Climbing back on the fitness wagon

The last party cracker has been popped, the last shortbread eaten. Tired and full you wonder how you're going to part ways with the couch to do anything, let alone exercise. Sound familiar? This resonates with many after the holiday season, but some of the following strategies can help you get up and get into shape:



Talk to your doctor. Before starting any new fitness regime, it's always a good idea to get a check up and the green light from your physician. He or she can assess your current fitness level, identify any concerns and even suggest the most appropriate activities for your condition.

Pace yourself. Don't train like an Olympian on the first day. Start slowly and listen to your body. The adage, "no pain, no gain," does not apply. If you feel pain, light-headed or short of breath (to the point where you're unable to talk), slow down or take a break. Over-exerting yourself will not only leave you in pain, but can also lead to injury, landing you right back on that couch.

Do what you like. It's no wonder that people who look at exercise as a punishing chore don't stick with a program. Instead of dragging yourself to a yoga class where you count down the minutes until end, seek out exercise activities that you enjoy. Go for a stroll in your neighbourhood, turn up the tunes and have a dance, or join that weekend pick-up basketball game you've been eyeing from afar.

Buddy up. Sometimes peer pressure can be a good thing: you're less likely to skip a trip to the gym or a dance class if you know a friend is counting on you to be there. Joining a gym or activity with a friend or partner is a great way to motivate each other to stay in the fitness game.

Mix it up. Doing the same exercise over and over, will probably leave you uninspired and can also lead to injuries caused by repetitive motion. Stay interested, engaged and on the fitness wagon by alternating between activities that highlight the main fitness components of:

- **Aerobic exercise.** E.g., jogging, swimming, walking—which increases cardiovascular strength and builds endurance.
- **Flexibility training.** E.g., yoga, pilates, gardening—to boost your range of motion.
- **Strength training.** E.g., weight lifting and stability ball exercises—which builds muscle tone and keeps bones strong.

"Work out" on the job. Look for ways to intersperse your day with exercise. Standing and sitting straight requires the muscle contraction of your abdomen, chest, legs and back, helping you look and feel better and upping your calorie burn. Minimize muscle and body strain that can lead to muscle and back problems and conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome by modifying the physical set up of your work area so it's more ergonomic. Do a few back and neck stretches at your desk or work station, take the stairs on coffee runs and "pump up" by tightening and relaxing major muscle groups a few minutes at a time throughout the day.

Set small, attainable goals. Losing 50 pounds or running a marathon may be possible, but smaller signposts —e.g., dropping 10 pounds in 10 weeks or being ready to run a 5 km race by spring—can help you celebrate your progress and stay motivated along the way.

Work in a "workout." If carving out 30 minutes for exercise seems impossible, try squeezing in 10-minute sessions throughout the day. From a series of morning "wake up" stretches, to walking the dog, to gardening "squats," remember that physical activity comes in many guises, so get creative and get moving!

Get back on the wagon. Ditch an "all or nothing" attitude. If you miss a day, a week or even a month of exercising, it doesn't mean all your hard work is lost. Realize that exercising is part of a healthy lifestyle—

one that lasts a lifetime. Find your way back to fitness by forgiving any lapses and getting back to your routine.

Many people overindulge during the holiday season all the while vowing to get fit and healthy in the New Year. Even if you've fallen off the fitness wagon before, now is the perfect chance to climb back on and renew your commitment to your health and yourself.