

Looking at the lighter - or is that heavier? - side of resolutions

New Year's resolutions supposedly can be traced to ancient Rome.

It figures, that the custom began near the sunny Mediterranean, where the temperature on Jan. 14 neared 60 degrees and there is no NFL Network replaying postseason classics to steer a middle-aged man from a loftier path.

In Australia, where they are basking in the glow of summer, less than 3 percent of smokers who vow to quit stick with their pledge. In the land of fewer than 10 hours per day of sunlight, if it's not the winter calendar conspiring against a fresh start, it's the culture.

The U.S. Department of Health and Social Services advises us to be committed, be prepared for setbacks and to track our progress on the New Year's resolution front. With the understanding that I prefer long-term goals, here's a progress report on four of the 14 items on my 2009 to-do list.

Join a book club

Younger male friends meet one Sunday afternoon a month to discuss a new, serious work of fiction. Their absorption of literature has presumably been put on hold, while they consider Joe Flacco's reading of the cover-two defense.

After years of taking the NFL for granted, I admitted that they were a joy to watch and jumped on the Ravens' bandwagon. The downside to spending a good chunk of the weekend around a TV? A waning commitment to exercise, compounded by advertisements for less-than-finer things that promote sitting on your butt: cell phones, fast food, light beer and pick-up trucks.

Run a 10-K in less than an hour

After months of making solid headway on the exercise front, the opening fortnight of 2009 saw me log all of three miles, on the morning of Jan. 7, when I grunted into my

running tights, headed out for a pre-dawn jog and promptly went skating on a patch of ice.

Fortunately, I have a workout partner who prefers winter exercise to panting in summer. Molly wears a fur coat, and days like these are perfect for traipsing over a muddy trail with a Chesapeake Bay Retriever. Once tick season arrives, she'll be relegated to neighborhood walks and I'll run those trails in solitude.

150 on May 30

Mary's kitchen at Christmas is reminiscent of the parable of the loaves and fishes.

Every time a sweet is finished, another pie or batch of cookies appears. A personal bias: It is un-American to watch football without a bowl of nacho chips loaded with cheese and salsa.

Do the math. Dieticians acknowledge that weight control is a simple matter of calories consumed and calories burned. They can't, however, quantify hope. That aforementioned weight hasn't registered on my scale this millennium, but in four months ...

Ride your bike

The 10-year-old weight bench in my garage spends too much time as a bookcase. It is now blocked by a newer Christmas gift, and there is no better definition of optimism than a wife giving a husband in his mid-50s the first bicycle he has ever been able to call his own.