

New Year's Fitness Goals: 24 Pieces of Advice That Work

1. The Survivorship Bias

Brief overview: Survivorship bias refers to our tendency to only focus on the success stories, or the winners in a particular area. And in the case of fitness, with a specific diet or training plan. For every person who succeeded with a particular diet or training plan, there are thousands who failed miserably.

The winners are remembered while the losers are forgotten. Therefore, we can't know for sure if something works just because a successful person attributes their achievements to it.

What to do: Beware of the Survivorship when making a decision, be it fitness-related or not.

2. Screw Genetics

Brief overview: Some people are more genetically gifted than others and there's nothing you can do about that. We can bitch and moan about it, or we can bust our asses and see what our genetic potential really is. You never truly know where your limits lie until you put in the years, sweat, and blood into it. The only real failure is never to try.

What to do: Stop placing limits on yourself and start putting in the work. You might discover that you're much more genetically blessed than you previously thought.

3. Fat Loss & Strength Gain

Brief overview: When losing fat sensibly, you won't lose nearly as much muscle as people would have you believe. And even if you do, muscle mass is not the only factor that affects strength. Neuromuscular capacity is critical. You should strive to get stronger (or, at least, maintain your strength) every time you cut.

What to do: Practice. Lift heavy weight (75-80%+ of your 1RM) in the lower rep ranges of 1-4 with proper form. Practice the lifts you want to improve two to four times per week. Don't train to failure, especially if you're losing fat. Always leave some repetitions in the tank. Prioritize compound exercises over isolating ones.

4. Importance of Environment

Brief overview: Our environment is a mighty force that drives our behaviors and habits much more than we think. If you are new to fitness or want to get more serious and start making better progress, you need to take a look at your environment and ask yourself, “Is my current environment a positive influence on my fitness goals or not?”

With a bit of thought, you can design an environment that seemingly automates good behaviors while making bad ones more difficult to do.

What to do: Make it easy to stick with fitness habits.

- Prepare your gym bag and take it to work with you. On your way home, stop by the gym for a workout.
- Remove junk foods from your kitchen and replace them with healthier alternatives.
- Keep your room dark, quiet, and cool to ensure a good night’s sleep.

5. The Goldilocks Rule

Brief overview: As humans, we all love a good challenge, but only if it falls within a manageable zone of difficulty. The Goldilocks rule states that we humans enjoy working on tasks that are just challenging enough for our current abilities. Tasks that are too easy quickly bore us. Conversely, tasks that are too difficult quickly overwhelm us.

What to do: In the case of lifting, strive to challenge yourself enough. Not too much and not too little. If you currently hit the gym zero times per week, nothing good will come out of dedicating yourself to training six days per week. Start with just enough to challenge yourself and slowly build upon that as the months and years pass.

6. The Repeated Bout Effect

Brief overview: The more consistently you do something, the less of an impact it has on you. In other words, your body responds to the same stimulus less with each passing bout.

- Each workout makes you less and less sore.
- Lifting the same weight will have less of an effect with each passing workout until it no longer does anything for you.

What got you here won’t push you forward. If nothing changes, nothing is going to change.

What to do: Progress is critical. Over time, you need to find yourself doing more if you want to ensure growth. More weight on the bar, more repetitions with the same weight, more total sets, more workouts within a week. If you find yourself stagnating and you're recovered, chances are you need to push harder.

7. Recovery is Non-Negotiable

Brief overview: To ensure that you're adapting to training stress and are growing, you need to put a priority on your recovery. Otherwise, you'll find yourself under-recovered, achy, and prone to injury.

What to do: Eat enough food (and protein), get your eight hours of sleep, find time for relaxation, don't skip mobility work, warm-up well before training, and stay hydrated. Stay consistent with all of these things. No matter how silly some of them might seem, each one plays an important role in your ability to recover and improve.

8. Track Progress

Brief overview: The old saying, "You can't improve what you don't measure." holds a lot of truth. If you want to progress over time, you need to track the hard facts - how strong you are, how much you're eating, how well your workouts are going, and what exercises you're doing. That way, you can compare yourself to last week, last month, and last year and objectively judge if you're doing well or not.

What to do:

⇒ [Read this](#) to learn how to calculate and track your calories.

⇒ [Read this](#) to learn how to track your workouts simply and effectively.

9. The Power of Positive Thinking

Brief overview: We all write narratives in our minds about who we feel we are, what we think we are capable of, and why we are where we are in life. But it's important what these narratives are. If we don't believe in ourselves and our abilities, we'll be limited no matter our circumstances, genetic potential, and opportunities.

What to do: Start paying attention to the beliefs you currently hold about yourself. You have to be willing to believe in your abilities and to trust that you can make a lasting change with enough hard work and consistency.

10. Process > Goals

Brief overview: Having goals is good. They give us direction. But the small, daily actions we take toward these goals are much more critical and we should focus our attention on them.

You might set a goal to squat or deadlift 315 pounds by the end of the year. But your process will be to do each workout as planned, stretch daily, and eat enough food.

You might set a goal to lose 20 pounds by May or June. But your process will be to consistently lift weights, eat in a caloric deficit, and get enough protein.

What to do: Focus much more on the processes and day-to-day actions and much less on your fitness goals.

11. Bad Workouts Will Happen

Brief overview: Bad workouts are the price you have to pay for consistency. If you have enough workouts throughout the year, some are bound to be bad, and that's okay. Under normal circumstances when you allow yourself to recover well, you'll have a few bad workouts and a few 'meh' workouts. But the majority will be good.

What's important to remember is that even bad workouts are beneficial and you shouldn't linger on them.

What to do: Accept it, walk into the gym with confidence, do everything in your power and never dwell on a bad workout when it happens.

12. Delayed Gratification

Brief overview: If there is one quality that greatly determines our success in work, finances, health, and fitness, it is delayed gratification. Small daily successes are often built on delayed gratification. Over time, these small, seemingly insignificant acts of delayed gratification snowball into huge, dramatic improvements.

What to do: Before you can be strong, you need to embrace some discomfort under the bar. Before you can be lean, you need to embrace some discomfort with eating less. Before you can enjoy that nice car you want, you need to embrace the discomfort of living on a budget and putting money aside each month. Embrace the discomfort now for the satisfaction later.

13. Consistency > Intensity/Perfection

Brief overview: Being consistent is not the same as being perfect. And trying to be perfect is probably holding you back. Consistent effort (even on a smaller scale) is ultimately going to deliver much better results than going all-out for a month or two and then giving up. If you can't stick with something for the rest of your life, there's a good chance that you'll fail.

What to do: Focus on long-term changes rather than short-term 'fixes.' Instead of dieting religiously for a month, start improving your eating habits gradually. Instead of going on a crazy training program, start hitting the gym three times per week, but do it every week.

14. The Confirmation Bias

Brief overview: Confirmation bias refers to our tendency to seek information that validates our current beliefs and understandings while completely ignoring or trying to disprove statements that contradict our beliefs. We tend to form certain beliefs on different topics and only seek out information that confirms that. We don't want new information; we want to validate what we currently believe.

What to do: Beware of this bias and do your best to stay open-minded for new ideas and other people's opinions. Very few things are set in stone.

15. Make Sleep a Priority

Brief overview: Tons of research has shown that lack of sleep leads to increased hunger, decreased ability to burn fat, decreased athletic performance, less muscle growth, impaired recovery, attention lapses, brain fog, general fatigue, irritability, and more.

The longer you go on less sleep, the more severe the symptoms get and the less productive, healthy, and clear-minded you become.

Sleeping for six hours per night for two weeks straight has the same effect on your mental and physical capabilities as staying up for 48 hours straight.

What to do: Make sleep a priority. Get the TV out of your room, invest a bit of money in a nice pillow and mattress, and keep the temperature low. If you consistently feel beat up when you wake up in the morning, try going to bed a little earlier. Aim for eight hours of sleep. Adjust as needed.

16. The 'Perfect Solution' Fallacy

Brief overview: There are a lot of ways to get stronger, to build muscle, and to lose fat. What matters is the context. Even if the information is good, you always need to analyze its usefulness for you, individually. What might work for a twenty-two-year-old college student might not be optimal for a person in his later thirties with a full-time job and a newborn baby at home.

What to do: Always be skeptical when someone tries to sell you a 'perfect solution' to your problem, especially if there's a real price tag attached to it. Also, when consuming information on the internet, always think about how useful and applicable it is for you.

17. Stop Program Hopping

Brief overview: There are a lot of people who happily jump from one thing to the next, always looking for a better way to do things — the better program to get stronger, the better supplement to build muscle, or the better diet to lose fat. Scattering your focus like that will only lead to unfulfillment with your training. Even worse, you never feel like you're making any progress because you're always jumping from one training style to the next and from exercise to exercise.

What to do: Do more of what already works. Tunnel vision. Direct your focus to a program, put in the work and only make changes when it stops delivering any results.

18. The Power of Slow Gains

Brief overview: We live in a society where instant gratification is the norm. We want amazing results, and we want them yesterday. We are impatient, and we frown upon slow progress. But, small improvements add up over time. Adding two pounds to your squat each week might not seem like much, but over a year, that's an extra 100 pounds.

What to do: Depending on your experience, start adding a pound to your main lifts each week (if you're more experienced) or two pounds (if you're a beginner). You won't progress forever, but you'll understand that those small improvements can add up to huge gains down the line.

19. On Working With a Coach

Brief overview: Learning how to properly apply the basics will help you make better progress down the line and you'll save yourself a lot of wasted time, frustration, and potential injuries. A good coach can help you with that.

What to do: Hiring a coach to help you get started is a worthwhile investment. Also, always strive to learn from credible sources on the internet. Here are some of the best:

- Bretcontreras.com
- Strongerbyscience.com
- Bayesianbodybuilding.com
- Rippedbody.com
- Weightology.net
- Lookgreatnaked.com

20. Drink Water

Brief overview: Water is essential for training performance and gains, much more than most people realize. It's involved in pretty much every bodily process, including protein synthesis and muscle growth. Water also plays a major role in the repairing processes of the body and without it, we wouldn't recover well.

What to do: Aim for three liters of water if you're a guy and two liters if you're a girl, daily. More or less water could be needed depending on your bodyweight, activity level, how much you sweat, how warm it is where you live, and how old you are.

21. Nutritional Habits and the Dieting Trap

Brief overview: Dieting doesn't work because hunger catches up to you, and you start craving all of the foods you used to eat on a daily basis just a couple of weeks back. Binge eating, gaining all the weight back, and feeling bloated and disgusted are soon to follow. This is the problem with diets, and more specifically, radical change.

What to do: Stop chasing the perfect diet and instead spend that mental energy on gradually improving your eating habits.

- Choose three or four wholesome foods to include to your grocery list.
- Make just one of your daily meals healthier.
- Try intermittent fasting.

22. Don't Compare Yourself to Others

Brief overview: Comparing yourself to other people is dangerous and counterproductive. This goes double for doing so on social media. There are plenty of fitness models on social media who are ripped 365 days of the year and have dozens of perfect shots. When an average person compares themselves to the model, they quickly lose confidence in their body and progress.

What to do: Focus on your own thing and be proud of your work (this is where tracking your progress helps). Also, remember that what you see on social media are the *highlights*, a carefully constructed image of that person.

23. On Training to Failure

Brief overview: Research hasn't been able to show any significant benefits in favor of training to failure. On top of that, training to failure can negatively impact recovery and sabotage your performance on subsequent sets, exercises, and even workouts. Plus, going all out is very mentally taxing and often leads to technique breakdown.

What to do: Leave one to four repetitions in the tank on each set. This is going to help control fatigue, allow you to maintain proper technique, but also stimulate your muscles to grow and strengthen.

24. It's Not Always Easy

Brief overview: You won't always be motivated or excited, and some workouts will feel much more difficult than others. But if you want to get healthier, look better, and be stronger, you'll have to embrace some discomfort.

What to do: Do it.

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