



Mind over matter

It may sound like a cliché, but thinking yourself into shape really works. By Sue Heintze.

Ready to throw in your gym towel? Perhaps your trainer neglected to share this important tip: while a personalised training and diet program is paramount to success, to totally transform your body in a short time you need to train not only your body, but also your mind.

Here's the scenario: it's Friday, you're proud of yourself for being good all week, and keen to continue the trend. You hear colleagues chatting about tonight's drinks, but politely knock back invitations.

By 3pm you start to feel weary. You think about tonight's training session with less enthusiasm. Perhaps you can reschedule it for tomorrow? You read somewhere that fresh air and a quick five-minute stroll can ward off sleepiness, but a coffee sounds much easier. Off you go to the kitchen for your caffeine fix.

The cakes, pies and biscuits that you so determinedly refused at 10am are there to taunt you again. Your fruit and protein shake is in the fridge but those Tim Tams look a lot more appealing.

Knowing you're on a diet, nothing would please your workmates more than for you to give in. "Go on, one won't hurt," they say.

You have four Tim Tams instead of one, and when everyone leaves, you scoff some chocolate cake straight out of the fridge for good measure.

Back at your desk, it hits you. "What have I done?" you ask yourself. "Why can't I stop at one? I am hopeless, I will never lose this weight."

At 5pm you head to the pub to drown your sorrows, and after a few beers or wines, you start feeling pretty good again. "I don't need to do this, the others are right, I'm not that fat," you tell yourself.

You polish off a big greasy pizza with your friends on the way home. The next morning – or perhaps afternoon – you wake dehydrated, hungover and aghast. And the gym closed an hour ago so you can't train today.

Instead you sit around watching TV, feeling sorry for yourself and eating more junk until your hangover subsides. By nighttime you are bloated and feel disgusting. You get on the scale. You are 3kg heavier than you were two days ago. You think, "I'll start again on Monday but this time I will stick to my plan."

Sound familiar? It's time to get off the roundabout. Here are my tips for gaining and maintaining mental and emotional toughness throughout your physical challenge:

1 Make a plan, and have a vision
Think about what you want to achieve (perhaps you want to drop two dress sizes or be able to jog for 30 minutes and increase your energy levels), how you will achieve it (you may secure the services of a reputable trainer – online or one-on-one), and why you want it (you refuse to buy new clothes in a size 16, climbing the stairs wears you out, and you feel tired all the time). Commit your plan to paper, and constantly envisage your goal physique in your mind.

2 Make a firm decision
Now you've figured out what you want, how badly do you want it? Are you ready to give it your all? Sit down and make a written promise to yourself stating that you will give 110 per cent, not make excuses, and not give up. Remember, it takes at least 12 weeks to significantly change your body shape.

3 Become selfish
To achieve an amazing transformation, to some extent it has to be all about you. If you choose not to go the pub for Friday night drinks, your friends will get over it. If friends or family have been holding you back or getting in the way of your goals, it's time to be selfish and put yourself first. If you don't, you'll continually be disappointed with your efforts.

4 You must be prepared to make sacrifices for 12 weeks
Nothing worth achieving is ever easy. Instead of trying to fit your body-beautiful diet around your work commitments, family and social obligations, make the transformation process your priority. The 12 weeks will pass anyway, so make some sacrifices for this short time and you'll be astounded at what can be done. If your approach is half-hearted, you can't expect brilliant results.

5 No excuses
There are no valid excuses if you want amazing results in 12 short weeks. There are always alternatives – pay close attention to planning in advance, and have contingency plans for emergencies. If you start making excuses, then you haven't made a total commitment and are wasting your time.

6 For 12 weeks, forget that pizza and cheesecake even exist
Put all thoughts of non-authorised foods out of your head. Don't waste time wanting, looking at, or thinking about food that is not part of your plan. Think about what you can have, not what you can't.

7 Find a good support network
You need positive influences in your life when focusing on transformation. There may be negative friends, family and work colleagues just waiting for an opportunity to bring you down. Steer clear of them and find support and encouragement from internet fitness forums, a trainer or coach, or other gym goers.

8 Believe in yourself and banish negative self-talk
When I set out to achieve a goal, I truly believe and know I will do it. If you don't believe that you can do it, then most likely, you won't. If you find yourself using negative words, stop and replace them with positives. If you continue to tell yourself that you are fat and hopeless, your subconscious will believe it and prevent you from achieving.

9 Make your own personal inspiration book
Cut out pictures, quotes, articles – anything that you find motivational and inspirational. Keep them handy and read them daily, and at times when the going gets tough.

10 Feel the power
When you overcome the small challenges that each day brings, feel the sense of power that comes from these achievements. Use it to be more motivated as each day passes, knowing that you are in control of your own actions.

11 Understand you will have bad days when you want to give up
Everyone has bad days. Be strong, use your motivational tools, and know that when you wake up tomorrow you will probably feel like a different person. What was difficult yesterday is now easy, you feel full of energy rather than tired. You are motivated and focused.

12 Get your beauty sleep
Training and dieting places stress on your body – you need more sleep and rest when training hard. Lack of sleep can lead to overtraining and binge eating.

13 Understand the pitfalls of the scale and learn how to read it
Muscle is denser than fat and weighs more on the scale. If you use a scale, be aware that fluid will affect readings. Just because you weigh 1kg more than you did two days ago does not mean you have put on 1kg of fat. Most likely it will be water due to dehydration, increased carbohydrate/sodium consumption, or, if you are a woman, it may be that time of the month.

14 You WILL make mistakes
In my first competition preparation, I caved in and ate an entire family block of chocolate at week five. I thought I had ruined everything. Luckily I had supportive and knowledgeable people around to help me pull myself together. Aim for perfection but don't expect it. Nobody is perfect. If you fall off your diet plan, get right back on track and minimal damage will be done.

15 Be consistent and patient
None of the above will matter if you are not consistent with training and nutrition, and you must be patient to see results. You will be changing even though the changes may not yet be visible on the outside. The number one reason people fail in their attempts to lose weight is that they give up too soon. But give it a good 12 weeks (not four, six or eight), and you will be astounded by the results.

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● Sue Heintze is a body transformation specialist and natural figure competitor, as well as managing director of online personal training company, Ideal Bodies Online, www.idealbodiesonline.com

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