

Making an Autumnal Resolution: 7 Great Ways to Change Your Life.....NOW!

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In spite of our society's New Year's traditions, I have always maintained that January 1 (or worse, December 31....can you say, "distracted?") may just be the worst possible time of the year to decide on any goal or new endeavor, never mind making a full-out life-changing resolution! Not only are we all still tailspinning from the stress and decadence of the holidays, but the weather and the lack of daylight are ripe for sabotaging even the most earnest ambitions to break out of old habits and tackle new – usually equally challenging even if very rewarding – behaviors. No, January, February, and March are really better left as "tread the water" months. Unless you either have that rare burst of inspiration (and if you do, indeed, run with it) or are already experiencing good momentum from a goal quest already in progress, your best bet is to simply try to avoid regressing or losing ground on whatever level of health and fitness you're currently at. The time for growth and change is probably much better reserved for the spring and summer months.



Or.....is it? Really, what better time of the year to step back and make an honest examination of your life of the moment, even if it means putting yourself at what can be an uncomfortable level of awareness, than the season in which change is swirling all around us, where the landscape sometimes varies noticeably from even one day to the next, putting us in both the position of feeling excited and "wowed" and yet a bit nervous and sad at the same time -- at the transformation happening before our eyes? Why not take this passage we're all working through already, and throw in your own personal changes while you're at it? As you embrace and behold the delights of the fall colors, the crisp air, the stunningly blue skies and the "harvest" atmosphere that permeates everything from the farmer's market to the meals we cook and yes, even the produce department at the grocery store, so too can you celebrate the kick-off of behaviors in yourself that signal your own transformation. And just as we deal with the concurrent grief and trepidation of letting go this year's summer and facing the winter season ahead of us, we can confront the inevitable difficulties that accompany even the most positive of lifestyle changes and personal projects.

Gardeners and landscapers know that what you do in (and to) your yard right now will influence what happens over the winter and in the next growing season to come. Likewise, the seeds you sow for yourself this fall can and will impact your winter and spring life next year.

Okay, so maybe you're sold on the idea of "falling into change," but what change shall that be? Here are 7 autumn-inspired ideas to take your personal fitness, flexibility and (healthful) feasting to that next level:

1. **Soup, nourishing soup:** Forget deprivation. With the cold season upon us, why not use the endless abundance of soup recipes to incorporate more of those "I've been meaning to eat more ----- " foods into your weekly lineup? Whether it's green leafy vegetables or Omega-3-rich fish, unprocessed whole grains or fresh herbs and adventuresome spices, your path to seamlessly inserting any or all of those foods can be as simple as scouting out the nearest healthy, tasty soup recipe (and, well, preparing it, too).
2. **Super Supper Sundays:** Somewhat related to the above, if you find yourself constantly feeling wistful to cook more healthy meals, only to have your week's workload hijack your ability to follow through, now might be the perfect time to finally set aside at least one or two Sundays a month to cook a boatload of healthy, yummy meals, then divide into single servings and freeze for easy reheating, anytime. The bonus: Many recipes actually taste better when served as leftovers!

3. **Autumnal Hiking:** So you didn't get out as often as you would have liked this summer. Lucky for you, especially once the first frost hits, you now have plenty of mosquito-free opportunities to change that trend! Even better, set aside a day to go visit a state park or nature center, to explore trails outside of your regular stomping grounds.
4. **Lunch Break Revisited:** One of the top reasons given for not being able to get "it all done" in terms of fitness activities is lack of time. Another is lack of convenience. This often means our only option may be to get creative with certain pockets of the day, such as lunchtime. Just for a moment, consider your current lunch ritual. What can you do, even if just once or twice a week, that would make a difference? Maybe it's taking a walk (and a brown bag to work) on Mondays, but keeping your lunchtime otherwise the same on other days. Maybe it's making a change in where you go to lunch and/or what menu items you select. Maybe it's kicking off each lunchtime with 5-10 minutes of light office stretches and exercises (if you missed the Take It With You Sheet of these, not to worry, four of them will be online shortly). Whatever you choose, the fact that it will be a weekly, recurring activity means a little change can truly go a long way!
5. **Cardio Upgrade:** Thankfully, studies are increasingly pointing to the effectiveness of shorter-duration workouts that involve varying intervals of higher and lower intensities, rather than exhaustive, lengthy sessions that few of us have time (or the desire) to do regularly. Why not take advantage of this finding, and turn to the cardio you're already doing, only amp it up a little? If you walk, do 5-10 intervals of faster-paced walking spurts during the course of a typical outing. Or, if you use the gym, consider mixing up differing forms of cardio; rather than 20 minutes of stationary cycle, consider doing 7 minutes of challenging "hill" walking on the treadmill, 7 minutes on fluctuating intensities on the elliptical trainer, and 7 minutes on the stationary bike (with some faster pedaling intervals sprinkled in), which will further challenge your body through both the variety of movements and intensities within a single workout.
6. **"Winterize" Your Workout Program NOW:** You know what's going to happen once Halloween comes and goes. Suddenly it will be Thanksgiving season, and after that, the madness of the holidays, then the New Year, and THEN the height of winter – hardly the time to attempt to make fitness decisions or impose a new workout schedule on yourself! Get those wheels in motion now, so that by the time most "January Fitness Warriors" have given up on their impulsive resolutions (which we can expect to happen by about January 21), you'll already have all the momentum of the preceding 4 months to keep you going strong!
7. **Back to School:** Hey, why should kids be the only ones to get all the fun? What better time than fall to take a healthy cooking workshop, enroll in a new sport training program, or even take classes in a skill not immediately related to "fitness," per se, such as a musical instrument or a foreign language? Because any activity that takes your attention from TV, eating junk, and generally feeling bored and lethargic (read: all the symptoms of the winter blahs), is an activity that's helping to keep you healthy and happy! After all, fitness and health aren't just about what you DO; they're also about what you DON'T do!

Whether you use one of the above suggestions or not, the next time you take note of a tree turning orange, or the intense earthy fragrances that seem to bombard us from all directions at this time of the year, think of what "autumnal" changes you ought to be initiating (or recommitting to), and make it your mission to join nature in this ultimate annual "makeover"!