness, Brooklyn, New York

Quick Tips to Stay on Track

Make the most of your time by including quick hit ways to eat well and incorporate exercise every day.

"Make breakfast a healthy meal that is easy to get," said nutritionist Isabel De Los Rios. Her favorite breakfast options? Greek yogurt, almonds and half a banana, or two hard-boiled eggs -- already prepared in the fridge -- with half a banana.

Making the most of your slow cooker will save you time while still yielding a nutritious meal. "In less than 10 minutes, you can put in a roast, chicken or pork, or even fish with some vegetables and potatoes, and have a delicious meal waiting for you when you get home from work," De Los Rios said.

Perform a fitness routine in a matter of minutes with a set of a kettlebells. "Small as it is, it is also one of the most effective whole-body exercise routines ever devised," trainer Brad Siskind said. "All you need is 15 minutes, and you'll be sweating in no time."

Make an Honest Assessment

Take stock of where you are with your fitness and your diet. To assess your fitness level, Franci Cohen, owner and CEO of Fuel Fitness in Brooklyn, New York, suggested a few at-home tests.

1. Measure and record your heart rate before and after a brisk walk around the block.
2. Do as many full pushups as possible and record the number.
3. Measure the flexibility in your hamstrings and lower back with the sit and reach test. Place a yardstick on the floor. Sit with your legs flat, parallel to the yardstick, and one end of the yardstick even with your tailbone. Reach as far forward as is comfortable without lifting your knees off the floor. Repeat two or three times, and record the best result.
4. Calculate your body mass index. These numbers will give you a starting point for measuring your fitness.



5. To evaluate your diet, Isabel De Los Rios, certified nutritionist and co-founder of BeyondDiet.com in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, advised paying close attention to how you feel every day. “If you feel lethargic and fatigued and it has become difficult to make it through your day, that is a clear sign that something just may not be right with how you’re taking care of your body and your health,” she said.

6. For a clear picture of your eating habits, start a food journal and write down

everything you eat and drink for a week. Then review your journal to see what you are consuming on a regular basis. A lot of sodas? Heavy on bread and pasta? Not enough vegetables? This will help you see where you need to make changes.

Use this information as personal baseline data to help you track success.

Devise a Plan

When you embark on the road to better fitness and nutrition, you need to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve and how to do it. Do you want to lose a set number of pounds? Drop two clothes sizes? Complete a half-marathon? Quit drinking caffeinated beverages? Start with an overall, long-term goal of where you want to be regarding exercise and diet, making sure that you are realistic in your intentions.

“You must take into consideration all variables in your day-to-day life,” Cohen said. **“Take some time to put your life into perspective before making long-term fitness [and nutrition] plans. Be sure that your goals are attainable, so that all your hard work will pay off in the end.”**

Set a series of short-term goals that will mark your progress. “Focus on short, easy, achievable goals that will build self-confidence and will familiarize [you] with the habits and rituals that make a successful program yield results,” said Brad Siskind, owner and trainer with FlatbellyLA in Los Angeles, California.

Don’t start out trying to do too much. If completing a half-marathon is your goal, instead of attempting to run a few miles the first day, run one block, then two, then six. “Increments -- that’s the best way to progress to fitness,” Cohen said.

De Los Rios suggested setting weekly goals with a reward for success at the end of each week. “My favorite rewards are the ones that are not food-related and are special treats for me,” she said. “Things like manicures and pedicures, massages and even a new magazine or book are all great rewards I love.”

Turning Words Into Action

As you put your plan into motion, consider what you can work into your day without a lot of time or stress. For exercise, Siskind suggested doing squats while brushing your teeth or doing calf raises as the coffee brews.

To stay on track with your diet, De Los Rios recommended finding shortcuts to making healthy eating part of your daily routine. Her favorite is leftovers. “If I cook or buy something healthy, I will be sure to make enough so that I have plenty of leftovers for the next day or enough to put some in the freezer for the next

week," she said.

She also suggested having three fast, "go-to" meals that come together in 10 minutes or less, such as veggie omelets or smoked salmon served over salad. "I also make sure to know where all of the healthy options are around me," she said. "For me, this is nearby grocery stores with salad bars and a local deli that offers delicious salads and meals that are ready in minutes."



Quick, nutritious breakfasts can help you stick to a diet.

Stay Motivated

Because of the conflicting demands on most people's time, it's crucial to find something or someone who encourages you to achieve your goals and holds you accountable. "Connect with a great fitness instructor, and make sure to become a regular in his or her classes," Cohen said. "Find a friend to take the plunge with you."

It's also great to have your own personal cheerleader, such as a spouse. "There will inevitably be situations that come up that will be challenging," De Los Rios said. "If you have a solid support system in place, it will be much easier to get through these difficult times."

Keeping a fitness and nutrition journal is another great motivational tool. "Any time you feel discouraged, just open up your journal to see all that you have achieved," Cohen said. "There's no calling it quits after that!"