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New Year's Resolutions and How to Keep Them

"I am going to increase the amount of time I spend exercising next year"; "I resolve to lose fifteen pounds in the coming year"; "I am going to double my weekly mileage by the end of the next year"; "I will stop eating apple fritters for breakfast every morning".

Sound familiar? It should. Research suggests the most popular New Year's resolution relate to diet and to health. Given the surface of the road to perdition it is not surprising that intentions to start, continue, or upgrade exercise programs are frequently not enough to ensure their eventual success.

Motivation obviously plays an important role in many exercise and training resolutions, but unfortunately, so too does injury. Research from the Aerobic Center Longitudinal Study, and ongoing investigation involving patients examined at the Cooper Clinic in Dallas from 1970 to 1989, reported that among over 7,000 individuals participating in a fitness program and documented one third stopped exercising permanently after an injury. Another study followed runners in Atlanta's Peachtree 10 kilo Road Race were followed over a ten year period demonstrated that 30% stopping running permanently because of an injury. Both studies document sobering fact that there is a 30% chance you will stop participating in regular exercise because of an injury.

Pre-participation Musculoskeletal Screening Exam

There are as many explanations for exercise related injuries as there are strategies available to prevent them. One proactive approach is to seek an evaluation by a health care professional qualified to identify potential musculoskeletal problems before you begin or upgrade your exercise program.

This screening is analogous to seeing a physician before beginning a strenuous exercise program – important for adults leading sedentary lives or having significant risk of heart disease. It is also not unlike pre-participation screening exams required of high school athletes.

Of course not everyone needs to see a physical therapist for a musculoskeletal screen prior to beginning or advancing their program, but some individuals who are at increased risk for developing injuries should seriously consider it. Whether or not you are at risk can be determined from your answers to the following six questions about your musculoskeletal history:

- Have you broken any bones in the past, particularly during childhood or adolescence?

- Have you previously suffered traumatic sprain strains, or dislocations?
- Have you had any surgery of your bones, joints, and muscles?
- As a child did you wear corrective shoes or braces?
- Are both your feet the same shoe size, and are both your legs the same lengths?
- Do you have any bone or joint problems such as arthritis or osteoporosis?
- Have you experienced reoccurring injuries in the past in response to regular exercise program?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions you have an increased risk of developing an injury during a program of regular exercise. You are particularly at risk if you have suffered from recurring injuries in the past year. Studies have demonstrated that an injury within the last year corresponds to a to 50% greater risk of a new injury during subsequent exercise program.

If you are at risk, musculoskeletal screening may be in order. There are many benefits of a pre-participation examination. Musculoskeletal screening can provide direction for interventions to address muscle weakness, muscle shortness, or joint laxity, with such a remedial exercise program or adaptive devices. If exercise equipment is part of your regimen your health care provider can adapt the equipment to accommodate individual abnormalities, such as unequal leg length, unequal shoe size, excessively flat feet or high arch feet. Braces, supports, or pads can be fabricated to support and protect previously injured joints and muscles. In short if deficiencies can be identified interventions can be applied to address the identified deficiencies. He or she can fabricate braces, supports, or pads to protect and support previously injured joints and muscles. In short, if deficiencies can be identified, interventions can be applied to address them. As an added bonus, information from a musculoskeletal pre-participation screening is valuable for more than just injury prevention. The results are useful as an enhancement to your performance through improved flexibility, strength, and coordination specific to your individual weaknesses and deficiencies. Because health care providers can customize supplemental exercises specifically to fit your needs, you spend less time doing unnecessary exercises and more time focusing on your weak areas.

Selecting Health Care Professional for Pre-Participation Screening

If you want to seek professional advice to prevent musculoskeletal injury you must decide what type of health care professional and which individual health care professional to see. Whatever the type the individual should be knowledgeable about the musculoskeletal system and injury prevention. Ideally the individual should also be knowledgeable about the specific demands of the sport or program you are interested in, whether it is running, golf, or bicycling. If you have difficulty finding a professional who is well versed in your particular sport, look for

two individuals – one who is a specialist in musculoskeletal screening and another who is a professional coach with knowledge about your sport or program.

Don't let reoccurring injuries prevent you from achieving your goals. Consider consulting a health care professional for assistance in designing a strategy to eliminate barrier of reoccurring injury. This is one way you can prevent injuries that keep you from successful attainment of your New Year's exercise resolutions.