

## **Making Big Changes... Six Months at a Time**

by Nathan Womack

Some think that twelve months, seven years, or even a lifetime of bad health decisions can be erased with just a few weeks of hard work. I tell them that it's not a few weeks of hard work; it's decisions they make today, and again tomorrow when they wake up.

I have seen and read amazing stories of people who have surpassed great odds, overcome great challenges, and beaten expectations, to rise above an illness, lose weight, and return their body to a healthy state. Unfortunately, when nothing is “wrong”, I have also seen people ignore the small warnings: they put in extra time at the office and miss a trip to the gym, spend half of Saturday working instead of spending the day recovering from a tough work week, or grab fast food instead of going shopping for something with

a little more nutrition. They find excuses for not having time to take care of themselves. Many people don't realize just how valuable their health is until some small warning sign turns into a life-altering event.

For me, the realization came when I was 22. I was working over 80 hours a week, traveling internationally for my job, eating every meal on the road, and finding excuses to avoid exercise. I was getting heavy and my pants started to shrink (well... hmm... maybe the pants weren't shrinking afterall). I decided to look for answers to help me get back into shape.

At first, I made excuses, and looked for the quick fixes. "I don't have time," I'd tell myself, or "where am I going to get the energy to get up at 6 am?" Then I saw the ads "Take this pill and your appetite will disappear!"

It wasn't long before I was putting things into my body that were not meant to be there... and my body didn't like that. I wasn't sleeping well and I had headaches, which led me to eat more, which led me to gain more weight.

What is it about good health that makes us...made *me*... ignore it? Why do we take “good health” for granted? Why do we sometimes settle for feeling “fine” and not strive to be truly “healthy” and feel “*great*”? Instead of attacking the *symptoms* of the problem, we need to attack the root cause.

The *Smartest Thing* I ever did in six months for my health was when I decided to apply the “success in the next six months” methodology to my health, much as I had been applying it to my professional career. I quickly realized that choices made over several years cannot be changed within a few weeks. Within six *months*, however, a shift *can* occur—a shift in thinking, a shift in actions, a shift in habits, and a shift in results. And this is just what I did.

To begin my “success in the next six months”, I needed to clearly understand my starting point, and so I wrote everything down... my weight, percent body fat, water weight, bone mass, and where those numbers ranked in relation to my age, gender, and family chemistry. What medications I was taking, and what foods I was allergic to. What my work routine was and what my personal commitments were. I also wrote down what my personal

methodology was, and my thought process toward personal fitness and health. What my thoughts and feelings were toward food (is it there to sustain me, to comfort me, to pleasure me), and my view on carbs, fats, and proteins. I listed the kinds of foods I tend to overeat, and what kinds I under-eat. I made note of whether I ate fruits and vegetables; whether I actually ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and if I snacked throughout the day.

Understanding my eating habits and daily regimen were crucial to establishing a starting point. To clearly understand this, I made myself a food log, and filled it out on a daily basis for two weeks. I wrote down what I ate, when, and how it made me feel. After two weeks, I had an understanding of my daily food intake, my reaction to various foods, and more importantly, the timing and portions of my meals. It didn't take long to see that I was eating at the wrong times, eating the wrong foods, and experiencing the results of both.

I also worked to understand my water intake. If someone had asked me how much water I was drinking, I would have said "oh, I drink at least eight glasses of water a day." My

food log, however, told me something entirely different.

After two weeks—when I had a firm understanding of where I was regarding my food intake, and current health—I clarified where I wanted to be within six months. Only with the background information was I able to create a goal that was achievable. I knew that unless I understood where I was, no amount of direction would get me to my destination.

I wrote down my six-month goal as if I had already accomplished it: “I have changed my daily habits to achieve a more healthy lifestyle. I have lost 3% body fat, increased my water weight by 2%, and my total body weight is 155 lbs. I am eating with more awareness and exercising three to five times each week, for between 30 and 60 minutes each time. I am doing what is necessary to purchase food that supports my goal, and my average caloric intake is 2,500 calories.”

With this goal in mind, I was able to create tasks that were do-able immediately. Using the information I gathered, I was able to look for things that I could buy, or research on

the internet, or talk with friends about. I found things that were quick to take care of that moved me closer to my goal.

Some tasks that I put on my to-do list were:

An errand: go to the running store, work with a salesperson to get properly fit, and then buy a new pair of running shoes;

A phone call: Call Bob and ask him how he likes his gym;

An Internet task: research health food stores in my area.

Although these were small tasks, I had my goal in mind, and with each small task completion, I was getting closer to my goal. Within six months, I had reached my goal. Then I continued on to set new six-month goals. I became a triathlete, competing in triathlons in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and California. I pursued personal fitness and decided to go into physical fitness training. I now live in Colorado where I compete with some of the best triathletes in the world and work one-on-one with clients at three local gyms.

Reflecting back on my past six month successes, I have to smile, for it was nothing more than waking up and saying

“today” is the day that I make better decisions. That’s the *Smartest Thing* I ever did for my health. I hope it works for you, too.

### **About the Author**

Nathan Womack is a life coach who resides in Lafayette, Colorado. He consults on a wide range of topics including physical fitness and nutrition, finances and debt consolidation, real estate, and behavior management. Mr. Womack worked for IBM for nine years, throughout the US as well as in several other countries, as a developer, business analyst, and project manager. He earned his undergraduate degree from Boston College and his MBA from the University of Phoenix. He participates in triathlons, competing in about seven races per year. He can be reached at 303-304-9507 or via email at [Nathan@TheNewLongTerm.com](mailto:Nathan@TheNewLongTerm.com).