

# PLAN NOW FOR A PRODUCTIVE NEW YEAR

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New Year's resolutions are created with the best intentions, only to vanish before the last traces of winter snow on the front lawn. The pursuit of higher fitness tops the chart on most individual's list of New Year's resolutions, and whether your goal is to run a personal best, look better in a bathing suit, or simply avoid being scolded by your primary care physician during this year's annual checkup, the best opportunity to accomplish your fitness goals starts with a plan. The following strategies should provide the framework for reaching and maintain those fitness goals this coming year:

**1) Develop a plan of attack:** Corporations spend a tremendous amount of time creating a formal business plan. Yet people who work for these very same corporations often fly by the seat of their pants in their personal lives. Runners are often guilty of heading out the door without any idea of what they are hoping to accomplish from their daily run (with the exception of peace of mind, a universal reward that accompanies almost an exercise program). If your goal is to simply get some quality exercise, then any act of running will do the trick. But for those seeking improved race results, developing a training plan that coincides with both your social schedule and your racing calendar is a key component for success. Figure out what you hope to accomplish and execute the plan.

**2) Start now:** Years ago, one of the "Coach's Corner" columns that I had co-written with triathlete Chris Hansen was titled "Races are won in January and February". The statement was borrowed from Lance Armstrong, who knows a thing or two about preparing to race at peak performance. Armstrong emphasized the value in a strong base-building phase which is necessary to develop the endurance required to carry fitness benefits to the next level. For runners, the strain of New England's climate makes winter running a challenge at times. But the absence of weekend road races provides an opportunity for consistent base mileage without the interruption of resting for competition. A strong base of mileage during the winter months will lead to improvements during the racing season.

**3) Mix things up:** Ask any elite distance runner what the number one training mistake that most runners make and a consistent response would be the lack of range between training paces. While elite runners vary the pace and effort of their training runs from session to session, most recreational runners hit the streets at the same pace and effort day after day. Even the very best Kenyan distance runners will begin the training runs at a pace much more pedestrian than the average runner, yet they are clearly capable training at paces few could manage even for a short distance. Incorporating threshold-paced runs, intervals, LSD (long-slow distance, not what you were thinking), and recovery runs into your training program is not as complicated as it sounds. Running at a specific pace or level of effort requires more discipline than hammering along at near-top effort, yet the practice will pay long-term dividends, reduce the risk of injury, and keep your running routine interesting.

**4) Improve the intangibles:** Although it is the simple act of running that will lead to improvements in running performance, there are a number of variables that can be considered necessary ingredients in any fitness plan. Cross-training, diet, and sleep are also key elements for health and success. Strength training, form drills, and core exercises will reduce the risk of injury, make you look better, and just as importantly, lead to improved efficiencies, resulting in faster running. Cross-training develops muscles ignored by running and improves form and conditioning and adds a variety to your fitness routine. A healthy diet will provide the necessary fuel to get you through the day feeling sharp, providing a much-needed boost to energy levels and improve athletic performance. Getting the necessary amount of rest, not always an easy task to accomplish in this busy day and age, is a primary component of any training program and allows the body to properly recover from each challenging workout to prepare for the next. Improvements in these areas will result in happier and healthier running.

**5) Don't become a slave to the routine:** A concern in advising any Type "A" personality is insuring that physical fitness remains a lifestyle and not an obsession. While a disciplined approach to exercise is best, it is important to remain flexible in anticipation of the many curveballs that life will toss your way. Family and work commitments, illness, injury, and a busy social life all challenge even the best of intentions to exercise. Plan for days away from running and focus on being a well-rounded and well-grounded individual.

With these tips in mind, here's hoping that physical fitness becomes a discipline in your life in the upcoming year and for many years after. Happy holidays and best wishes for happy and healthy running in 2009.

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