



Best ways to get started

Master trainer Douglas Brooks on how to plan your goals and training programme and set up a workout log to keep you motivated.

Set your goals

It's been said, "If you keep doing what you have always done, you will get what you have always got." Your workout programme cannot proceed according to a plan if you have no plan, nor can you expect great results without a road map to guide you.

Take a few minutes to set realistic goals and organise your training, and you'll find the road to success is not far away. Many of you reading this article will be looking to move beyond moderate physical activity and toward optimising your health, fitness and performance training returns. If this is true, let your goals reflect this direction.

Too often, individuals set goals and never re-visit them. Setting and reevaluating personal goals keeps you accountable, your training

Setting and reevaluating personal goals keeps you accountable, your training programme, mind and body fresh, and the results coming in.

programme, mind and body fresh, and the results coming in. Before you set your goals, you also need to affirm that down the road, you will be willing to reevaluate and change directions when the evidence warrants it.

Describe and record your goals

Setting goals and record keeping are important because the adaptive response (this occurs when you work harder than the body is accustomed and you become more fit) to training is complex and individual. In other words, individuals will most likely respond differently to exactly the same programme. Because of this, it's important to update your goals, record your progress or lack thereof – so appropriate changes can be made to create improvement or continued gains in your fitness.

If this concept of developing goals is to be useful, you must 1) commit them to paper, 2) be specific, 3) set realistic goals, and 4) read and reevaluate your goals regularly. If you need help organising your goal tracking system, fitness goal tracking forms and weekly workout planning sheets are available in *Your Personal Trainer*, by Douglas Brooks.

Motivation is only effective when the goal is meaningful and fits the individual. Once you've set your personal goals, remember to break a long-

term goal, like losing twenty pounds or running a marathon ten minutes faster than your previous best, into more manageable goals. These are not only more likely to be realistic, but also allow you to achieve one goal (short-term) while keeping the next within attainable reach.

Record management and keeping a diary

I combine the idea of record keeping with a diary. After all, a diary is a daily record of personal observations and experiences. (Guys, don't worry about your buddies teasing you. This diary is not about love secrets, but about getting results and being accountable to fitness goals that you've set.) And don't think of a diary as a long-winded, time consuming, voluminous accounting of the day's activity. From a workout perspective, 'diary,' in my mind, represents one to several cryptic comments about how you're feeling or any other circumstance you think is important to note.

From the standpoint of a health/fitness or performance oriented workout regimen, it's important to observe and record feelings, thoughts or a mind-set about your workouts, as well as actually record what you

Sample Week-at-a-Glance Workout Log					
Goal	Day	AM pulse	Workout description	Cardio* distance/time	Comments
Moderate cardio workout	Mon	60	Easy run, light stretching after the run, abdominal and back strength exercises	50 minutes	Starting to feel tired; needed an easy workout
Full body strength workout	Tue	65	6-8 reps today, per set, target all of the muscle groups	35 minutes	Cut my workout short; body feels heavy
Interval workout	Wed	68	Canceled workout; just not feeling good	N/A	I need a rest!
Light stationary bike and strength workout	Thu	62	45 minutes on bike; some easy speed play; full body strength workout using 12-15 reps to fatigue	45 minutes on bike plus 30 minutes strength time	Rest felt great; body's starting to respond again; training is fun! Glad I changed my workout plans.
Rest	Fri	62	Complete rest/recovery	N/A	Feeling good, but I want to keep in my planned rest day.
Long run	Sat	59	90-minute run with easy intervals (20-second pickups followed by easy recovery); 20-minute stretch	90 minutes plus stretch time	Stretch felt great, needed that! Back on track, run felt easy and comfortable.
Family time	Sun	61	2-3 hour hike with light pack, moderate pace	about 3 hours	Nice!! Will do 3 hard strength workouts next week.



did in the workout. Many committed exercisers adequately record what they did, but fail to comment about how they felt or what they noted of importance about the session. Talking about keeping records and recording a diary is one thing, doing it in a time efficient and hassle free manner is another matter.

In my book, *Your Personal Trainer*, I developed an easy to use, Week-at-a-Glance Workout Log for this very purpose. Simply, you record your goal(s), morning pulse, write down what you're going to do in the workout (this workout description includes a brief line about cardio, strength or stretching plans), in-depth information about your cardio workout (this column lets you detail duration and intensity) and there's space to write down any comments about the overall workout (eg. "Starting to feel tired; need an easy workout", or, "Rest felt great, body's starting to respond again.") I have my clients detail their strength workouts on the Strength Workout Sheet, also found in *Your Personal Trainer*, but as mentioned, in the Workout Log they can briefly describe the focus of the strength workout under the column titled 'Workout Description.'

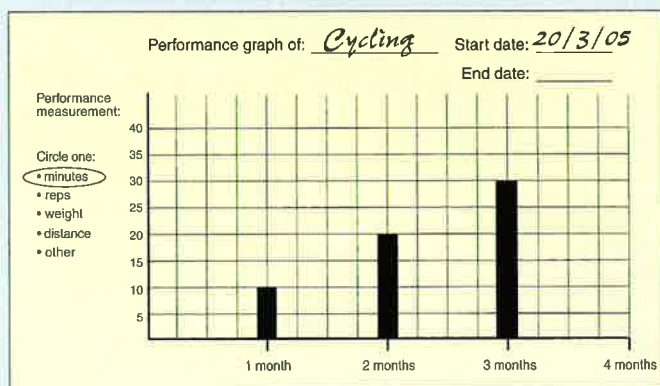
Tracking your progress

How do you use your observations and records to enhance results or to help guide programme changes? First, focus on the positive, what you can do and have done, as well as applauding your progress when you compare how far you have come with regard to where you started.

You know, that if you want to create a fitness programme that is goal- and results-oriented, it's important to know where you've been (use fitness assessment tests), where you are (keep records and a diary of comments), and where you'd like to go (goals). If you follow these three guiding points, you will have recorded a starting point from which to compare your fitness improvements over time. From there, you need to keep track of your progress by continuing to keep records and jotting down your observations, as well as periodically reassessing your fitness level.



KEY POINT: Results depend on what you are achieving and doing – not what you think you are doing.



Tracking your progress

The progression of your training programme or results from any assessment tests you may have used can be easily recorded. Most training improvements and test results, unfortunately, are filed away to collect dust. Don't let this happen. Your recorded improvements and testing results can show you the areas of fitness that you need to improve in and simultaneously motivate you to keep progressing. Realise that if you're new to training, during the first three months of training you'll probably see outstanding improvement. After this time period, results will come at a less dramatic pace, but steadily. Understanding this fact about training improvements will keep you –

whether a veteran or a beginning exerciser – from developing unrealistic expectations.

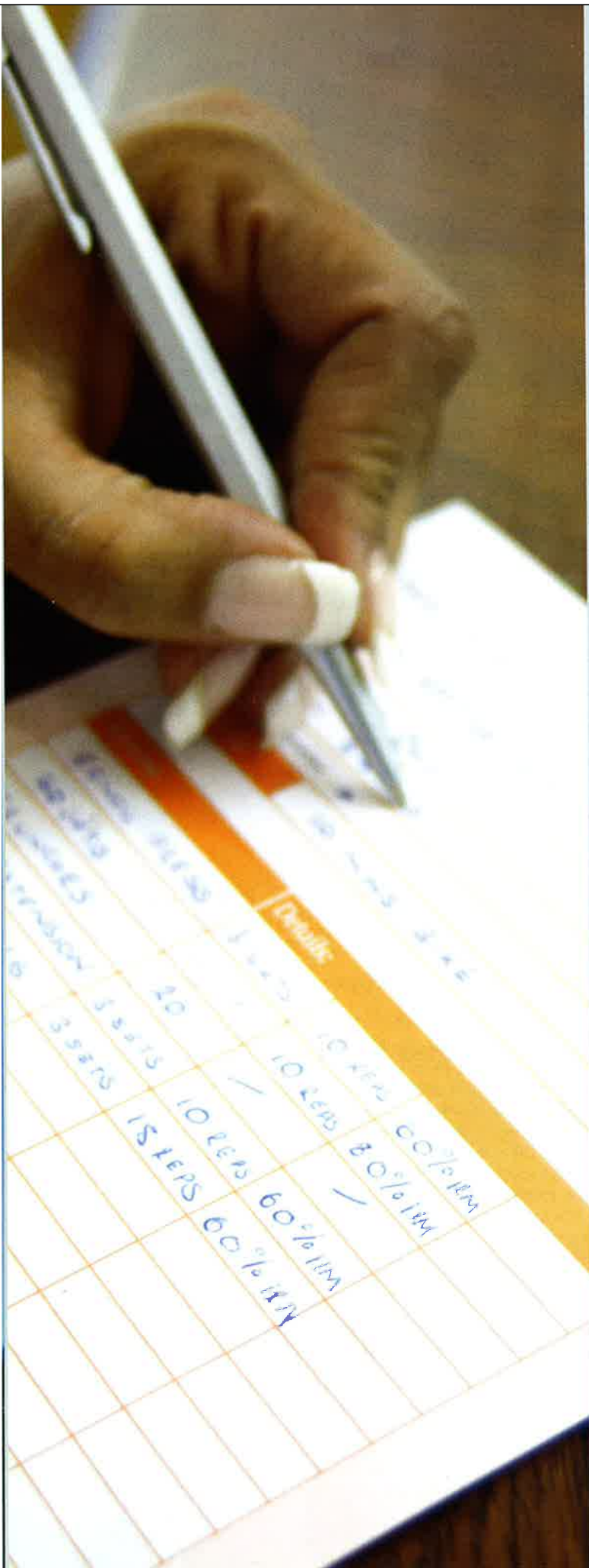
Using performance graphs

Performance graphs are an excellent tool to use if you want to get an overall picture of the direction your training is headed. Over a period of weeks, these graphs should also show a steady-build of 4-6 weeks with regard to results, followed by a plateau or dip, followed by another steady-build of 4-6 weeks. This rise, followed by a levelling or slight dip, reflects a programme that is properly periodised, and allows for both hard training and recovery.

The performance graph I developed has both a vertical and horizontal axis. The vertical axis represents your performance. This could represent past and most current: 1) body fat measurements (as you get more fit, your body fat will go down, so a positive graph for this test will start high and go down.), 2) strength self-tests, 3)

PERSONAL TRAINING GURU

If you have any questions on various aspects of your fitness regime, don't hesitate to hire a qualified professional to steer you back on course with accurate information. In the long run, this will save you time and disappointment. As you can see, you've got a lot to know to be your own personal trainer. But, by incorporating these key aspects of training into your programme, and if you're willing to do additional homework, you may be well on your way to becoming your very own personal training guru.



Strength Training Workout Sheet

#	Exercises	Weekly sets/reps	Day 1				Day 2				Day 3			
			Set	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3
1		Wk. Reps												
2		Wk. Reps												
3		Wk. Reps												
4		Wk. Reps												
5		Wk. Reps												
6		Wk. Reps												
7		Wk. Reps												
8		Wk. Reps												
9		Wk. Reps												
10		Wk. Reps												

Phase _____ Week _____ Comments _____
Date _____

cardiovascular self-tests (as you get more fit, your heart rate will go down, so a positive graph for this test will again start high and go down.), and 4) amount of weight being lifted for a particular strength exercise. Using the performance graph represents my clients' favourite way to record results that reflect personal improvement. Using a bar graph like this gives you a 'performance line' for almost any fitness related task you do. The horizontal line of the performance graph represents time. Generally, it's easiest to record improvement by weeks and months.

Working out at the right level of effort

Whether you're training cardiovascular or strength fitness, or participating in flexibility training, you've got to work sufficiently intensely to optimise results. On the other hand, you shouldn't treat every workout as though it's your last. Restoration and recovery in a properly periodised programme is essential, too.

Generally, cardiovascular workouts should sustain an intensity of 40 to 85% of maximal heart rate reserve, be performed 3-4 times per week, for a duration of about 30-minutes. Of course, you can work outside these parameters and/or progress your programme to attain this type of goal over a reasonable time period. Strength programmes should incorporate at least two sessions per week to see significant results. Generally, two-set training, using 8-10 exercises to target all of the major muscles groups, and a repetition range of between 6-20 reps to failure will result in excellent strength-training results with a minimal time investment. Flexibility training can be done most days of the week, but realistically, it's adequate if you focus on stretching at least 2-3 times per week at an intensity that could be described as 'comfortably-uncomfortable.' Of course, the art is represented by properly manipulating duration, intensity or load (number of reps to failure or heart rate response), and by balancing the right amount of work with recovery (periodisation).



Douglas Brooks holds a master's degree in exercise physiology. As an author, lecturer, trainer and video personality, his knowledge of fitness is recognised by professionals and the public worldwide. He is the author of four major texts, as well as numerous manuals and articles relating to personal training.

Douglas frequently conducts lectures and workshops on exercise physiology, kinesiology, strength training, and personal training across the globe. He can be contacted at Moves International in the United States at 760 934 0312 or email him at movesint@qnet.com

Douglas' latest book, 'Effective Strength Training' -- Analysis and Technique for Upper Body, Lower Body and Trunk Exercises and 'Your: Personal Trainer' a previous book that takes you step-by-step through the phases of programme design for cardio, strength and flexibility training, goal setting, fitness testing and record keeping to track your progress in an easy-to-read format can be purchased from Ultra-FIT Books. Phone the Ultra-Fit office or visit the Ultra-Fit website to order.

Parts of this article are adapted from Effective Strength Training, by Douglas S. Brooks, Human Kinetics, 2001.

Photo: Ultra-Fit Images/Grant Pritchard