

THE DO-IT-DAILY CHALLENGE

Regular exercise just wasn't happening for Alyssa Shaffer, so she set a goal to do 15 minutes of something—anything—every day. You won't believe how long she kept it going.

ILLUSTRATION
BY STEPHAN SCHMITZ



RESOLUTION REVOLUTION

Like most people, I used to approach December 31 with big ideas: I'll run a marathon! Elliptical away my baby pooch! Become a yogi! These resolutions had a shelf life of, oh, two weeks. But in the waning days of 2014, I had an epiphany. Instead of setting a vague, never-gonna-reach-it goal, I decided to keep it small and specific. I'd exercise for at least 15 minutes a day, every day. Why 15? Besides the nice repetition with the calendar year ("15 in '15"), there was the fact that I had tweenage twins and a demanding job. That was as much time as I could reliably carve out.

I set just one rule: The daily workout had to be intense enough to pass the highly unscientific sweat-stain test. It counted only if it got my heart thumping enough to work up a glow. That meant a slow stroll around the block with my dog didn't qualify, but a two-mile light jog did. A yoga flow session also hit the mark, as did strength training, so long as I kept the weights challenging.

STREAK SUCCESS

On January 1, I took my resolution on the road for a short, easy run. The next day, I squeezed in a strength circuit workout before heading to the office. Soon, I found that committing to that 15 minutes made me want to go longer. Once I was out the door I quickly ditched the can't-do attitude, often exercising for a half hour or more.

It turned out that even on my laziest days, the prospect of breaking my streak was less enticing than dealing with just 15 minutes of movement. Whether it was pride, shame, or pure stubbornness, I was unwilling to fail. So 2015 came and went, and I hit my goal. Every. Single. Day. But I didn't stop there. The streak had become part of who I was, and I began writing about my workouts on social media. Friends, family, and even distant acquaintances responded to the posts, saying they'd been inspired to get moving too. Now I *had* to keep it up, for their sake. So I did, all through 2016, and I don't have plans to call it quits.

No, I haven't dropped 10 pounds or chiseled out a six-pack, but my clothes fit better and my energy is up. Best of all, my kids and husband have joined in, biking, hiking, and doing jumping jacks along with me. It's a chance to laugh, sweat, and spend time together—for at least 15 minutes.



the verdict

AN ATTAINABLE "STREAKING" GOAL COULD BE JUST THE THING TO GET YOU EXERCISING.

Start Your Own Streak

First, be patient: A workout resolution can take as long as six months to feel like it's second nature, says Claudio Nigg, Ph.D., a professor of behavioral medicine at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. To stay committed during that period, make sure the activity has an element of fun. End your morning walks at the coffee shop for a caffeine pick-me-up, get off the treadmill and instead explore a local park on foot, or start a challenge with a friend to see who can keep the streak going the longest (winner gets treated to a mani). The mini "rewards" will help spur you on.