



by Bob Harper

## Are you really ready? Getting on Track for a Lifetime of Good Health



**New Year's resolutions might be good for some things, but they're not necessarily the answer when you want to change your life for the healthier.**

The whole concept of the New Year's resolution puts too much emphasis on one day. I've found that people are much more empowered to do what they can do *right now, right here*—as opposed to waiting until Monday, their birthdays or Jan. 1. With “resolutions,” people tend to think the sky's the limit until that all-important day when, miraculously, they'll have the habits in place that will last them the rest of their lives.

Life changes are no quick fix. They're long-term effects, which start with small steps.

One thing I've learned being in the fitness business and working on *The Biggest Loser* is that it's not just about getting people on an eating program, doing pushups and running on a treadmill. It's about their relationship with themselves, and with food.

You have to clean your emotional house before you can start to incorporate diet and exercise. Are you really ready? That's the first question that I ask because, until you're ready, there's nothing I can do for you—nothing that can be done. But when you decide that today is the first day of the rest of your life, and you want to change, then nothing is going to stop you.

How do you know you're ready? It's that inner resolve, when you finally look at yourself in the mirror and realize the time is now. Or it might be when you can't even look at yourself in the mirror. It's when you've hit your rock bottom and decided that you don't want to live like this anymore. It's an epiphany that people have in different ways, shapes and forms, but, at the end of the day, it's an undeniable feeling that you won't accept anything less than change.

**Exercise doesn't have to be complicated.**

To start fresh, forgive yourself. Believe me, you're not the first person who has tried and failed to lose weight or change unhealthy trends in your life. Whatever it is you did before—however big you got, however you let go of life—you have to be able to forgive yourself and move on.

Love yourself. I've often noticed how hard people can be on themselves. You have to be able to cut yourself slack. Focus on what you like about yourself, so you can manifest more positive feelings.

You have to change the way you think about yourself—your internal tape recorder—to get back on track with a

healthy way of life. People can be the best fathers, mothers, sisters, the best friends—yet they can be their own worst enemies because of the negative thoughts they have about themselves. These thoughts can be replaced by positive ones. We all have that inner resolve and spirit that just needs to be unlocked.

Remember, this is no quick fix. It is difficult and requires a lot of changing. It's not possible to, all of a sudden, forgive yourself, change your internal tape recorder, learn to love yourself—rather, it's a lifestyle change. I tell people to start in small steps and to remember that this is going to be happening for the rest of their lives. You might start by taking a 30-minute walk or by making healthier food choices for a day.

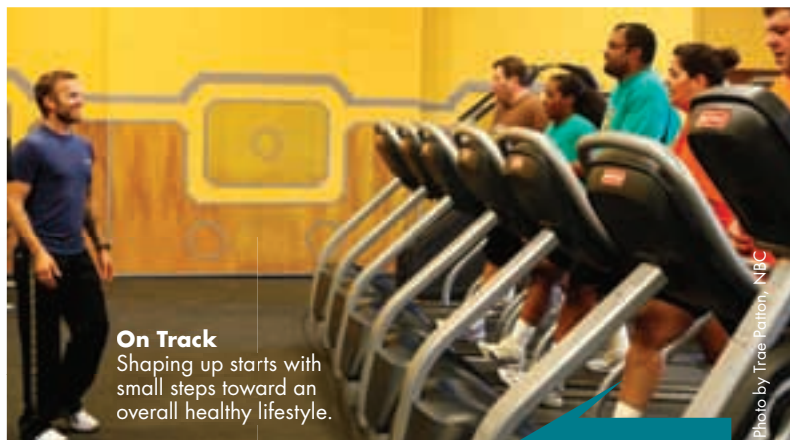
When it comes to healthier eating, you have to realize an eating plan is not a diet. Often people who need to lose weight think they'll have to give up everything they love and be food deprived. That's not the case. A well-thought-out plan has to be practical and sensible, and there's a world of food you can eat.

What I emphasize is that you have to eat to lose weight. That means getting the right foods in your system within 30 minutes of getting up in the morning and then eating every four hours or so. It's important to plan meals, too, so you're never at a point when you're without a sensible food choice.

One sure way to be accountable for what you eat and how it affects you is to keep a food journal. When you write down what you eat, you realize what you're eating. You'll remember those M&Ms you nibbled on at the secretary's desk or the doughnut you grabbed on your way to work in the morning. When you do start losing weight, you can go back to that food journal and say, "This is what I did, this is how I ate, and this is how I started seeing results for my body."

You can't talk about a healthy lifestyle without addressing stress, which I believe is a cancer to the body. For a lot of people, stress can also make fat. There's a hormone called cortisol released with stress that tends to hang around the belly area, and that's the most dangerous fat you can have for heart health.

To reduce stress, you may need only to take a few minutes in your office with the door closed, phone and BlackBerry off, moving the body or breathing deeply. I've



**On Track**  
Shaping up starts with small steps toward an overall healthy lifestyle.

Photo by Trace Peterson, NBC

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shown people how to do this. The goal is to restore calm, and, over time, you feel better just for these few minutes of relaxation.

Exercising also doesn't have to be complicated. Especially in this economy, people are happy to hear it doesn't have to mean buying expensive equipment or joining a gym. It's more about setting up a routine. In my program, the first phase of the workouts calls for setting up a schedule for cardiovascular exercises—a walk, jog, hike or something as simple as that.

As you progress, you need only simple gear to get in good shape. Fifty dollars will buy you hand weights, a physio-ball and a yoga mat—all the tools you need for an effective exercise program while traveling or while at work or at home.

As you start to lose weight and feel better, you incorporate resistance training, which builds more lean muscle mass. The more muscle mass you have, the less fat, because muscle and fat don't like living together.

Embarking on a program to change your life means getting your head in the game. Once you've decided you're ready, it becomes a matter of reprioritizing your schedule and life. Taking time for yourself isn't selfish. Actually, you'll feel better and, as a result, have more to give to the people you care about and to your career.

We all have the key; it's just hard to unlock the energy that we have in our bodies and souls to be able to move forward. New Year's resolution or not, you have to look at starting a lifestyle that is going to last the rest of your life. When you've decided that today is the day that you're going to start taking charge of your life, you don't have to make it a New Year's resolution or wait for Jan. 1. When you're ready, you can do it. **S**

*Bob Harper is a motivational expert in his sixth season as a fitness trainer on NBC's The Biggest Loser. He is the author of Are You Ready! Take Charge, Lose Weight, Get in Shape and Change Your Life Forever, released in 2008.*