

The Top 3 Reasons We Fail & What We Can Do About It

I started so well... what happened?

If you've never asked this of yourself you're definitely the exception and not the rule.

Most of us have at some point struggled with this question or a variation of it. Other common versions include, 'Why can't I stick with it?' 'Why does this happen every time?' 'What's it going to take?' And for those of you who have really had enough... 'What the f#%k!'

So why are so many of us cursed with an inability to hang in there when it comes to changes like diets and exercise programs? Why do many people not even last a week before they quit? And why do so many of us fall into a cycle of quitting after 6-12 weeks? When we start so well and actually feel better for it, it makes no sense that we would quit right?

Well the bad news is that there is no one reason why we do this. There are some common themes that pop up regularly though. I see the following three all the time...

1. **Setting reactive goals**
2. **Going from 0-100%**
3. **Forgetting about what you're not doing**



1. Setting reactive goals

So many of us set arbitrary or reactive goals based on specific triggers.

Someone makes a comment, or looks at you funny, or your pants don't fit. Maybe the doctor suggests something. Or maybe you make some kind of health goal because it's New Years. You said... "This year I'm gonna go to the gym, join a sports team, commit to a diet etc..." How did that go for you? Maybe you started something which is great. But how's it going now?

The point is that so often we set goals that we have no emotional connection with. While our goals seem logical it is rarely logic that drives us to change. We need to have some kind of affinity for our goals.

So what's the answer?

Turn it into something you actually want to do! If you wanted to get fit for example but you hate the gym... Don't go to the gym! When it comes to fitness any movement counts. So just go through every type of movement you can think of (sport, dance, walking, gym, swim etc.). When you think of something you say, yeah that sounds fun, then this is the kind of thing you should be doing.

2. Going from 0-100%

What makes you think you can go from doing nothing to going to the gym 5 times per week?

I guess many of us just assume when we decide to do it we will just do it. WRONG! Trying to change by changing everything will result in not changing. The brain is a stubborn organ. It likes to take the path of least resistance, to do things in exactly the same way as it's always done. It's particularly resistant to rapid change and will do what it can to resist.



So what should we do?

Start at a pace that you can sustain over time. Building the routine of what you're doing is more important than what you're doing. If you make small regular changes then your brain will acclimatise. Once this occurs you can then start building the habit and so on and so on until you get to where you want to be.

So remember... Slow gains are better than no gains!

3. Forgetting about what you're not doing

We all live busy lives and we all have a short amount of 'free' time in every day.

The free time you do have will already be filled with things you're accustomed to doing. So when you set a new goal and start doing new things you'll also need to do less of existing things. This often doesn't seem like a big deal at the time but in reality it's a ticking time bomb! Remember the brain likes to do the same things... So even though you may have started doing something new, your brain is craving the things you used to do.

An 'extinction burst' is what often results. This is where your brain makes a last ditch effort to reengage in the old behaviour. You could be tracking along nicely then out of the blue you find yourself on the wrong end of a binge wondering what happened. Unfortunately these kinds of incidences regularly lead to an all-out relapse and before we know it we're back to square one.

So how can we overcome this?

As with previous point the best thing to do is to start slowly. Start at a level where you can still largely do what you usually do. This way the brain won't end up craving the things it used to do. By slowly replacing old behaviours with new behaviours you'll find that your brain adjusts much better and your urges to return to old ways won't be anywhere near as strong.