



# MEG Fitness

*Create a New Future, Create a New You!*

## Lessons on Fitness from Olympic Athletes

We just experienced the 20<sup>th</sup> Season of the Olympic Winter games. It is always fun to watch the athletes challenge themselves in feats above what the rest of us do. As I watched the skiers fly down the mountain at an average speed of 65 mph, I especially appreciated all the training and work they have committed themselves to in order to get to this point in their lives.

No matter what ranking they each come home in, they have all accomplished a feat that many of us will only know by watching them on TV. They have pushed themselves to the point of sometimes wondering why they are doing it. They push themselves so hard that at times they feel like just sitting down and crying, or giving up. But, because they have a unique spirit of competition –with themselves, with others – they will not settle for quitting or giving up. Wow.

But what can you learn from these elite athletes to help YOU achieve greater fitness?

First of all, their level of fitness and expertise did not happen overnight. They were not all born with great genes. It has more to do with determination and drive... and consistency. When they'd rather be sleeping, they're up, working and training. Think of that the next time you tell yourself you're not going to get up 15 minutes early to get that quick walk or bike ride in.

Just as I tell all my clients, though, it's not as important how intense the exercise is, especially in the beginning, it's more important how CONSISTENT it is. Again, getting up and doing it, or putting the shoes in the car to make it fit into your life WILL pay off in the end. Doing a hit or miss workout once or twice a week, maybe getting in 3-4 workouts a month, is not going to help you achieve any of your fitness or weight loss goals. It has to be no less than 30 minutes for no less than 3-5 days a week. Ideally, a full hour per day is recommended for heart health.

Researchers have found that you can even break this total amount up into 10 minute blocks! So, you can do a quick 10 minute bike ride before showering in the morning, park your car further from the office in the morning and walk briskly into the building, do a 10-15 walk during lunch, and then another one to wake you up during your afternoon break. Then, when you get home, get back on your stationary bike to catch the 30 minute news before eating or cooking dinner. When you add all that up, you spent 60-75 minutes on exercise that day!

Now, for people who do already work out, regularly, yes, they may have to push themselves harder, but by then it's easier. Once you have achieved a certain level of fitness, dropping the body fat gets more challenging and requires harder work.

Next, as with anything one wants to achieve in life, you have to set goals. Olympic athletes definitely do this and often the gold medal is their goal. But what if your goal is just to lose weight by summer? All successful people set up goals to achieve. If setting up a goal seems too overwhelming, drop your goal down to something easier. Maybe setting a goal for the first month, such as you will take your shoes to work and always walk at lunchtime is a 'doable' goal. Once you have set your goals, though, then you have to create a strategy to accomplish those goals. The example of 10 minute blocks is one idea. The question to ask yourself is how will you make that exercise happen on a regular basis? Plan alternate strategies for when it rains, if walking is your primary activity, for example.

Also, all levels of athletes have down days, though, so don't feel you're a failure if there comes a day here and there that you do NOT want to take that walk. However, remember to at least get the minimum days and times in, avoiding falling back into just a few workouts a month. There's a fine line between listening to your body and just flaking out.

Next, remember that it's important to start out small and work your way up into bigger things. So, don't decide you're going to start running tomorrow. Start walking, and, as I often tell my clients, walk slower than you think you should. If you have not exercised for years, after you get the approval of your physician, you should then start out extremely slow and short. For people who have a great deal of weight to lose, I will recommend that they start with just 5 minutes a day, every day, and walk slower than they think they should. From there, after a couple of weeks, they're ready to increase to 10 minutes, and so on, until they eventually can walk at a pretty impressive pace for 30 minutes. It happens gradually.

Especially if you have a great amount of weight to lose, when people decide they'll start exercising, they quickly find that what should be an easy stroll quickly becomes a chore after 5-10 minutes, simply because it's a new activity for their body, and even 5-10 minutes is more than they are used to. Olympic athletes did not start out doing jumps and flips. They had to start out learning the basics and going slow, working consistently to build up.

These are very simple suggestions, but really are lessons from Olympic level athletes:

1. They all started out slow and small and gradually worked up to a higher, more challenging level. So, find something simple to start with.
2. Every single one of them realized that consistency was the key; day in and day out, doing the work. This is what makes the ultimate difference between achieving the goal and allowing it to fall to the wayside. So, even when you feel like sleeping in, kick yourself out of bed!
3. Setting up goals is critical. You have to set up a goal in order to know where you want to ultimately go. Setting up small, achievable goals, then creating the strategy to accomplish those goals are keys to success.
4. Finally, although Olympic athletes may push beyond what they really should when they are injured or not feeling well, they generally suffer for it in the end. We saw examples of that in the Olympics this year. Learning to listen to your body is very important. Overtraining, or trying to push through an illness or injury just ultimately delays your progress. You just have to be sure that the message is truly to take care of yourself and not to allow yourself to peter out and stop.

So, as you consider the Olympics last month, consider how you can achieve some of your fitness or weight goals. Make a small list of the goals you'd like to achieve, and then determine how to make them happen. Then, as Nike used to say, 'just do it!'.

*Marjorie Geiser helps people overcome their confusion and distress they may feel when trying to add healthy eating and fitness into their busy lives through a successful e-coaching program. She offers a free, monthly newsletter on various topics of health. Margie is a Registered Dietitian, Personal Trainer and Life Coach. To learn more about her services, go to her website at [www.megfit.com](http://www.megfit.com) or email her at [margie@megfit.com](mailto:margie@megfit.com)*