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## Tips to Help You Keep Your New Year's Fitness Resolutions

(College Station, TX. December 12, 2006) New Year's Resolution time is here, and according to a study from the University of Washington, getting more exercise tops the list of resolutions.

On January 1<sup>st</sup> you might have the best of intentions to get outside and walk more, to join a dance group, to get back to the fitness club, or to begin a new exercise program. But like many Americans you may quickly lose momentum and slip back into old habits. So how can you keep those well-intentioned resolutions?

Marcia Ory, PhD, who directs the *Active for Life*<sup>®</sup> program at the Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health suggests a simple formula to help you with your physical activity goals. "Think **START**," she advises.

"Be **Specific** about what you plan to do. People are apt to say they will 'exercise more'. But they are more likely to be successful when they are specific about exactly what they plan to do." Examples of specific goals might be to walk for 30 minutes four days each week, to jog or bicycle a set distance or amount of time, or when joining a fitness center being clear on exactly what activities will be done.

"Schedule the **Time** for your activity," says Dr. Ory. If you decide to walk four days each week, decide which days you will walk, and at what time. Write it on your to-do list and keep it somewhere you are sure to see.

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“**Allow** yourself flexibility when you don't meet the goals you have set. But don't let this be a reason to abandon your commitment to be active,” is her next point of advice. If you miss a day or even a week of your exercise program, recharge yourself and start again. Pressing work, illness, bad weather, vacations, and personal emergencies are examples of things that can temporarily get in the way of activity. But do not let them to have a long-term impact on your activity. “In the long run, taking just 30 minutes a day to be physically active can pay back in dividends of increased energy, mental clarity and better health,” says Dr. Ory.

“**Reward** yourself for being active,” is Dr. Ory's next suggestion. Set measurable goals, and when you reach a goal, reward yourself. “For example, if you have been sedentary for a long time, one of your first goals might be to walk for 15 minutes at a time. Once you achieve this, you can reset your goal to walk for 20 minutes at a time, and gradually get to 30 minutes a day. The rewards you give yourself should be special to you. For example, setting aside time to visit a friend, or treating yourself to a new nail polish, a fancy bar of soap, or a new tool or gadget.”

“**Track** your progress,” is her final suggestion. “You'll be amazed at what you will be able to do in six months or a year from now. Use a simple system, such as a spiral notebook, to write down your daily activities – what you do, how much time you spend, and how you felt before and after the activity. You will be amazed by the progress you will see in your strength and endurance.”

“Thousands of *Active for Life*<sup>®</sup> participants have been successful following these types of hints,” says Diane Dowdy, PhD, the program's deputy director. *Active for Life*<sup>®</sup> is funded by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. For more information, visit [www.activeforlife.info](http://www.activeforlife.info).

The Texas A&M Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health is the first school of public health to focus on the often-unique health issues and needs of rural populations. The mission of the School of Rural Public Health is to improve the health of communities with emphasis on rural and other underserved populations, through education, research, service, outreach and creative partnerships.

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