

# The Missing Link – When Your Fitness Program is Broken

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## The Missing Link – When Your Fitness Program is Broken

The week is over and you are so proud of yourself – you spent 6 ½ hours on the treadmill, 3 hours doing weight training and attended two flexibility classes. You think to yourself before you climb up onto the scale for your weekly weigh-in, “This is it, this is the week I break 200!” Then, feeling completely devastated, you step back down, “How could I have gained 2 pounds after doing all of that?”

Now, while I understand this example may be a little extreme, I often hear similar stories. “I’m doing everything I can think of and nothing is happening. What am I doing wrong?” I don’t think there is anything more frustrating. You work hard, you put in the time and you deserve the results. So, where are they? There isn’t any one correct answer to that question. The objective of this report is to help you find the solution to why your fitness program may be broken.

Thank you for taking the time to download this report. Unfortunately, the health and well-being of our society has taken a drastic decline in the past 20 years or so. You are to be commended for your time and dedication to fitness. Grab a highlighter and a comfortable chair and let’s get started – Is my fitness program broken?

### **Goal Setting**

Since we have probably never met and I do not know the specific details about your fitness program, I am going to start at the beginning. Before I ever begin working with a new client I make them sit down and figure out their goals. (I know you did that already). “I want to lose weight, tone up and look better”. Laugh if you want but they are the top 3 goals I hear almost every time I meet with a new client. I can think of a many different potential scenarios/goals when I hear that line. Which one applies to you? For example, “I want to lose weight.” Well, do you want the number on the scale to go down, your waistline to get smaller, your body fat to go lower, your belt to go a notch smaller or your dress size to go down by one?

For goals to be achieved they really must be written correctly. For a few years I had the privilege of teaching middle school health. Believe it or not goal setting was one of the first subjects taught in the curriculum. I was constantly amazed by how the students struggled with that particular assignment. Today I try to translate that experience to the adult population I work with because if they have not had proper training in goal setting then, they are most likely going to struggle just like my students.

The goal setting process:

First of all it is important to follow certain steps when creating your goals. The first step involves thinking about what you want to ultimately achieve and then coming up with several mini steps to help get it accomplished – we will refer to these as your short term and long term goals. For example, my long term goal may be to complete the Boston Marathon. An example of a short term goal would be the setting up of my weekly running schedule or striving to complete 4 runs a week. As you can clearly see I would need to complete all of my mini goals to get to my long term goal.

You may wonder why this step is so important or why long and short term goals are necessary. It's simple – most people would probably view running in the Boston Marathon an almost impossible task to achieve. But if you were to break that down into 25 smaller tasks you begin to see that with the correct motivation you really could achieve it.

Now on to the actually writing process, arguably the most important step of all.

I have found using the SMART Process to be the easiest way to get good solid goals written.

**S** - *Specific*

**M.** - *Measurable*

**A** - *Attainable*

**R** - *Realistic/Reward*

**T** - *Timeframe*

Each of the above refers to a particular portion of the goal setting process and each step plays on the next. Every time you set both long term and short term goals you need to use the SMART Process like a checklist and make sure the goal adheres to the 6/7 principles.

Let's begin at the top with **Specific**. The more specific your goal the better your results will be. Goals should be written in away that you will know exactly what it is you want to achieve. Let me give you an example. "I want to look better." Vs. "I want to lose 10 pounds." It is very hard to define the word better, therefore it would be extremely difficult to achieve such a goal. The second goal is much more specific you will either achieve it or you won't.

If the goal is **Measurable** it allows us to physically see when we have accomplished it. We will use the same goals from above. "I want to look better" can not be easily measured. A low self-esteem can sometimes camouflage results which would make it a hard goal to accomplish. On the other hand "I want to lose 10 pounds" is very easy to measure using a scale.

**Attainable** is the 3<sup>rd</sup> principle. When setting your goals it is very important to dream big, but make sure the dream is within your reach and you have the resources to accomplish it otherwise you are setting yourself up for failure.

As you can see from the diagram above there are two principles involved with the letter R. There are two different versions of the SMART Process. I choose to explain both. The **Realistic** principle to a

large extent is like the attainable principle but in this case the dream is next to impossible. The **Reward** principle could also be used. (Personally, I like reward better). Just as it implies – there should be a reward waiting for you at the end of the tunnel. When the goal is achieved, what will you get? Is accomplishing the goal itself enough? Sometimes to make it more meaningful you need to have something else dangling in front to keep you going.

Lastly goals must be set with a **Timeframe** in mind. They need to have an end point, because without one you will lose focus. Goals should be viewed as milestones in your life. You should be happy when you achieve them. Having that end point keeps you motivated and gives you something to look forward too.

Now that you have been taught the proper way to write goals sit down and take a look at yours. Do you have both long term and short term goals written? Do each one of them follow all 6/7 principles of the SMART Process? Answering “no” to either question could be one of the problems with your fitness program.

## **Fitness Logs/Reports**

The next logical place to look is your record keeping. I have a very detailed record for every client I work with. I keep track of everything and it all stays in their folder. What do you keep track of? I know many people who go to the gym and just do what they feel like that particular day. Not a very sensible approach for achieving specific goals, but then again at least you are not home sitting in front of the television. I will admit I am a little OCD when it comes to records, so let’s just cover the basics so it does not overwhelm you. At the very least you need to keep track of the following: exercises, sets, reps and days you work out. It would have been helpful if you would have had some assessments done when you first starting working out, since these allow you to visualize your progress. Fitness logs are able to help you in various ways. They allow you to see when it is time to move on to the next stage of training, they confirm if overtraining is occurring, they keep you motivated and lastly you have a written form detailing all of your progress, or lack thereof.

You do not have to use anything fancy for you records. They could be kept on homemade excel spread sheets or in a spiral notebook. However there are pre-made fitness journals for sale. I have one for sale on my website. If you are not already keeping a log, start using one with you next workout and see if it makes a difference.

## **Periodization**

I hinted at this topic a little in the last section. Are you like the person I referred to above, or do you have a laid out routine you follow when you go to the gym? You may have heard the term Periodization before, it is nothing more than rotating and manipulating your workouts around a set schedule. Okay, there may be a little more to it then that, but for our purposes that is as much detail as you need to utilize it. If you do not rotate your workouts you will eventually hit a wall or a plateau. The physical adaptations in your body will likely stop and you will no longer see results and overtraining may occur.

Basically every 4 – 8 weeks your workout parameters should be changing. You do not want the adaptations while training to stop. Below you can review a sample chart that could be used as necessary. When you get to the end, start over again at the top and repeat.

# of Weeks	Sets	Reps	Exercises per body part
4 - 6	1 – 2	18 – 20	1 – 2
4 – 6	2 – 3	12 – 15	1 – 3
4 – 5	2 – 3	8 – 12	2 – 3
1 - 4	3 – 4	3 – 8	3 – 4

In another section we will talk about where rest would fall in this particular schedule and why it is necessary. As you can see in the chart the numbers vary. Beginners should stay on the lower end of the spectrum. The next part of the puzzle is to change the exercise parameters during the different 4 – 6 week cycles. This accomplishes two goals. First, it alleviates boredom and second, it helps keep the muscles guessing. This will keep the body from hitting that plateau.

In the next section I will go over all of the different exercise parameters in more detail.

## **Exercise Parameters**

You must vary the parameters of your workout or you will hit a plateau, meaning the results will stop. This could very well be the section that solves your broken workout dilemma. Lets first review what some of the various parameters are:

Frequency – how often you workout

Intensity – how hard you workout

Time – the amount of time your workout lasts

Some of you may have figured out I just explained the FIT Principle. These parameters are most often used with aerobic/cardio training but can refer to strength training.

Let’s get back to the rest of the parameters:

Exercise order – which exercise is first, middle and last etc.

Load – the amount of weight being lifted

Volume – the total amount of weight lifted during the session

Exercise Selection – Chest fly vs. the chest bench press

Reps – the amount of times the exercise is executed

Sets – the number of times the desired set of reps is performed

Any of the above parameters can be modified to give your routine a new look and feel. It is good practice to change something at least one a week. However, you should refrain from changing multiple parameters within the same week.

## **Rest & Recovery**

When I first meet with clients some of them will tell me how they workout 3 hours a day 7 days a week. They spend an hour on the treadmill, an hour performing a resistance program and follow this with a combination Pilates or toning class at the gym. Some would say that this seems like an unlikely scenario, but I hear it quite frequently. You may have heard the phrase less is more. In this case it truly does apply.

Believe it or not, rest must be a part of your fitness program in order for you to see real results. When you are working out your body is in a catabolic state (the breaking down of tissues). At rest and when you are sleeping your body is in an anabolic state (the synthesis or rebuilding of tissue). It is actually this process that creates the muscle new muscle mass in your body.

The clients I mentioned above never allowed their body to reach the anabolic state for any length of time. On top of not seeing great results with their program, they run the risk of overtraining. Overtraining leads to feelings of fatigue, loss of interest, mood changes and injury.

## **Eating for Exercise**

I have given you 6 suggestions so far as to why your fitness program may be broken. There is one last possibility I need to touch on – food. Most people do not relate their eating habits to their workout simply because they believe eating has nothing to do with working out. That could not be further from the truth. If you recall in the last section I touched a bit on the anabolic state. For your body to truly rebuild in the most effective way you need to have all of the correct nutrients available. If you are not eating properly the nutrients will not be sufficient. In the following section I will lay out a plan that will help you reap the benefits of your fitness program.

## **Eating for the Workout**

To keep a furnace going you have to refuel it periodically during the day. Think of your body in terms of the furnace. Your fuel is your food and you need to refuel often during the day. Research has shown 5 – 6 small meals a day or eating about every two hours works the best.

The next question is generally “What should I eat?” You will be eating many mini-meals throughout the day, each of which should contain a carb, a protein and a fat source. Generally speaking, do not

worry about adding fat to your meal; we typically get enough fat in our diet. (However you may want to take a look at the sources of your fat). Naturally your carbs should be healthy whole grains and your protein should come from lean sources such as chicken, fish, nuts and legumes. Protein shakes can also be a substitute for the meat.

On workout days 1 or 2 of your mini-meals will consist of the pre and post workout snack/meal. The pre workout snack/meal is optional so long as you are fueling your body on a regular basis with quality food choices. Understand that research clearly states that the more fueled you are for a workout, the longer and harder you will be able to go. Having a snack/meal roughly 1 ½ to 2 hours before the workout should supply the long lasting energy needed. Try to stick with foods that are lower on the GI Index. It will be necessary for you to experiment with various foods to find the perfect combination. Some foods may leave you feeling bloated and are not a good pre workout option.

The post workout snack/meal is more important and does not afford you the option of skipping. You must refuel the body, especially the muscles, after your workout. Equally important to remember is you only have a small timeframe in which to accomplish this. The window of opportunity is something that is heavily debated. I suggest sticking to a shorter timeframe just to be safe. Try to eat a protein and a medium GI Index carb within 45 minutes of your workout. A protein-fruit smoothie would be a perfect choice.

## **Conclusion**

There you have it. Seven possibilities revealing why your fitness program may be broken. I hope you are able to take this information and find the missing link you are looking for. If you have more than one thing broken, my advice would be to work on one thing at a time and see what kind of difference it makes before moving on to the next. The only exception to this rule would be if you are doing something in your routine that could potentially harm you. Good luck with your training.

## **Stay Motivated**