

Conor's First Steps

(Again, please note, I am not a professional nor expert in anything I am doing or talking about. This is simply my story and experience.)

Today, December 23rd, marks the 23rd day of Harrison and I's six-month challenge. Not quite a full month, but it has been plenty of time to get started and understand where this challenge is going. Within the past few weeks, I have learned a number of things that have worked for me and what haven't. After this week, I will go into detail about certain aspects of my journey, such as my meditation, more specific methods of stretching, and matters of other exercises and calisthenics. For now, I will just give a general overview of the past 23 days.

Initial Steps

As I mentioned in the last installment, much of what I am doing towards my physical and mindful goals all stem from things I have learned throughout the year, so it is not like anything is too random. It comes to show how certain things can come back around, and what you learned then can come to help you now.

Now, I am not an avid fan of anime. I have nothing against, I have simply never gotten into it despite the basics like Dragon Ball. So, it may sound strange to you that I based one of my training aspects on an anime. "One Punch Man" to be exact. I saw a feed online that talked about other people being inspired by this particular workout. The training program involves 100 reps of push-ups, sit-ups, and squats, along with running 10 km daily. I thought this was great because being that in the midst of Covid, I had little to no access to weights or training equipment. This way, I am simply relying on my body weight. I knew that I would have a hard time doing this all at the beginning, so I intended on doing only a portion and working my way up.

One thing that I feel is often overlooked when it comes to exercising is stretching. Sure, back in my days of school sports, we would stretch before and after practice, but I felt it was something we did not take seriously enough. I have been ridden with back and knee issues most of my life, so I looked into ways to help myself. Earlier this year, I used braces to support myself. I had a back injury while moving stuff in the garage which led me to look into buying the braces and using them almost daily. They felt great and helped my mobility and stability; however, I came to realize I was using them as a crutch rather than actively working to solve my problems. Again, I came across another feed online that included 16 different stretches. Each stretch is designed to help activate, loosen, and even strengthen various parts of your body. Besides that, it talked about how certain stretches were great for their calming properties. Two of them in particular looked a little too advanced for me, so I opted into not doing those at first. I'll get more into the specifics of the stretches in a later installment.

With all that, this is what I decided to do:

- Wake up early, start the day with doing 14 out of the 16 stretches for a minute each
- Total of 50 push-ups, sit-ups, and squats a day
- Run 2.5 km

Baby Steps

As I've mentioned, my sleep schedule has not been the greatest. I am a freelancer who works from home and I create my own schedule; however, I am not the greatest about waking up early. I find that I am more productive with my day when I wake up earlier; however, that is something that I struggle to do. Very often I will set my alarm for 5:30/6 o'clock, only to keep snoozing until 9 or 10. Nine hours of sleep seems to be my preferred number of hours of sleep, which is interesting because all of high school and college, I was running on give to six most nights. So, waking up early and starting my day with this exercise routine was the goal, but never the outcome. All throughout the 23 days, that is probably what I struggle with the most.

So, instead of waking up at 6 o'clock, it was usually more like 9 or 10. When I did eventually get up; however, I was pretty good about getting into the routine. I would push through the workouts and make sure I accomplished everything before moving forward with my days. The first few days were fun. I would message Harrison every day all pumped and excited. I remember by Day 4; though, I was so unmotivated. It was just one of those days I wanted nothing to do with humanity, let alone the challenge. But it was for days like that I wanted to do the challenge in the first place- to persevere and push through anything. Very often we easily find excuses not to do something, and I refused to let myself rest.

That was, until, the pain set in. Not just the "burn" of the workouts, but major back and neck discomfort. This probably started kicking in after the first week. I would be so sore, and I was afraid what kind of damage I was putting on myself. I reevaluated my workouts, and I came to the conclusion I was not doing my push-ups nor my sit-ups properly. In regard to the push-ups, I kept my butt up too much, I didn't place my arms properly, and my stance was too wide. I was putting too much strain on my back and shoulders. As for the sit-ups, I was pulling upward with my neck and back rather than core. I was so focused on the quantity of reps that I disregarded the quality of them. So, for about 4 days, I let myself rest. I continued doing the stretches and running daily, but I didn't do any of the other exercises.

When I returned to doing push-ups, sit-ups, and squats, I changed a few things. First of all, I lowered the reps. I wanted to make sure whatever I did was quality rather than just trying to do as many as I could, regardless of how poorly. I continued with squats the same because I did not believe that was an issue. Instead of 50 push-ups, those reps became 40, while sit-ups became 20. For my push-ups, I am not ashamed to admit this, but I started doing knee push-ups rather than full ones. I did this so I could get the form corrected before I caused any more damage to myself. That has made a major difference. I have been focusing on feeling the push with my arms and have alleviated the stress in my neck and shoulders. Besides push-ups, I also included doing 40 triceps dips, as well. I wanted to make up for the shift in my workout and supplement it with something else that I felt would be safe but effective for me. And so far so good in that category. As for the sit-ups, I used to keep my arms bent at the side of my head. I realized that was one of my issues- I would thrust myself up rather than engage the core. So, I started tucking my arms in, making an X over my chest. I found that way I was engaging in more quality sit-ups, but I was certainly worn out by the time I would hit 10. Just like how I added tricep dips to my arm workout, I also included more planking time to my core workout.

In regard to my stretches, I found my flexibility greatly increasing. For example, in regard to touching my toes, I started out being able to touch my toes by my fingertips without bedding my knees. Now, I am able to lay my knuckles on the ground. I have been able to stretch further in all my stretches, and I feel my core and legs being engaged in most of them. Also, to prevent any more neck and shoulder pain, I included a few more stretches I remember doing back in high school which focus on the arms, shoulders, and neck. Also, the two stretches I originally opted out of doing in the beginning, I attempted them about 16 days in, and I learned I could pull them off, to a degree. Each day, I know I am getting better at them, so it is exciting to see those improvements.

Lastly, running has gone alright for the most part, but the snow impeded things for a while, and I did not feel comfortable going outside in the snow and ice on the roads around me. That aspect was lost for about a week, but it is something I am getting back with.

So after 23 days, this how things have changed:

- Wake up early, start the day with doing 14 out of the 16 stretches for a minute each
- 50 squats
- 40 push-ups
- 40 tricep dips
- 20 sit-ups
- An additional 3 minutes of planking
- Run 2.5 km

Today's Wrap Up

Just because you go into something with a plan, that doesn't mean that is what you are going to stick with the whole time. That is what growth is all about- understanding what works and does not work for you, assess the situation, and adapt to make things better for longterm and overall success. That, and we should eliminate the "all or nothing mentality." It should be more of "all or something." It is better to chisel away at something slowly than to leave it alone altogether. Tending to something a little bit each day can make a huge difference in the end. Finally, listen to yourself. When your body is telling you something, address it so that you can take care of yourself in the best possible way. Obviously, I am still learning, but I think I am on a decent path as of now, and I am sure it will adapt and grow as time goes on.