

I did it!

By Suze Hargraves

I did it. On Sunday I walked in my first ever 5K race. I wasn't there to beat a time or win a trophy. I was there to validate my progress on fitness goals I had set for myself. After a year of working on my health, both mental and physical, could I walk an official and rather hilly 5K? The answer was yes. I wasn't even winded when I finished. Okay so I came in next to last (I'm pretty sure the group behind me stopped to let their dog rest), but I finished. More importantly, I didn't just reach a finish line, I reached a goal.

Setting fitness goals is a good way to stay on track. MayoClinic.com recommends a gradual method of fitness goal setting; "Start with simple goals and then progress to longer range goals. Remember to make your goals realistic and achievable. It's easy to get frustrated and give up if your goals are too ambitious. For example, if you haven't exercised in a while, a short-term goal might be to walk five minutes once or twice a day. An intermediate goal might be to walk 20 minutes three or four times a week. A long-term goal might be to complete a 5K walk." Speaking from experience this approach works remarkably well.

Regular physical activity has, according to the Mayo Clinic, seven essential benefits. It improves your mood, combats chronic diseases, helps you manage your weight, boosts your energy level, promotes better sleep, can put the spark back into your sex life, and it can even be fun! Being the Anti-Pollyanna that I am, my thinking is more along the lines of, "If my car breaks down in one of our various cell phone dead zones can I fend for myself and walk miles to get help?" Not the sunniest motivation but self reliance works for me.

Staying focused on goals requires that you ditch your lame (and you know they're lame) excuses and push yourself when you feel like slacking off. Use whatever tools work for you to make your chosen activity enjoyable. If walking, you can use a walking meditation technique to turn the activity into a mind/body experience. Visit <http://www.meditation-methods.com/walkingmeditation.html> to read more about walking meditation. You can use your walking time to listen to that book on your MP3 that you've been meaning to read. Listen to music you enjoy. Staying focused on your goals is a lot easier when you make the process of getting to them enjoyable.

Setting reasonable fitness goals and reaching them gives you a sense of achievement that can't be beat. Your body feels strong and your mind feels sharp. Of course you should discuss your goals with your healthcare provider to make sure they are appropriate for you. Once you set your goals go after them with dogged determination and the knowledge that you alone control your success.

Next year I'm going to give that hound a run for his money.

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