



## Happy New You Year!

By M.J. Clark, M.A., APR

It's that time of year again. When those of us who are not in our ideal shape decide to give it another go and do our best to shape up. Eat less and better; exercise more. We all know what to do, but do we do it? Well, here's a new year, and we're going to try again, right?

First, let's talk about the body. It's our temple, right? Just like a house, that gets weathered and damaged by storms, deteriorating beams, and rusty nails, our body gets weathered with slips on ice, feeding it the wrong foods, and little or no exercise.

One of my favorite books, *You: The Owner's Manual* by doctors Michael Roizen and Mehmet Oz, says "Physical activity helps our entire body – our heart, brain, and bones – but the catch is that when it comes to your bones, joints and muscles, *excessive* physical activity can be just as destructive to your body as a boxer's right hand." Our ancestors have shared the "everything in moderation" axiom, and they were so right. It's a hard concept to imagine, but the book points out that "... the more pounding you take (from running, boxing, jumping rope) – even if you aren't a super athlete – the greater the chance that the foundation of your house is going to be reduced to rubble."

Many people begin a new year by doing too much too fast. I remember one year as a teenager when I decided to take up jogging. I ran so much the first day, my muscles were screaming in the morning, and I could barely walk for a week. It made trying again very difficult. My message here is start slow and exercise within reason. You know what you're ready for, so take it slow when you begin.

We all know exercise is a great way to reduce stress. But did you know it also helps your brain? Another one of my favorite books, *Brain Rules* by John Medina, talks about the fact that way back in Africa when our kind were first called *Homo sapiens*, we spent much of our time walking, and we were in top physical shape back then. If we weren't, we did not survive. The book says, "If all you do is walk several times a week, your brain will benefit. ... In the laboratory, the gold standard appears to be aerobic exercise, 30 minutes at a clip, two or three times a week. Add a strengthening regimen and you get even more cognitive benefit."

I think many of us are overwhelmed by the idea of regular exercise, but even a little bit goes a long way. Some is better than none. That's why we start slowly, to help us feel less overwhelmed. We can do this; we can get in shape, if we take it just one step at a time. Medina says, "Physical activity is cognitive candy. We can make a species-wide athletic comeback. All we have to do is move." He points out that our evolutionary ancestors walked about 12 miles every day. Now don't you feel lazy?

Have you noticed that when you work out, your mind is clear, you feel less stress and you feel happy? Sometimes when I exercise, I feel like it's the first time that day that I am able to actually think. Your mind becomes clear through exercise. Medina says the oxygen supplied to our brain during activity improves mental sharpness.

So now we come to the business reason for exercise. If employees exercised regularly, it would dramatically reduce health care costs. That's simple enough. There's also the humanitarian side of helping people cut their risk of stroke or Alzheimer's disease. Aerobic exercise just twice a week cuts the risk of dementia in half and cuts the risk of Alzheimer's by 60 percent. In addition, according to Medina, companies would boost the collective brain power of their organization with fit employees. Fit employees are shown through research to have better problem-solving abilities, more fluid intelligence, and better memory.

So what are we waiting for? Let's get busy.