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The Breakaway Athletic Development team (from left) is founder and owner Kevin Barcal with trainers Olivia Allen, Tara Grundy, and Eric Fuessle.

An Athlete's Mentality: Rome Wasn't Built in a Day

HERE'S A SAYING that "Rome wasn't built in a day." Sometimes getting fit, losing weight, or getting into top athletic form is a matter of one tiny step at a time—and sometimes it's two steps forward and one step back. The path to top fitness never goes in a straight line.

Most of the elite athletes that I train already know this, and that's why they come to the gym every day, even when they're not motivated, or

they're having a bad day, or they simply just don't feel like training. They know that even if they don't have their best workout or if they fell off the wagon on their diet, the only way to keep climbing to the top of their game is by getting back to the gym and taking it one step and one day at a time.

In my personal training business, I try to help my clients develop this type of mentality: to "train like an athlete." For example, like many people, you probably made a New Year's resolution to eat

better, work out more, and get in shape in the new year. But now it's spring, you're tired of the grind, and you may be on the verge of quitting. So the trick is to think like an athlete, shake things up, and shock your body a little. Do something different. Even if it's a small change, it can have a big effect on jump-starting your body.

Here are some things you can do to shake up the routine:

EAT SMALLER MEALS MORE OFTEN

This wisdom has been around for awhile, but it really does work. Your metabolism is the fuel that keeps your body's fire burning, and fat burning. So, if you go too long between meals, your metabolism slows and your body stops burning energy. You have a sugar crash, and your body goes into self-protection mode, stopping all the work it was doing to burn fat and build muscle. The trick is to eat less sugar and more smaller protein-based meals to keep your fuel going and to avoid the crash. You should eat about every two hours.

Have a couple of eggs with wheat toast in the morning. Have an apple with peanut butter as a mid-morning snack. Have a veggie-rich salad with avocado, a protein, and some cheese for lunch. Eat a handful of almonds and some carrots with hummus in the mid-afternoon. Cook up some fresh salmon or chicken with grilled vegetables for dinner. With this menu, you've built your day around protein, a few "good" carbs, and healthy fats. There's no better diet to help you on the road to fitness.

LIMIT SUGAR AND CARBS AFTER 3 P.M.

High-fiber, "good" carbs should be a part of your diet, but if you can, try to cut out carbs and sugar after 3 p.m.; you'll see the results on your body. Eliminate all processed sugar and cut out high-sugar beverages. You know what they are: soda (even diet soda is bad for your body), fruit juices, alcohol. Limiting caffeine can also help give you a jump start if you're stuck.

EAT LEAN PROTEIN TO BUILD MUSCLE

Looking to tone up and build muscle? To build muscle, each day you should eat one gram of protein per every pound of body weight (so a 150-lb. woman looking to build muscle would eat 150 grams of protein per day). Be sure to eat at up to 30 grams of your daily allotment within 30 minutes after your workout to add fuel to the fire.

DRINK MORE WATER

This is a no-brainer. Your body simply needs hydration to process the food you put in it, and to keep you hydrated when you're working out. If you find yourself on a weight loss plateau, sometimes ramping up your daily water intake can kick you into higher gear. Carry around an oversized water bottle and aim for 64 ounces per day.

EMBRACE FAILURE

Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day. You'll have bad days and good days. Embrace the bad days as stepping stones to the good days. And keep in mind, when you're working out, failure is a good thing! It means you've pushed your body as far as it can go. Embrace failure and let it propel you forward to a new body and a new lifestyle! 

Kevin Barcal is the founder and owner of Breakaway Athletic Development in Lake Barrington. He and his team train dozens of elite high school, college, and pro athletes and provide personal training to anyone looking to take that first step toward a healthier, more fit lifestyle. He can be reached at 847-452-9720 or at www.breakawayathleticdev.com.



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