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Active

# Work towards a new shape in the New Year

*There's no better time to begin your weight-loss journey than now, says Matt Roberts, personal trainer to the stars*

## Shed the sheepishness

All right, so it's not exactly original, starting the New Year wanting to lose weight and feel fitter, but don't for a minute feel embarrassed about being one of the herd. You have to start somewhere and January is as good a place as any. Hold onto those good intentions, don't sweep them under the carpet.

## Set your sights

You need an achievable goal and a realistic date to achieve it by. It takes two and a half to three weeks to get into a good (or bad) habit, and it is not unreasonable to expect to lose one and a half pounds per week. So if your goal is a two-stone weight loss, you are looking at a timescale of 18 to 20 weeks.

## Go with the flow

Any sudden, dramatic weight loss will probably be due to temporary reduction of water content in the body, rather than a longer-lasting reduction in fat. I can make you lose half a stone in a single afternoon by not allowing you any food, making you exercise constantly, not giving you any water, and then locking you in a sauna. But that weight will come straight back on once you get some liquids on board.

## Make a date with yourself

Write a diary. Make space in your day for exercise at a fixed time, just as if you were booking a squash or tennis court for a match with someone else. All you need is 30 to 45 minutes, four or five days a week. And I don't care how busy you are. John Galiano, the fashion designer, lives in Paris, travels all over the world and has about the fullest schedule of anyone I've ever met. He wasn't in great condition when we started working together, but that has all changed now. Wherever he is in the world, he makes sure he puts time aside each day for exercise.

## Cut the chat

If you see two people running through the park having a perfectly normal conversation with each other, then they're not doing it right. The whole idea of exercise is that you should go beyond your comfort zone and push yourself to use as many different muscle fibres as possible. Pootling up and down the swimming pool, or going for a nice, gentle stroll just isn't enough. Right from the start of the session to the end you should be hot, sweaty and so out of breath that talking is possible, but not a pleasure.

## Phone a friend

All the research shows that people who embark upon a weight-loss programme



On your marks: Matt Roberts trains with Frida Haraldsson; Amanda Holden runs with her dogs; and Mel C gets fit for *Blood Brothers*

with someone else have a statistically much higher chance of achieving their goal. If you can't find a friend, you can always hire a personal trainer. For people who need to look good for their work, that can be the best option.

I have been working with Mel C from the Spice Girls for 10 years now and our most recent project has been to get her into shape after having had her baby Scarlet, in preparation for her lead role in *Blood Brothers*. Another of my clients is Amanda Holden – if you've seen her on television recently, you'll agree she's in terrific shape.

## You're on your own

There is no way, of course, that I can keep a round-the-clock eye on my clients and, at the end of the day, the success of any weight-loss programme is dependent upon the self-discipline of the person who wants

to lose the weight. Sure, you might allow yourself the odd treat; perhaps eat that tasty little bit of fat off an otherwise perfectly lean sirloin steak. It's when those little treats start to add up that you've got a problem.

## No gym needed

You don't actually have to sign up for a year's membership at an expensive fitness centre. You've probably got all the equipment you need in your own home: a carpet to do press-ups and squats on, a staircase for step-ups, a chair with arms on which to do triceps-building dips, and water bottles to use as weights to exercise your arms.

## Go brown

Instead of white rice, plain pasta and white bread, switch to brown rice, wholewheat pasta and wholegrain breads. They're

a better kind of carbohydrate: more nutritious, more vitamin-rich and with less of the goodness milled out of them.

## Cast your mind back

Think about the last time you not only looked good, but felt good – when you were the shape you would like to be in now. Try and remember the things that you did back then and how that made you feel. You've got to keep an eye on where you're heading, on where the journey is taking you.

## Clear the fog

Yes, I'm talking about drink. If you're having three to five glasses of wine a day, you are going to have a lot of foggy days. Your liver works at one speed only and can only break down the alcohol in its own time, and at its own pace. And remember: one gram of



carbohydrate represents four calories, one gram of protein represents six calories, and one gram of alcohol represents seven calories, which is almost the same as fat (nine calories).

## Go the whole way

If you just diet, you will lose weight, but then you'll hit a plateau where you won't lose any more. The only way to get beyond it is to incorporate exercise into the equation.

## Get some 'intelligent' scales

Normal bathroom scales are fine if you have a lot of weight to lose and need a rough indicator of how you are doing. But they can't distinguish between fat and water, so they can often give a misleading impression of how much actual body weight you have lost. Instead, you can now buy "intelligent" scales (I use Body Stat) which send a small current through your body, producing a read-out of how much fat you're carrying and how much water.

## Have your feet looked at

This is important if your exercise programme will involve running. Most people's feet either turn in or out and because, like they say in the song, the foot bone is connected to the ankle bone, this uneven jarring can cause problems all the way up the body. So it's a good idea to go for a gait analysis and have orthotic insoles made to rectify any imbalances.

## You're never too old

Your heart and lungs need to be worked, whatever age you are. If you are looking for a sport to take up in retirement, try Nordic walking. We have a group of 20- to 70-year-olds who regularly plough the hills of Hampstead Heath. It exercises all the muscle fibres, challenges the legs and is definitely not a walk in the park.

## Interview by Christopher Middleton

● Matt Roberts is a personal trainer who runs a chain of fitness centres in London. He has written a number of best-selling books on health, fitness and nutrition. Visit [www.mattroberts.co.uk](http://www.mattroberts.co.uk)

● Don't miss: Matt Roberts's A-Z of Fitness, which starts in the Telegraph on Monday

● Free inside next weekend: Matt Roberts Total Fitness and Diet Plan  
Sat: your free fitness programme DVD  
Sun: your free diet plan book

