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Incorporating a fitness goal into the fabric of your life

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Commitment

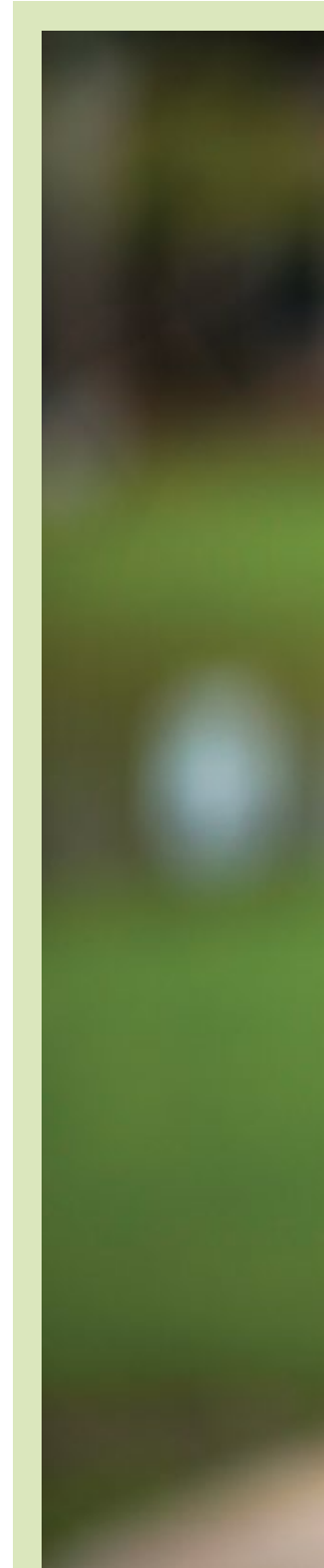
Incorporating a Fitness Goal into the Fabric of Your Life

Have you ever started an exercise program only to stop after a short while? What motivates you to get out and move when there are endless demands on your time? This is the challenge we face on a personal level, and here is the story of how I faced it.

By Emily Schmitt, Ph.D.

IN JUNE 2012, I was 40 years old, thinking again about personal fitness goals. Since March 2009, five months after the birth of my second child, I had been going to the NSU Recreational Complex for group fitness classes. Still, I wasn't keeping to my fitness goal of regularly exercising at least four times a week because work and family responsibilities were making demands on my time. In high school, I had been a cross country and track runner, but I had not run since then. How was I going to keep up with my fitness plan?

Then it came to me. In order to succeed, I had to make my fitness goal an integral part of my life. I had to make it important to all aspects of my life—work, family, and spiritual. I could use fitness to connect the dots of my life, and that would make me stick to it. I committed to training to run in a half marathon by registering with the A-T CureTeam, one of the official RunDisney charity groups at the Walt Disney World Marathon Weekend's Half Marathon. Since this race was at Disney World with many scheduled events and activities, it would be a fun experience for my family. Additionally, I would be fulfilling my role and interest as a faculty member to participate in community service and write about the experience.



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The A-T CureTeam raises money to support needed research into Ataxia-Telangiectasia (A-T) as part of the A-T Children's Project. A-T (also known as Louis-Bar syndrome) is a rare genetic disease that attacks in early childhood, progressively affecting coordination, predisposing patients to fatal cancers, and severely compromising the immune system. Many children with A-T do not survive their teenage years. I joined Team Emily, which raises funds in honor of Emily Hughes and all children with A-T. Hughes was diagnosed with the disease in infancy and has beaten the odds, graduating high school in 2013, just after turning 18. She now plans to attend college.

More dots in my life were connecting through this fitness activity! Presenting the Ataxia Telangiectasia Mutated protein-pathway would be a great way to explain molecular communication during biology course lectures. I also connected with various student groups, including the Multicultural Association for Pre-Health Students (MAPS), the Pre-Medical Society, and the Athletic Training Student Organization, and got students excited to raise awareness and funds by sponsoring a Jeans for Genes Day. In 2013, the campus Jeans for Genes Day was on October 7. Student organizations sold T-shirts, pins, and blue jean-style ribbons with the words "Hope. It's in our Genes." The proceeds benefited Team Emily and the A-T CureTeam.

Training progresses

During the 2012–2013 school year, I ran two half marathons: the Space Coast Half Marathon in Cocoa Beach, Florida, in November and the Disney Half Marathon in January. More than 70 of my colleagues, friends, family members, and students contributed funds to Team Emily. Alumni also participated. Together, contributions totaled nearly \$2,020. This contribution was a part of the approximately \$780,000 raised by 275 other fund-raiser runners at the Disney Marathon Weekend, in which more than 50,000 people participated. As part of the A-T CureTeam, I am 1 of approximately 500 fund-raiser runners nationwide who run in many races each year.

To further support my commitment to running, I joined the Greater Fort Lauderdale Road Runners Club. Their motto is "Run for Fun." I surprised myself by logging 680 miles that school year, participating in 23 races to benefit charities, and even achieving a competitive 5K race time. Through running, I find myself building greater community with colleagues and students.

Fitness as an integral part of life

Exercising at least four days a week is working for me, because exercise is now part of the fabric of my life. Students, colleagues, and family members often ask me how my running is going and when the next running event will be, which spurs me to keep up with my routine. I run for myself and my fitness, but I also run for the benefit of others, my family, my students, and Team Emily. By incorporating fitness into your life, you will be inspired to do so as well. For example, my husband and young children have gotten involved in running and regularly participate in fun runs and 5K run/walks at organized race events.



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Inspire others

Several students, alumni, friends, teachers, family members, and colleagues now tell me about their running and fitness events. I inspired them, but they inspire me. By becoming involved in running linked to community service and scientific research, I have been able to connect with former students in a new and meaningful way.

This year, Lauren Douma, a Ph.D. student at the University of Florida and my former student, was inspired to run the Disney Half Marathon as a member of Team Emily. On January 14, 2014, we ran for the A-T Cure-Team in Disney World for her first and my fourth half marathon. Together, we have raised more than \$1,200 for Team Emily. Even if I wanted to stop my personal running fitness plan, it would be hard to quit now, because others are propelling me forward! Having personal fitness goals and participating in racing events have been highlights of the year, and I look forward to continuing to expand my participation.

According to the National Wellness Institute, there are six dimensions of wellness: emotional, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual. Fitness activities can help us stay healthy in all these aspects. My method of striving for total wellness has included making running part of my professional interests, as well as attending RecPlex group fitness classes. These activities are helping me become a better parent, teacher, and colleague, as well as an overall happier person.

We can best maintain a fitness goal when we incorporate our fitness activities into as many aspects of our lives as possible—until it is the activity that helps to keep the many threads of our life’s fabric connected. How to do this will be different for each person, just as there are many different types of fabric. The trick is to make your own beautiful fabric that works best for you, grows with you, and breathes with you.

For more information about Team Emily, visit www.atcp.org/emily.