



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Fitness Goals

JAMES L. SEWARD January 22, 2009

So, here we are a month into the new year. How is that New Year's Resolution coming along?

For many individuals a top priority is losing weight. Not a bad idea when put in the proper context. Unfortunately so many people concentrate only on the numbers on the scale.

Health experts agree though that in order to achieve a healthy level of fitness you need to focus on a more well rounded lifestyle.

Weight can be one issue. Across the United States and right here in New York obesity has reached epidemic proportions. Check the facts:

- The percentage of New York State adults who are overweight or obese increased from 42% in 1997 to 57% in 2002;
- Obesity among children and adolescents has tripled over the past three decades;
- Obesity-related illnesses cost the United States an estimated \$117 billion and New York State more than \$6 billion.

These numbers are a clear example of the problem so many individuals and families are facing. But while identifying the dilemma is one step, coming to a solution is quite another.

The New York State Department of Health is taking aim at this epidemic for good reason.

Failing to win the battle against obesity will mean premature death and disability for an

increasingly large segment of New York residents. By 2010, some have predicted that the causes of the obesity epidemic—poor nutrition and physical inactivity—will be among the leading underlying causes of preventable deaths in the U.S. And, what makes mounting a successful battle so urgent is that obesity is a problem not just for adults but for children as well. If the battle isn't won soon it will be a war that will be with us for generations to come.

While many people think dropping pounds through fad diets and magic tonics is the answer, experts point to better overall nutrition. According to the New York State Department of Health, six of the ten leading causes of death in the United States are linked to a poor diet. The New York State Department of Health Division of Nutrition's goal is to improve the health of New Yorkers through prevention, providing nutritious foods and educating people about making smart nutrition choices. A number of programs are available focusing on all areas of the population.

The Prevention Agenda is another piece of the puzzle. New York has joined forces with local health departments, health care providers, health plans, schools, employers, and businesses to improve the health status of New Yorkers through increased emphasis on prevention. The goal is to thwart health problems before they occur or worsen. If we can find ways to prevent illness in the first place we would not only have a healthier population, but also be able to realize savings in health care and Medicaid budgets.

Now that all leads us back to where we started—fitness. Some exercise is probably needed if you want to meet your goals. Luckily there are so many great resources right here in upstate New York. Health clubs, your local YMCA, and community centers are all great places to start. Outdoor activities also abound. Cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and hiking are just some of the calorie cutting activities available in our region during the winter months. Soon warm weather will be here and you can add swimming, running, canoeing, and many others.

Not only are these all excellent fitness activities, but they are wonderful ways to spend time with family and friends.

Some great information on many of these programs is available online at the New York State Health Department website, www.nyhealth.gov. Finally, before starting any fitness program it is important to have a full check up with your family physician.

Here's to a healthy 2009. Best of luck reaching all of your fitness goals.

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