

THE SECRETS OF  
BODY TRANSFORMATION

# YOUR MINDSET FOR SUCCESS

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# LESSON #5

## YOUR MINDSET FOR SUCCESS

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# THE 3 ABSOLUTE WORST HEALTH AND FITNESS GOALS YOU MUST AVOID.

**Plus a clear recipe for turning ‘bad’ fitness goals into good ones.**

**By John Berardi, Ph.D.**

If you want to achieve your health and fitness goals, you need a powerful formula, something to organize your efforts. In this article we'll help you get organized while covering three important strategies for turning ‘bad’ fitness goals into ‘good’ ones.

# What, exactly, are the health and fitness goals you're shooting for?

Any effort to “get in shape” starts with this question.

It *seems* like an easy question to answer.

Just rattle off how many pounds you want to lose, what pant size you want to wear, how much weight you want to deadlift, or the date you need to look photo-ready... and you're on your way.

Of course, that's how most people set their fitness goals. But are they doing it right?

Usually not.

That's why we spend a lot of time helping our coaching clients define and set the right *kind* of goals.

When you set your goals up properly, you have a simple, elegant, action-inspiring blueprint. You know *exactly how* you're going to build the skills you need to get the body you want.

Proper goal setting is a plan for getting things done. When you do goals right, you feel ready, willing, and able to make your dream happen.

When you *don't* know how to set goals, you get lost. Confused. Overwhelmed. Crushed by “shoulds”. Distracted by wondering and worrying, or by irrelevant details. If you succeed with poor or unclear goals, it's probably by accident.

# Mastering the skill of goal setting is powerful.

Early in the development of our PN Coaching and Certification programs, we realized it wasn't enough to talk about the kinds of goals that work and the kinds that don't.

We needed a formula that our own coaches (and Certification grads) could use with clients. One that was easy to understand and implement.

We needed a formula that could be applied to any desired outcome — from losing weight, to getting off cholesterol meds, to feeling good about where you are in life.

Today, I outline that formula.

Read on for three important ways to instantly transform “bad” fitness goals into “good” ones.

## **Step 1:** **Turn “outcome goals” into “behavior goals”.**

Generally, when someone asks about their fitness goals, most people start with the outcome(s) they want:

- *I want to lose 20 pounds.*
- *I want that thin-skinned, ripped look.*
- *I want to binge less often.*
- *I want to deadlift double my bodyweight.*

Outcome goals describe *how we want things to be at the end of the process.*

**There's nothing wrong with wanting things.** Or talking about what you want. Or starting with the end in mind.

**But we can't stop there.**

Wanting things isn't enough. Even if you really, really, *really* want them.

Because: **We often can't control outcomes.**

Outcomes are affected by environmental things. Like:

- Your job gets crazy busy.
- Your kid gets sick.
- Your gym closes for renovations.
- Your mom with dementia needs help.
- You have exams at school.

And they're influenced by physical things. Like:

- Your hormones get out of whack.
- You have a chronic illness. (Or even just a tough bout with the flu.)
- You're stressed.
- You're traveling a lot.
- You're getting older.
- You're having problems sleeping.
- You sprained your ankle or your arthritic knee is doing its thing again.

You get the idea.

**You can't *make* your body do what you want it to.** (And neither can your personal trainer.)

**But you can control *what you do*.**

That's why behavior goals are so important: They focus on the things we *do* have control over.

Behavior goals represent your commitment to practice a particular set of actions or tasks every day, as consistently and regularly as possible.

Here's a practical example.

Client:

"I want a flat stomach."

Coach:

"Okay, cool.

"Let's write that down as the outcome you want.

"Now let's think about all the little steps we can take to move you toward that outcome, and which ones should come first.

"In my experience, here's a step that makes a huge difference, and it's a great place to start.

"It's very simple but incredibly effective: Eating slowly.

"I know it doesn't seem to relate to 'flat stomach' right away.

"But in fact, eating slowly helps you pay more attention to what you're eating and how. That means over time, you make better food choices easily and effortlessly.

“Eating slowly helps you eat a bit less, but still feel satisfied. It helps decrease bloating because now you’re chewing and digesting your food better, which is another plus for Project Flat Stomach.

“Would you be willing to try this first step of eating slowly, and also to track whether you practice this?”

Since eating slowly helps folks eat less, and eating less most often leads to fat loss (not to mention the benefits of better food choices and better digestion), this approach helps turn an outcome (uncontrollable) into a behavior (controllable).

Here are a few other examples of how we can turn outcome goals into behavior goals.

Outcome	Behavior
Lose 10 pounds.	Eat till satisfied (instead of stuffed) at each meal.
Lower blood sugar.	Eat fruit for dessert, instead of sweets, at least three times a week.
Squat more weight.	Squat 3 times a week at various intensities.
Sleep 8 hours per night.	Create a calming pre-sleep routine and start it 30 minutes before bedtime.
Have a better relationship with partner.	Have a date night once a week.

Notice how both outcome and behavior goals are trackable. However, behavior goals are usually more effective because they give you something to do (and track) each day.

### **So how can you set powerful behavior goals today?**

1. **Write down one outcome you want.** Don't overthink it. Just name the desire you want most right now.
2. **Write down some of the skills you think you'll need to get that outcome.** If you're just starting out, focus on foundational skills. What are the basics that make everything else possible? (For instance, if you want to manage your time, you need to learn to use a calendar.)
3. **Related to each skill, write down a behavior or two you can do today that'll help build those skills.** This can be really easy, like walking through the gym doors or even packing your gym bag for tomorrow morning.
4. **Do the behavior today, and tomorrow, and so on.** And, keep in mind, if you don't follow through on a given day, don't let it derail you. Each day is a clean slate.

Want help breaking outcomes into skills and skills into behaviors?

### **Step 2: Turn “avoid goals” into “approach goals”.**

*Stop drinking soda.*

*Stop eating junk food.*

*Stop smoking.*

“Avoid” goals like these are nice and straightforward. What’s simpler or easier to understand than “don’t”?

This seems logical. “Don’t” or “stop” will push you away from something “bad”, or something that threatens what you want to achieve.

Yet “avoid” goals are psychologically counterproductive.

**Because telling yourself to *stop* doing something almost guarantees you’ll *keep* doing it.**

As you might imagine, nobody likes being told what to do. This is called resistance, and it’s completely normal. The moment someone (even yourself) argues strongly for change, your natural reaction is to argue equally strongly *against* change.

What’s more, if the goal is to stop doing something, even the smallest slip can feel like a failure. One miss means you’re “off the wagon” and all hell breaks loose.

“Avoid” goals are a lot of psychological work. They take up a lot of mental and emotional real estate and energy. All you can think about is what you’re *not* doing... or *shouldn’t* do... but really *want* to do... but you’re not allowed to do it... *argh*.

That’s why we help clients turn “avoid” goals into “approach” goals.

**“Approach” goals pull you toward something desirable (and quietly pull you away from something you’re trying to avoid).**

“Approach” goals also focus on feeling good. About doing good for ourselves.

Here are some examples of how we can turn “avoid” goals into “approach” goals. Note how approach goals are about adding and enjoying “good stuff” rather than taking away or avoiding “bad stuff”.

Avoid	Approach	Benefit
Stop snacking on “junk food”.	Snack on cut-up fruits and veggies prepared in advance.	Fruits and veggies are good for me, and this helps me get more of them.
Stop over-eating when stressed or overwhelmed.	Stay “checked in” and practice eating slowly and breathing between bites.	I feel so much calmer, I enjoy mealtimes more with my family, and my digestion is better.
Stop drinking soda.	Drink a glass of water with at least 3 meals each day.	I don’t get headaches or constipated any more.
Stop eating when I’m stressed out.	Come up with a list of stress-relieving activities that I enjoy. Then pick one from the list and do it.	I feel so much better after my “stress-relief break”!
Stop feeling so fatigued and sleep deprived all the time.	Develop a relaxing sleep ritual and 9 pm bedtime.	I am clear-headed, energized, and happy. I need less caffeine now.

## So how can you set powerful “approach” goals today?

1. **Write down a “bad” habit you want to avoid.** This is pretty easy. It’s the “hard to break” behavior you nag yourself about a lot.
2. **Write down a “good” habit or two you can use to replace the habit you want to quit.** Try to make the “good” habits relevant to the context. If you usually take a smoke break at work, take a tea break instead, for example.

3. **Write down an “approach” goal you can do today to support the new “good” habit.** Start as small as you want. Maybe you take the tea break today — or maybe you just bring your new tea stash to work today so it’s ready for you tomorrow.
4. **Identify how this “approach” goal will benefit you.** Brainstorm all the good things that your tea break could bring: you get antioxidants, you can try all different kinds of tea, you can use the adorable mug your daughter made you in pottery class, you can hang out in the break room with that attractive coworker who also likes tea, you’ll smell like fragrant jasmine or vanilla rooibos instead of cigarette smoke... whatever.
5. **Find what works, and repeat.** You can try a bunch of different “approach” goals to find out what feels easiest for you. When you find one that works for your life, practice it every day.

### Step 3:

#### Turn “performance goals” into “mastery goals”.

Performance goals are a lot like outcome goals. But they’re usually associated with *external validation* such as wanting to get good grades from a teacher, win a competition for the fans, or race against a standardized time.

Just like outcome goals, performance goals are often limited by factors outside your control:

- It could be rainy and windy on the day of a marathon. That’s out of your control, yet influences your time.
- You could get a head cold, an upset stomach, or mega-period-cramps on the day of a powerlifting meet. You may not perform well or set that personal record.
- You could show up in top form at a bodybuilding competition. But your opponent could show up in *better* form.

Of course, performance goals can be fun for a while. They can push you to achieve your best.

But it's incredibly demotivating if they don't work out. Every time you don't achieve the performance standard, you may think you've "failed" (regardless of whether it even makes sense to meet that standard).

And performance goals put our happiness and satisfaction in the hands of someone or something else. Like pleasing a coach. Beating a competitor. Matching an arbitrary number. Having lots of social media "likes". Or getting a gold star.

We never really feel like we accomplished something because we're always looking over the fence.

Mastery is different.

- **Mastery emphasizes the process of getting a little bit better each day at a particular skill.** You don't expect to be a black belt as quickly as possible. But you do expect to progress... a little at a time.
- **Mastery focuses on the joy of learning and the value in intrinsic (inside-yourself) process.** External validation becomes irrelevant when you're focused on the pleasure of doing the activity itself.
- **Mastery is gratifying because no matter what others think or do — whether you're judged poorly or you're outperformed — you can still feel good about your own personal progression.**

Truly, mastery is motivating no matter what else is going on.

*But wait, you're thinking, I'm an athlete.*

Or maybe: *My clients are athletes. Athletes are defined by performance goals.*

They might be *during competition*. However, during the day-to-day grind, the best athletes I've ever worked with have focused on mastery almost exclusively.

The intrinsic pleasure of a growth mindset, of learning each day, and of making improvements is what keeps them training for years. And top performance comes *from mastery*.

After a disappointing play, or game, or season, mastery-oriented athletes don't question the value of the activity, or of themselves. They don't feel like losers. They see losses as essential learning opportunities.

And let's imagine a situation where performance *can't* get better. Let's imagine that an athlete is winning everything, performing their absolute best — at the very top of their class, with few competitors to challenge them. If there's no one else to beat, what do you train for? Mastery.

Here's an example of this in action.

As many of you know, I've long worked with former UFC champ Georges St-Pierre. Back at UFC 111 in New Jersey, the crowd saw GSP completely dominate his opponent (Dan Hardy) for 5 grueling rounds and 25 minutes of fighting.

What the crowd didn't see was that Georges was dissatisfied. When given the opportunity, he didn't submit his opponent via armbar and the fight went to a decision.

What did he do? At midnight, immediately after the fight ended, hell-bent on perfecting his technique, he went backstage and spent 30 minutes working on armbars with his grappling coach.

That's what mastery looks like.

Another example comes from Jahvid Best, elite NFL running back who recently retired from football and started competing as a sprinter. When asked about his track and field goals he replied simply: “To master the technique of sprinting”.

He didn’t talk about winning this competition or that one. He didn’t talk about his 100m times. He talked about *mastering his craft*.

Here are some examples of how we can turn performance goals into mastery goals. Notice how mastery goals involve words like “work on”; “build”; and “practice”.

Performance	Mastery
Beat a personal record in the half marathon.	Work on running elegantly, efficiently, and smoothly. Watch video of self running and identify technique elements to improve, then incorporate these into training plan.
Bench press more weight.	Work on increasing bar speed and strengthening supporting muscles; consistently practice exercises that do this.
Beat last year’s time in the Tough Mudder.	Build up lactate tolerance through high intensity anaerobic sprints.
Drop body fat to 8% for an upcoming competition.	Build my ability to consistently prepare and execute a well-designed meal plan.

## So how can you set powerful “mastery goals” today?

1. **Write down a desired outcome that’s a performance goal.** This could be obvious, or it could take some digging — like: “Damn, why am I so focused on lifting more weight than my brother-in-law?”
2. **Write down some ideas for turning inward with that goal.** If you take the external validation out of the equation, what does success look like? What do you want to master... for *you*? For the craft?
3. **Think about which skills will lead to mastery.** Not to a faster time. But to a body that can produce faster times or higher jumps or smoother movement or better decisions made more consistently.
4. **Write down an action you can take every day for the next two weeks to build those skills.** Then take the action. (Our clients have a lot of fun with this one, because it tends to totally transform and renew workouts, meal planning, and other health-related regimens. It becomes about practical progression. It can even become a game.)
5. **Track your progression toward mastery.** Make your practices a permanent part of your daily or weekly routine. Have fun tracking your progress. And high five yourself for all progress, no matter how small.

## So, why set the right kind of goals?

The right goals can help you set realistic expectations and break large projects into smaller pieces. This avoids overwhelm and helps you stay committed.

The right goals help you feel “in charge”: autonomous, accountable, and responsible for your own life. This is a good feeling. You need it for sustainable change.

**The right goals set you up for long-term understanding and inspiration that “sticks”.** (Rather than short-term “quick fixes” that ultimately fail or frustrate.)

**The right goals boost your own intrinsic motivation.** They’re meaningful to you, rather than being about someone else’s judgement, standards, or agenda.

**The right goals help you take action. Right now. In real ways. In your real life.** Because in the end... only action leads to change.

## What to do next

### 1. Take an honest look at your goals.

Most people have health and fitness goals. Think about yours. Write them down if you like.

Review and sort them. Which ones are “outcome goals”, “avoid goals” and/or “performance goals”?

If any are, how long have you had them? Do you feel good about your progress? How are they working for you?

### 2. Consider the skills you need to do what you want.

New outcomes need new skills. If there’s something you want to do, and you haven’t done it, you probably haven’t developed the skills you need. (Yet.)

Consider which skills you’ll need to build and how you’ll build them.

### **3. Turn outcomes into behaviors.**

Once you know which skills will help you reach your goals, break them down into behaviors/actions you can practice with purpose every day.

### **4. Focus on what to do, rather than on what not to do.**

“Don’t do X” is not an action plan.

But “Do more Y” is.

Where possible, go towards “good stuff”: benefits, enjoyment, pleasure, abundance, learning, growth, and satisfaction.

### **5. Enjoy the journey.**

Choose behaviors you’ll enjoy (or find ways to enjoy the behaviors you’ve chosen). Experience the daily zen of doing a thing for its own sake. Refine, improve, and become a master.



# WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT WILLPOWER.

**Why popular ideas about determination and drive are all wrong.**

**By Krista Scott-Dixon**

Most people think of willpower as a resource that runs dry...  
and then you're just out of luck. But here's the truth —  
and a much more hopeful approach.

There's a reason why 6 out of 10 big, sweeping promises to change end up failing within three months. Or, a few reasons...

- Some folks try to introduce **too much change** all at once.
- Others never create a solid **action plan** to work from in the first place.
- Yet others fail to address **life patterns** that reinforce old habits.

But there's one key factor that plays a central role in making or breaking our ability to change. And as a culture, we just don't understand it.

I think it's time we talk about *willpower*.

+ +

Improving your life — whether that means quitting smoking, losing weight, or getting a handle on your disaster of an inbox — requires change. And to make change happen, we usually go straight to our old friend willpower.

The internal conversation usually goes something like this:

*Wake up, willpower, I've got a bunch of jobs for you! First I need you to get me out of bed at 5:30am. Then you've got to get me out the door for a run. Also, don't let me eat any sugar today. And while you're at it, help me keep my mouth shut the next time my boss says something stupid.*

Sound familiar?

We draw on willpower a lot. But what is it, exactly? Why does it seem to fail us? And, most importantly, how can we make it work better?

## How we think of willpower

You may know it by a few different names:

- determination
- drive
- restraint
- resolve
- self-discipline
- self-control
- resilience
- can-do spirit

The common thread: They all make your palms sweat and your mouth go dry when forcing yourself to do something you *really don't want to do*.

Definitions of willpower include similarly discomforting concepts:

- the ability to delay gratification, resisting short-term temptations in order to meet long-term goals
- the capacity to override an unwanted thought, feeling, or impulse
- the ability to employ a “cool” cognitive system of behavior rather than a “hot” emotional system

- conscious, effortful regulation of the self by the self
- a limited resource capable of being depleted

## Willpower: Impossible

That last definition, in particular, is interesting. Because, you see, **it might not actually be true.**

We used to think that willpower was a limited resource, something that we use up until it's gone.

That's the belief we fall back on when, after eating chicken and broccoli all week long, we find ourselves knee-deep in nachos and margaritas at 7PM on Friday night.

*My (depleted) willpower made me do it!*

Thankfully, new discoveries in willpower research have revealed that this viewpoint falls short.

Before we get into the new research, here's a crash course on what we thought we knew... until recently.

## Is willpower really a finite resource?

University of Kentucky psychology professor Suzanne Segerstrom began researching the biological basis of willpower in the early 2000s. Studying physiological correlations, Segerstrom found that heart rate variability (HRV) increases when people call on their willpower.

From there, a study in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* showed that using willpower literally fatigues participants. In another, stamina was shown to be depleted.

Florida State University professor Matthew Gailliot then proposed that the mind and body pull the same resources for fuel, suggesting that willpower uses glucose. Though arguable, Gailliot's research at least suggested that individuals with high glucose resources would have more self-control.

Follow-up studies showed that having too many choices — say, at a buffet — decreases our ability to restrain ourselves. The take-home: Limit your options if you want to conserve your willpower.

From these studies and other data, we get the picture that willpower is a limited resource. That we must prioritize our willpower-requiring activities, since we'll likely run out.

Countless books and strategies have been written on the subject.

The first wave of books was a bit fatalistic: If willpower is a biologically limited entity, it's not our fault if we run out. Not very hopeful — and practically useless when it comes to making big life changes.

The second wave was a bit better. These compared willpower to a muscle, suggesting that it can be strengthened. So authors shared all sorts of strategies for doing so.

Here's the only problem with all this: **The willpower-as-limited-resource narrative is only half right. Which means it's also half wrong.**

# Change your beliefs on willpower, change everything

In more recent studies, one thing really stands out: Willpower is surprisingly simple to boost.

So easy that merely *suggesting* to people that willpower works cumulatively, rather than being a finite resource, can be enough to improve the numbers.

In one study from Stanford, researchers gave subjects the prompt, *“Sometimes, working on a strenuous mental task can make you feel energized for further challenging activities.”*

Simply sending the message that willpower can *build* on itself rather than run out was enough to get people to be significantly more successful at the tasks at hand.

Staggering, isn't it?

I'm not saying this is going to work like a charm every time. But it does reveal the power of our own perception when it comes to finding motivation.

## Where willpower can take us from here

Okay, it is absolutely true that willpower is a finite resource. You will absolutely run out of it if you use too much.

**But only if you believe that's how willpower works.**

(Gasp.)

What happens if you believe the opposite — that doing something requiring willpower can drive you to accomplish even more? Well, amazing things happen.

For example, when the Stanford researchers asked 153 college students about their attitudes regarding motivation and willpower, the ones who felt that willpower was a limited resource felt “depleted” after a difficult task.

Yet the students who felt that willpower was cumulative did better on every subsequent task given.

As the saying goes, nothing seems to succeed like success.

From here, anything is possible. Excelling at something in one area of life might lead to a whole chain of successes in seemingly unrelated areas.

For instance, a good test score could lead to improved academic growth, which could lead to procrastinating less, which could even lead to things like healthy eating or sticking to a budget more effectively.

Well played, brain. Well played.

## What does this mean for you?

Just like every other life situation, our own self-talk and beliefs determine how we handle difficult situations.

This means that how you *think* about willpower can actually translate to how you act, and that can mean better results.

For example, if you’re having trouble finding the motivation to get to the gym, or you’re tired of white-knuckling yourself away from the refrigerator, try simply re-framing the situation.

Tell yourself that every time you work on a challenging task you become more capable of rocking the next one.

That mindset alone can make you feel more empowered.

## What to do next

1. Think about your **understanding of willpower**. How do you define it? How do you think it works? Consider how your definition of willpower affects your actions.
2. **Try giving yourself (or your clients) a prompt** to encourage a different view of willpower and motivation. Use the one from the study I mentioned (*“Sometimes, working on a strenuous mental task makes me feel energized for further challenging activities”*), or put your own spin on it (*“Following through on my new habits makes me feel like a rockstar who’s capable of anything”*).
3. Consider how a **different view of willpower** might help you, or your clients, with challenges like:
  - nutrition consistency
  - sticking to a workout routine
  - preparing meals ahead of time
4. The next time you feel like you’ve exhausted your willpower, ask yourself: **How can I reframe what willpower means for me?** What successes have I already achieved? How can I draw energy from those successes?

Remember, willpower is simply another tool you can use to empower yourself (or your clients) to make positive changes.

And, like most things in life, it’s best used with a hefty dose of self-compassion, positive self-talk, and social support.



# SECRET TO NUTRITION SUCCESS.

**It's not willpower, it's your environment.**

**By Ryan Andrews**

Have you ever wondered why you aren't succeeding despite "knowing" what to do? Maybe you've read every nutrition textbook in the library and aren't lean yet. The problem might not be how much you know... it might be what's around you.

When it comes to making life changes, we hear a lot about the importance of “mindset”. How you look at the world can shape the way you approach problems and view your experiences. And this happens both consciously and unconsciously.

Notice the latter part: many of our assumptions and worldviews are unconscious. We aren’t aware of them, even as we’re thinking them.

Have you ever “zoned out” while driving, and then realized you’re 10 miles down the road, not sure how you got there?

You must have been paying attention on one level, or you’d have crashed the car. And yet, most of your mind was elsewhere. Your unconscious brain was handling the job of driving while your conscious brain was focused on getting your errands done, what happened to you at work that day, solving Fermat’s Last Theorem, or whatever else you think about.

The way we approach health and nutrition is similar. There are ideas and thoughts that we’re aware of, and ideas and thoughts that we’re not. We can dive down into our brains to fish for our unconscious and subconscious thoughts and bring them to the surface. This might include unconscious thoughts like:

- I’m not worthy of self-care.
- I don’t deserve to look good.
- Looking good is for vain people.
- Eating bad food makes me feel good.
- I don’t want people to notice me.
- If I stay overweight, I won’t have to be social.

It can be a minefield in there! This will take some time to clear!

Self-analysis is an important — indeed, even essential — project, but it takes time and effort. It might take weeks, months, or even years to untangle all of our thoughts and assumptions about health and nutrition.

But you want to start getting in shape NOW! What do you do in the meantime while you're digging around in your brain?

Change your environment.

## How to change your environment

You can immediately change what's around you. This includes things like:

- Your daily routine
- What tools you have available to you
- The people you interact with
- What foods you have near you (or far away from you)

Having trouble making it to the gym? *Get home equipment.*

Can't seem to kick the PM ice cream and cookie routine? *Don't keep ice cream and cookies in the house.*

Having trouble getting enough veggies? *Buy veggies at the grocery store and keep them at your residence.*

Surfing the internet keeping you up too late at night? *Get rid of the internet at home.*

Friends always taking you out for pizza and beer? *Talk to them*

*about your goals. Explore other options for socializing. And look for opportunities to develop new friendships, too.*

Often times we convince ourselves that what we know and what we plan for will allow us to coast through any health and fitness obstacles that get in our way.

But knowledge and planning don't always translate into behavior changes.

## Control your environment — before it controls you

Researcher Brian Wansink, author of *Mindless Eating*, describes the ways in which portion sizing has changed over the years, and how this affects our behavior. There are two basic ideas here:

1. **Most of us will eat all that we are served — no matter how big the portion is.** If we are served a small bag of popcorn, we'll eat that. If we are served a bucket of popcorn, we'll eat that. Presumably if we are served a Volkswagen full of popcorn, we'd do our best to finish that off too.
2. **If we consistently eat bigger portions, bigger portions will seem “normal”.** Our great-grandparents would be astounded at the platters of ribs and Super Big Gulps that are commonplace in the US. (Other countries are slowly changing, but the US has the largest portions for now.) We've lost our perspective on how much we should really be eating.

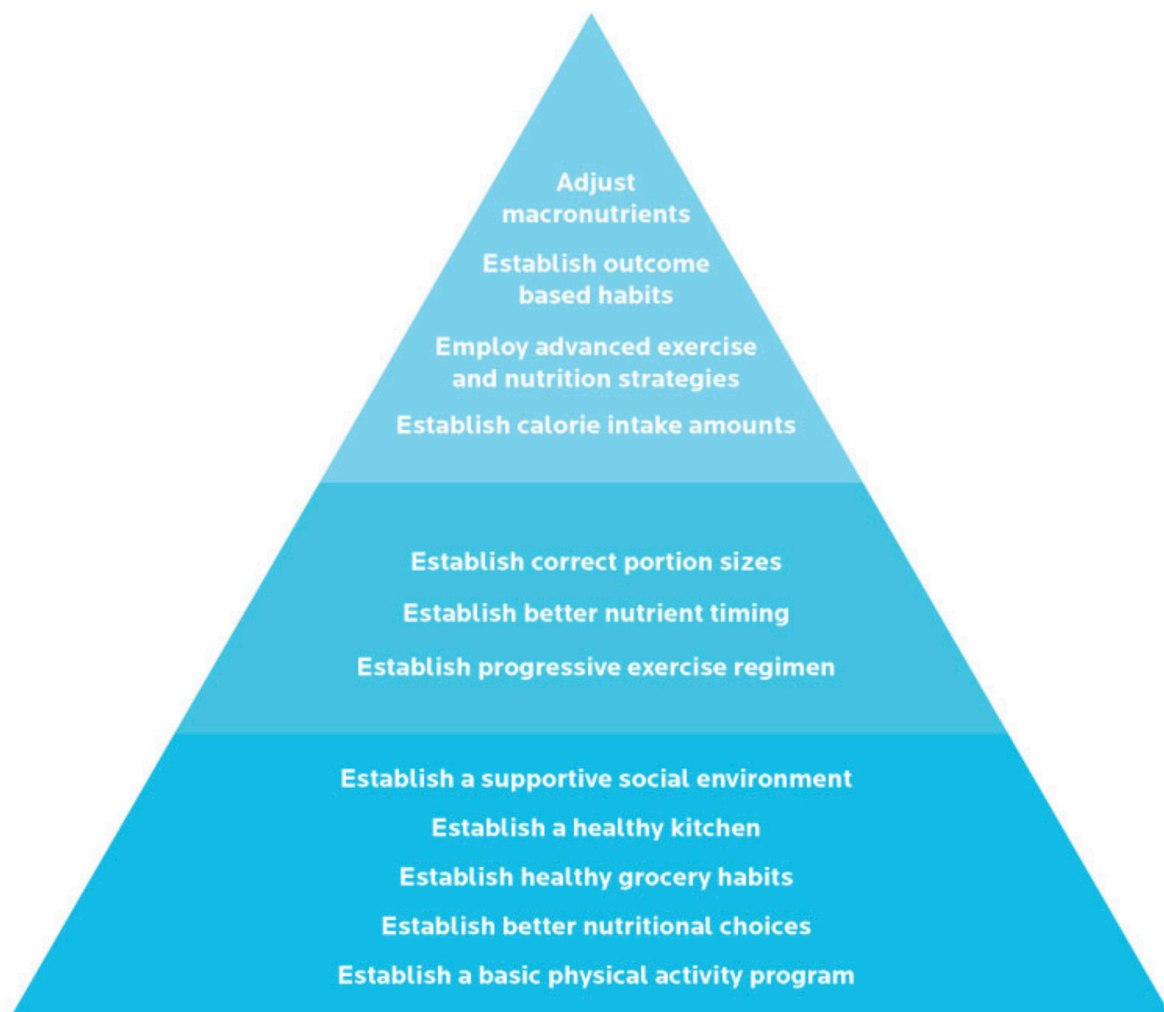
The article also points out that even “experts” can be fooled. No matter how much you know, you can still be affected by what's around you.

Conversely, even if you don't know something, your environment can affect you.

Have you ever been traveling and stuck on a delayed plane that's sitting on the tarmac? You aren't going anywhere. Nobody is serving drinks or snacks. Heck, you can't even get up to go to the bathroom! In that moment, it doesn't matter how much you know about nutrition — you aren't getting a meal.

## Your environment is your foundation

If you think of body composition change as a pyramid, here's what the pyramid should look like.



Notice that all the “expert information” stuff — adjusting macronutrients, advanced nutrition strategies, etc. — is at the top. It’s the smallest component, and the last one to occur in your development.

Notice that the base of the pyramid is what surrounds you: your social environment, your kitchen, your grocery habits, your day-to-day routine.

Changing your thinking eventually is essential. But in the meantime, it is much easier to change your environment than it is to change your mind.

## Set yourself up for success

As I mentioned in the previous examples, you need to set yourself up for success. Many times our environments create the “norm.” Junk food, no exercise, sedentary living, hours and hours of TV watching, etc. We can be very impressionable when it comes to our levels of physical activity and how much we eat.

Here are some ideas:

- Use smaller plates and cups. We’re often used to just filling the dish and eating till the food is done.
- If there’s a food you don’t want to eat, get it away from you. Don’t keep it in the house. Make it hard to get.
- Conversely, if there’s a food you should be eating, make it easier to get.
  - Sign up for a CSA box so that fresh, healthy produce and/or organic meat is delivered to you.
  - Have fresh, healthy whole foods on hand and prepared. If necessary, buy pre-cut veggies.

- If you have more money than time, consider signing up for a healthy meal delivery service.
- Put the TV in an inconvenient place or make the seating in front of it uncomfortable. Cut your cable package down so you don't have 200 channels to choose from. Or, get rid of the TV altogether.
- Park your car farther away from where you're going so you have to walk. Or sell the car and get a bike.
- Join a social group organized around activity: a class, club, or meetup group (e.g. hiking tours). Find a workout buddy. Surround yourself with people who are also working on their health, fitness, and nutrition. Organize your social events around activity — get a bunch of friends together in the park for some Ultimate Frisbee!
- Get a dog that needs walking — one that will chew up your couch as punishment if you don't take it for a daily spin around the block.

You'll notice that these tips share two features:

- They make problem behaviors inconvenient.
- They make healthy behaviors convenient.

In the battle between knowledge and environment, environment wins most often. If you think it is time to switch up your environment, do it. Indeed, it may be one of the best ways for you to stimulate new progress.



# WHY THE “PAUSE-BUTTON MENTALITY” IS RUINING YOUR HEALTH AND FITNESS.

**‘Getting a fresh start’ isn’t the magic bullet you thought it’d be.**

**By John Berardi, Ph.D.**

“I’ll resume healthy eating after my vacation... once the baby is born... after Dad gets out of the hospital... January 1... Monday.” While this kind of “pause-button mentality” seems reasonable, it could be ruining your health and fitness. Here’s why, and what to do about it.

There's a question that's been finding its way to me a LOT lately — from Precision Nutrition Coaching clients, Certification students, ProCoaches.

## “Why don't your coaching programs offer a 'pause' feature?”

After all, what's the harm in letting clients/patients take a break from a nutrition and fitness plan when they're:

- leaving for vacation,
- completely swamped at work,
- pregnant, or just after delivery,
- injured, or
- caring for an ailing family member?

For a client, the thought process boils down to:

*If I miss some workouts, eat the wrong things, skip the homework... I fail. Aren't I more likely to succeed if I take a break, just until I have the time to do it right?*

### **This is what I call the 'pause-button mentality'.**

Now, don't get me wrong.

I think it's normal — even commendable — to want to do your best. To consider taking time to regroup and then resume (or start over) when life feels easier.

At the same time, this completely natural and well-meaning impulse is one of the **fastest, surest, most reliable ways to sabotage your plans for improved nutrition, health, and fitness.**

Here's why — and what to do instead.

## **Starting fresh after you lose your way is a really comforting thought.**

That's probably why New Year's resolutions are so popular, especially following the indulgence-fueled holiday season.

*Give me that cheesecake. I'll pick my diet back up on Monday!*

In fact, we've learned in our nutrition coaching programs that the idea of a do-over is so alluring you don't even *need* a mess-up for the pause-button mentality to take over.

Every January, we welcome a new group of clients. Every July, we take in the second, and final, group of the year.

In July, six months in, just knowing that there are new clients starting the program fresh in January makes some July clients “itch” for a new beginning, even though they're already making progress, changing their bodies.

*If only you'd let me start over, I'd really nail it this time!*

## **But here's the problem: The pause-button mentality *only builds the skill of pausing.***

Whether it's tomorrow, Monday, next week, or even next year, hitting that imaginary pause button gives you some sense of relief.

It allows you a little respite from what can be really a tough slog.

(And the middle is always a tough slog, it doesn't matter what kind of project you're working on.)

This perceived relief is compounded by the illusion that if we “start fresh” later we can find the magical “right time” to begin.

Listen, I get it.

It can feel absurd to try to improve your eating and exercise habits while you're in the midst of chronic stress / looking for a job / starting a new job / going on vacation / caring for aging parents / raising small children.

That's probably why there are so many 21-day *this* and 90-day *that*. What adult has more than 90 days to go after their fitness goals with an all-out effort?

### **But what do these intense fitness sprints teach you?**

The skill of getting fit within a very short (and completely non-representative) period of your life.

### **What don't they teach you?**

The skill of getting fit (or staying fit) in the midst of a normal, complicated, “how it really is” sort of life.

This is why the yo-yo diet thing has become such a phenomenon.

## It's not about willpower. It's about skills.

**In most fitness scenarios, you learn how to get fit under weird, tightly-controlled, white-knuckle life situations.**

You build that one, solitary, non-transferable skill — to slam the gas pedal down, drive the needle into the red, and squeal down the road for a little while, burning the rubber off your tires until you (quickly) run out of gas and crash.

**What you don't build is the ability to get fit under real-life conditions.**

That's why it doesn't stick. *Not* because you suck.

But because the *natural and predictable consequence* of having a limited skill set is short-term progress followed immediately by long-term frustration.

## What will be different next time?

I remember having lunch with a colleague who swore up and down that his low-carb diet plus daily running was the secret to staying in shape.

I had to follow up with a painful question: “Well, why aren't you actually in shape?”

After a long pause: “Uhh, I've had a hard time sticking with it. We just had our second child. The holidays just ended. I just switched jobs.” He trailed off...

“But, once everything settles down, I'll get with the program and get in shape again! I guess I'm just on a little break.”

This story illustrates the point perfectly.

Here's someone who's built his fitness on a house of cards. He knows only one thing: **How to get in shape by following a very challenging program when the conditions are perfect.**

And whenever life isn't perfect, which is most of the time, he hits the pause button. He waits for a better time. (All the while losing the health and fitness he previously worked so hard for.)

That's why, when our clients ask to press pause, we usually ask them:

*"What will be different when you come back?"*

Nine times out of 10, the honest answer is nothing. Nothing will be different.

Life is just...happening. And it'll happen again in January, or after the baby is born, or after Mom gets better, or at any other arbitrary point you pick.

And what then?

## **I've wanted to press "pause" myself.**

If you've ever felt like pressing pause, or you feel this way right now, it might help to know **I've felt exactly the same way.**

A few years back, my wife and I decided to renovate a home. During the reno, we lived in a tiny apartment above my in-laws' garage. At the time I was also starting up Precision Nutrition.

Every day we'd wake up and get straight to work. At the end of the day, we'd drive 1 ½ hours to the new house to chip away at the reno. Then, late at night, we'd drive 1 ½ hours back and fall into bed. Repeat.

At first, I thought there was no way to exercise. My schedule was completely packed, I had nowhere to work out, and my eating was less than ideal.

But after a couple of weeks I realized that ***something* was going to be better than *nothing***.

The renovations would continue. Running a business would only get *more* demanding. And we were planning to have our first child.

I realized I couldn't wait. I couldn't press pause. Because, if I didn't continue, there'd never be that "perfect time" to hit play again.

I needed to find a way to squeeze in some kind of workout, however quick, easy, and unglamorous.

## Let's accept that life has no pause button.

The key lesson here is that, like it or not, **the game of life keeps going**.

There is no timeout.

**There's never going to be a moment when things are magically easier.**

You can't escape work, personal, and family demands. Nor can you escape the need for health and fitness in your life.

Here's a thought experiment:

### **What if you tried to hit pause in other areas of your life?**

Imagine you're up for a big promotion at work. For the next two weeks, all you want to do is focus on mastering an upcoming presentation, and winning over your boss.

Trouble is, you've got two young children at home who tend to grasp, koala-like, onto your legs and demand your full attention.

*Honey, you say to your spouse, I'm just gonna press pause on being a parent for now. I'll be staying at a hotel. Don't contact me.*

I don't know about you, but that would NOT go over well in my family.

You can't really press pause — and you definitely can't hit reset — on being a parent. (You've thought about it, though. I know you have.)

Just like you can't stop showing up for work and expect not to get fired. Or “take a break” from being married and not wind up divorced.

Generally, when it comes to life, we know we're not always going to be on our A Game. Sometimes we're superstars. Most of the time we just do our best.

We muddle through. We keep going.

So why do we expect it to be any different with fitness?

In my case, I hired a coach and we came up with a simple workout program that met these criteria:

- No more than 3x a week.
- No more than 10 minutes per session.
- Has to be done upon waking up, right next to the bed.
- Requires no equipment.

I did that for about 6 months. Was it the Best Workout Ever? No! Did I end up, after 6 months, fitter than ever? Heck no!

But was it better than hitting the pause button and doing nothing? You bet!

See, perfectionism is not the point.

“Completing” a program, PN Coaching or any other, is not the point.

Being the “best” for a tiny window of time is not the point.

**The point is to keep going. Sometimes awkwardly, sometimes incompetently, sometimes downright half-assed. But to keep going nonetheless.**

As I often teach our new clients:

**The “all or nothing” mentality rarely gets us “all”. It usually gets us “nothing”.**

That’s when I propose a new mantra:

**“Always something”.**

## **Instead of pressing pause, adjust the dial.**

Nowadays I like to think of my fitness and nutrition efforts as a dial.

There are times when I want to dial my efforts up, and times when I want to dial them down. But I never want to turn the dial off completely.

Here’s how this plays out in the context of my life.

Sometimes, say when I'm training for a track competition or concentrating on a particular goal, my fitness dial might be tuned to 9 or 10 out of 10.

Channel 10 means I work out every day. Every meal is planned and carefully considered. I think a lot about fitness. And not much about anything else.

Work, family, hobbies...they're all in maintenance mode (with the permission of the people this affects, of course).

However, as I write this, my life involves the following:

- Settling into a new home.
- Conducting major home renovations.
- Raising 4 children, one of them still a baby.
- Running a growing business with nearly 100 team members.

So these days, the dial rarely goes past 3 or 4. I work out, maybe, three days a week. And most of my meals are just “good enough”.

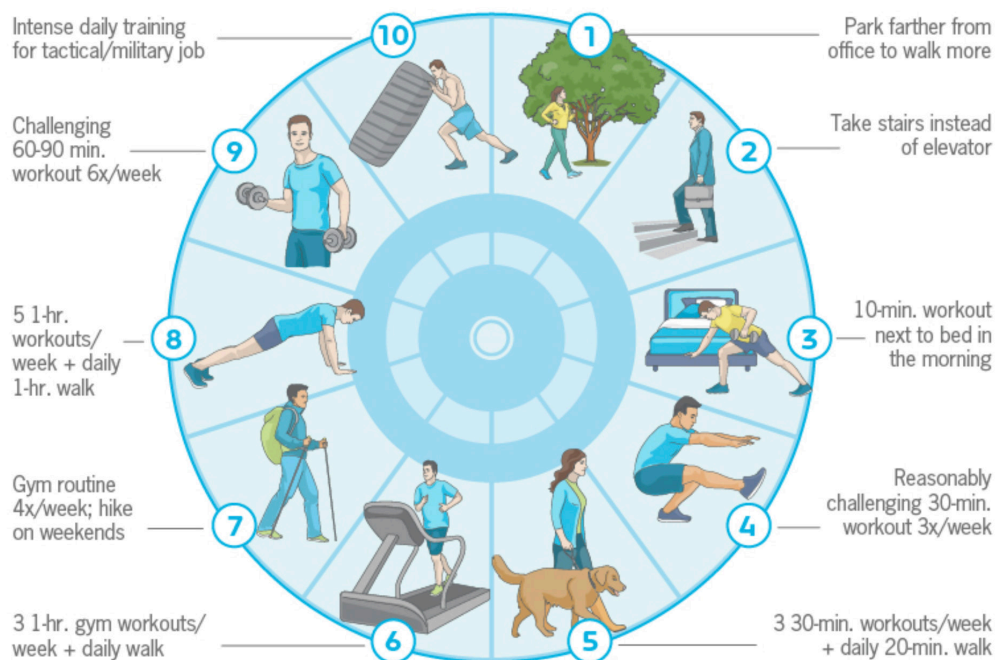
(For the record, I'm totally cool with that. There is no guilt about having my dial set a little lower. What's most important is that the dial is still set to “on”.)

**The important lesson: There's a big difference between tuning your dial to 3, 2, or even a 1, and turning the whole thing off.**

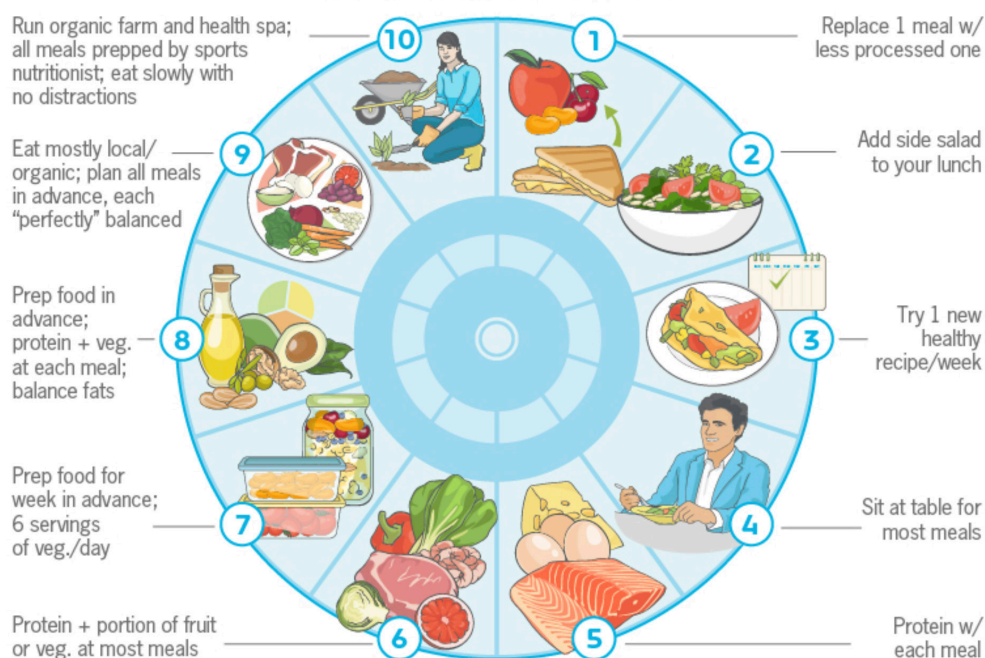
And when you realize how doable — and effective — channels 3 and 2 and 1 can be, you see that there's never a good reason to hit “pause”.

I get it. It's easy to discount the lower channels. Especially when you've done more in the past. But remember your new mantra...

## MOVEMENT



## NUTRITION





## “Always something.”

Precision Nutrition Coaching graduate Susan Olding was dealing with a family crisis during the program: Her dad became ill and eventually passed away.

Susan could have given up when her dad was sick. Asked for a pause. And no one would have blamed her.

Instead, she challenged herself to embrace imperfection and do something every day:

*Each day, I asked myself: If I can't do what was asked of me, what can I do? What can I manage (physically, emotionally, mentally) now?*

*Then I went and did it.*

*Meanwhile, I also tried to add spontaneous activity into my days.*

*I paced the hospital halls, parked at a distance and walked to the hospital door. I went for evening walks.*

*Anything to stay active.*

I remember Susan telling me about the random sets of squats she did in the corner of her dad's hospital room while he was resting.

Susan's takeaway:

***Perfection never happens in real life.***

***We're always going to be doing the best we can with what we have. And that's okay.***

***We can still make progress toward our goals and still improve our health and our fitness – whatever's going on in our lives.***

That progress doesn't happen if you "press pause" and wait for a better time.

It doesn't happen if you say "I'll squat again once the Dad situation resolves itself". Or if you ask for a re-do next week, next month, next year.

**"Fitness in the context of real human life."**

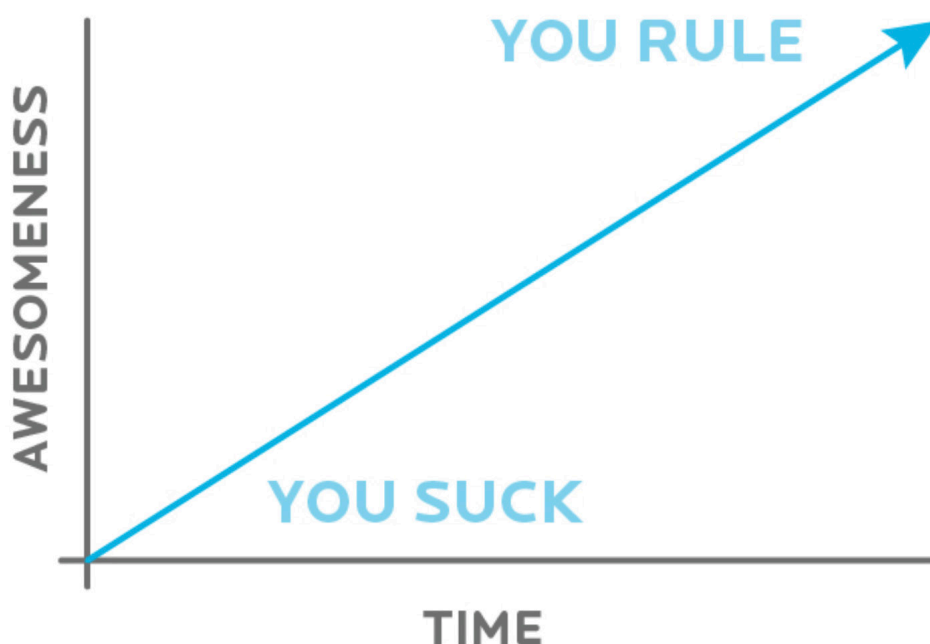
That's one of our mottos here at Precision Nutrition.

It's what I think we're the best in the world at: Helping clients be healthy and fit in the context of their *real lives*.

Not while pretending to be someone they're not. Not by signing up for a 12-week boot camp with daily workouts and restrictive diets.

But by living their own lives and practicing “always something”.

In my opinion, pressing pause is buying into an imaginary ideal: a “perfect” time when everything will fall into place; a beautiful, linear trajectory from total suckiness to apex awesomeness:



Asking for a restart because you don’t want to mess that line up is deluding yourself that somehow, next time will be easier. *Next time will be perfect. No interruptions, no distractions...no...life.*

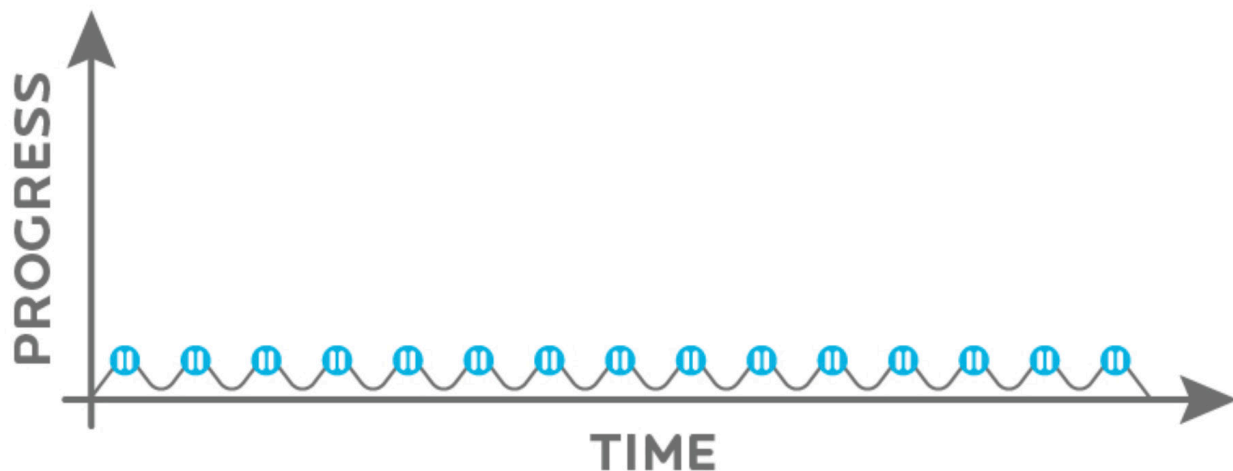
Unfortunately, there is no perfect time.

We may have magical moments, of course. Short periods of time when things seem to “click” and come together.

But then the dog poops on the rug. Or the kid throws up on the couch. Or both... and then one or the other tracks it all through the house.

You keep pressing pause, and your progress looks like this.

Or, worse yet, you end up flatlining, stuck on a never-ending (maybe eternal) pause.



## What to do next

Fitness in the context of real human life is just like the rest of life.

We're all just doing the best we can in challenging, complicated circumstances. We are all living messy, imperfect lives. We are all human.

If we can just keep moving forward, no matter what happens, no pause buttons, no do-overs, we win the game.

Here are a few strategies for getting out of the pause-button mentality and into a more realistic, effective, sustainable way of thinking.

### 1. Try the dial method.

Think of your fitness like a dial that goes from 1 – 10.

If you were to dial it up to “10”...

- What would your workouts look like?
- What would your nutrition look like?
- What other actions/habits would you practice in that scenario?

If you were to dial it down to “1”...

- What would your workouts look like?
- What would your nutrition look like?
- What other actions/habits would you practice in that scenario?

Giving thought to your life right now, where is your dial set?

Would you like to make any adjustments?

Could you move the dial *up* a channel, or even half a channel?

If so, what would that look like?

On the other hand...

Should you move the dial *down* a channel so you can stick with health and fitness even during a difficult time?

## **2. Aim for a little bit better.**

An all-or-nothing approach usually doesn't get us “all”. It usually gets us “nothing”.

You know what actually works?

Small improvements done consistently over time — we have proof in the over 100,000 clients we've helped through the Precision Nutrition Coaching method.

You might be trying to make a meal out of hospital cafeteria food, or gas station food, or airplane food. You might be spending hours awake with a newborn in the middle of the night, or stuck in yet another full-day meeting. These aren't ideal scenarios, but they're not necessarily hopeless either.

Look around. Get creative. See if you can find some small — maybe minuscule — improvements.

### **3. Anticipate, strategize and plan.**

Since we already know that stuff is going to go wrong, the best thing we can do is anticipate and make plans for how to deal when they do.

A simple way to do this is by answering two questions:

- What's likely to get in the way of what I hope to accomplish?
- What is something I can do today to help me keep going when I face those obstacles?

For some people, that might be a Sunday ritual where they prep food for the week so they won't be scrambling for healthy meals on busy weeknights. For others, it might mean having a healthy meal-delivery service on speed dial.

Don't be surprised and dismayed when things go haywire. They will at some point. Just arm yourself with the best tools and strategies so you can stay in the game when you're thrown a curveball.



# I'D LOVE TO GET STARTED...

## I'm just waiting for the perfect time.

**By Krista Scott-Dixon**

Many of us wait for the “perfect time” with our health, nutrition, and fitness. But this all-or-nothing thinking — as in, “If I don’t do this perfectly then it’s awful!” — rarely gets us “all”. It usually gets us “nothing”.

Are you waiting for the “perfect time” to start eating better, or exercising, or finally getting in shape?

Are you putting off that dream trip, or a new project, or that skill you’ve been meaning to learn?

If so, some of these phrases may sound familiar:

*When I get a different job.*

*When things are less busy.*

*When I find a workout partner.*

*When I find the right equipment.*

*When I feel less awkward in the gym.*

*When I lose 20 lbs.*

*When I get the right workout routine.*

*When my fridge is full of the right foods.*

Tomorrow. Next week. Never.

Human beings are always “waiting for the perfect time”. But why?

For many, it’s a great **distraction and justification**. It helps us avoid the real—and risky—work of *doing*.

For others, perfectionism and avoidance serve as strong armor against potential **embarrassment, criticism, and failure**.

*“I could \_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_”* keeps us safe from pain.

Unfortunately, it's also what keeps us from growing, thriving, and being who we know we have the potential to be.

**That's why all-or-nothing thinking** — *If I don't do this perfectly then it's worthless* — **rarely gets us “all”.**

**It usually gets us “nothing”.**

**There is no perfect time. There never will be.**

Oh sure, there might be some magic moment in your fitness journey where the universe comes together... and you're wearing your favorite t-shirt... plus your extra-comfy sneakers... and that song you love comes on... and your body is full of exuberant, bubbling energy... and your favorite piece of gym equipment is free (in fact the gym is empty today, hooray!)... and you bang out a set of ten reps like the angels are hoisting the barbell for you.

But that magic moment will be one in the zillion other less-magic moments that make up your real life.

Indeed, if we are talking about a moment as, say, approximately ten seconds long, that means you have somewhere between 2,398,377,600 to 2,556,165,600 potential moments in your life.

Which means that a single perfect moment is, well, a very very very small part of the whole thing.

Yes, celebrate that perfect moment when it comes. But sure as heck don't wait for it.

# Take your moments. Make your moments.

Just so you know, **nobody is going to give you any moments. You have to *take* moments.**

Hunt them. Chase them. Make them happen.

Scratch and gouge moments out of other times. Chip off tiny flakes of moments from the monolith of your day. Use your teeth if you must—bite off mouthfuls of those moments.

*You* are holding the chisel and the pickaxe. You are the miner of your moments.

This frustrates us, of course.

*It shouldn't be this way, we think. Everyone else's moments just... come to them. Everyone else has enough time. Enough money. Enough motivation. Enough information.*

But *it is* this way. For everyone.

This is how it is, with moments. Moments resist expectations like water resists the intrusion of oil.

However, there is a perfect moment. There is actually always a perfect moment.

**That perfect moment is *now*.**

Here. Today. The living, breathing sliver of time that you have in this precise second.

Because *that is all you ever have*: right now.

## Just start. At the beginning.

Here is another secret. You don't have to actually work to get to the next moment.

### **All you have to do is start.**

And then, moments will keep moving, as moments do.

One moment will stack on top of another and before you know it, you'll have arrived at your destination.

*"But I can't!"* You say. *"I can't get started! That is the problem, you see!"*

No, it's not. If you can't get started, you're just jumping too far ahead.

You're not *starting with starting*. **You are trying to start somewhere in an imaginary middle.**

For instance, let's say you choose to start with reading about nutrition.

That can be a good start—if it keeps you moving on to the next moment.

But it is not a good start if it keeps you stuck in your chair, clicking through a blur of blogs and charts and plans and testimonials until it's time for lights-out and you haven't made a single good nutritional choice today.

So maybe, starting for you shouldn't be reading.

It should be something else, like walking to the fridge and picking out a shiny fresh apple and eating it.

Or making a shopping list and putting it next to your car keys for tomorrow.

Or reading a menu from the restaurant you're about to visit, and picking out the salad option in advance.

**Starting means initiating *action*. Starting means committing to a choice of some kind or another. This is how you know it is a true start.**

Starting is when you drop the coin into one pinball machine, not when you stand there looking at the all machines in the arcade, deciding which one to play.

Starting is when you lift up one foot and put it in front of the other, not when you stand there debating which road to take or wondering if you should have worn different shoes.

For some folks, starting needs to be an even smaller action. Starting might be just lifting the foot. Or shifting their weight to one leg.

Putting the first foot in front of the second foot might require some help. Which is OK.

**As long as something is moving, that's a start.**

## **Push through. Embrace resistance.**

Many people who are just starting out assume that because they feel resistance, they have failed.

That because broccoli tastes bitter when they first try it, and because they accidentally overcook it, they just can't eat vegetables.

That because they forget the printed list of exercises on the kitchen table, they can't work out once they get to the gym.

That because their legs ache on the ascent, they are not ready to climb that hill.

No. *That's just how it feels sometimes.*

Starting will often feel like resistance, at least at first. Like grinding the brain's gears.

Give it time. Resist the urge to press pause. Push through. It will switch tracks, eventually.

Remember: **You don't have to fight the resistance of the entire trip. You just have to push through the resistance of the first few moments.**

## Get support. For now.

In order for a rocket to leave the earth, it has to fire extra-hard against gravity. It needs a boost.

In order for a heavy train to get moving, it might need an extra engine.

We *can* start—and stay moving—on our own. But it sure helps when someone gives us a push or a pull.

Someone who can call us on our procrastination and perfection. On our information-cruising and waffling.

Someone who can snap us out of our all-or-nothing trance with a gentle nudge and reminder.

For a while, we can even affix ourselves to this someone or something else, like hooking that extra engine to our front. As we go along, we can unhook superfluous cars that we realize are weighing us down. We grow lighter, leaner, more mobile.

Eventually, we don't need that extra engine any more. Our train is now whizzing along just fine on its own. The scenery blurs past the windows and we are heading on a grand adventure.

But in the beginning, we had to *start*.

## What to do next

If you're still "waiting for the perfect time", try these tips to help you stop feeling stuck and start taking action.

### 1. Revise your expectations.

Recognize that there is no perfect time and there never will be. There is only now.

### 2. Carve out time, even if it's imperfect.

Nobody will give that time to you. You'll need to take it. Give yourself permission to make yourself — and your fitness and health goals — a priority.

Find the time you need in your schedule. Don't have time for an hour-long workout? No problem. How much time do you have? 20 minutes? 10 minutes? Work with what you've got.

Don't expect things to go perfectly smoothly. Instead, anticipate and strategize. Ask yourself:

- What's likely to get in the way of what I hope to accomplish?
- What is something I can do today to help me keep going when I face those obstacles?

Instead of waiting for things to 'slow down', start making something happen right now, in the middle of the mess.

### **3. Just start.**

If you feel stuck, just do something. Anything.

Find the smallest possible thing you can do right now, in the next 5 minutes, and do it. Now you've started!

In PN Coaching, we concentrate on finding "5-minute actions". Instead of coming up with the biggest, grandest scheme, think about what you could do in just 5 minutes to help move yourself — even just a tiny bit — in the direction of your goals. Then, go do it.

Remember: action is a "vote" in favor of a different, healthier, fitter life. Vote early, vote often.

### **4. Expect resistance.**

It's normal. Push through it. Resistance doesn't mean this won't work. It just means you've started.

You only have to get through this moment. This moment of starting will be the hardest. Luckily, it won't last long.

## 5. Get support.

Let go of the concept of the lone hero. Instead, start building your support systems.

Whether it's a friend or family member, a workout buddy, or a coach, find someone to fire up your booster rockets until you can fly on your own.

## Want help becoming the healthiest, fittest, strongest version of you?

Most people know that regular movement, eating well, sleep, and stress management are important for looking and feeling better.

Yet they need help applying that knowledge in the context of their busy, sometimes stressful lives.

That's why we work closely with **Precision Nutrition Coaching** clients to help them lose fat, get stronger, and improve their health... no matter what challenges they're dealing with.

It's also why we work with health and fitness professionals (through our **Level 1** and **Level 2** Certification programs) to teach them how to coach their own clients through the same challenges.

For more information on Precision Nutrition Coaching:  
<http://get.pn/coaching>