

Kick-start Your New Year's Resolution

By Steve Baldwin, MS, RD, Associate Editor

Now that 2007 is a distant memory and you're still going strong with the resolution to eat well and exercise, there's no cause for concern, right? I'm sure eating right and exercising are still at the top of your "to do" list.

Or not.

The motivation to keep New Year's resolutions going usually wanes after about a week. Whether you're a single adult, married with kids, or somewhere in between, soon after New Year's Day – certainly no later than January 10 – the old habits wake from their nap, rear their ugly heads, and begin to stake their claim on your behaviors once again.

My family is no exception. After the holidays passed us by like a NASCAR driver late for his wedding, the first two weeks of January have been hectic. We've got three kids – Kindergartener Josh, 1st grader Sarah, and 2-year-old Sam. Sarah and Josh have nightly reading, homework, and projects. Both are in soccer, each with their own practice and game schedules. Sarah is also in Gymnastics and Campfire Girls. Do they make PDAs for 6-year-olds?

My wife and I have plenty of time together, if you count sleeping next to one another as "time together". Our typical schedule: work, chase kids, put them to bed, work some more, fall down with exhaustion. We'd consider having a fourth, but we don't have enough awake time to...um...make it happen.

Here's a recipe for anxiety: Thoroughly blend two kids' school and extracurricular schedules with Mom and Dad's busy workdays, and top it off with and a toddler at home who thinks he runs the place. Mix well. Serve nightly. It's not long before "I'm going for a walk once we get the kids to bed" becomes "I'm going to collapse on the couch once the kids pass out themselves".

It is possible to keep the momentum going, to eat well and be physically active during these busy times. But make no mistake, it takes planning and effort. You have to want it.

Your effort is worth it for several reasons. You need to keep stress in check. You need energy to do homework or play with the kids or clean the house after a long day at work. Beyond the practical reasons, it's about being a role model for your kids, your colleagues, and your friends and family. It's about your health *and* their health.

Here are a few steps to kick-start your healthy-lifestyle resolution:

Plan to weather the storm. Understand that life gets in the way sometimes. Your goal is not to be perfect, but rather to adjust and adapt your strategy as you go.

Keep fruits and vegetables readily available. Because your daytime environment will not always make healthy snacks available, you'll need to take them with you. Grab an apple on the way to work in the morning; keep baby carrots and pre-cut celery ready in the fridge for the kids after school (a little ranch dressing or peanut butter helps, too.). A little preparation goes a long way.

Be smart while eating out. We all lean on drive-thru meals now and again. Get your burgers or burritos on the way home, and eat them as a family along with a fresh salad and milk or water. At a sit-down restaurant, ask for a “to go” box when you place your order; divide your meal in two immediately when it comes to your table, then save the leftovers for the next day.

Move when you can. The old standards – park further away from the store entrance and walk, take the stairs instead of the elevator – really do work. Any extra movement you can squeeze in during the day counts.

Make a health appointment with yourself. Maybe you want to walk for 30 minutes, or get back to the gym before work. You might want to go hiking this weekend, or rollerblading at the park or beach. Maybe you want to try that healthy recipe you’ve been thinking about. Whatever it is, make an appointment with yourself and stick to it like it’s a first date with that special someone that you’ve been waiting years for.

You never know. It might turn out to be exactly that.