



ACSM Information On...

FINDING YOUR MOTIVATION FOR EXERCISE

Starting and sticking with an exercise routine can be very rewarding. Exercise brings a sense of accomplishment but provides many health benefits, too. Finding the motivation to begin exercising and keep exercising can be challenging.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross country skiing
- Swimming

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

Past experiences, competing priorities and unrealistic expectations can get in the way of leading an active lifestyle.

Know the benefits:

- **Most results of exercise are not instantaneous, so set realistic expectations.** It can take several weeks before seeing improvements in strength, endurance and weight loss. Don't use the scale as your only measure of progress and remember that healthy weight loss should not exceed two pounds per week. Embrace the idea that exercise is about more than losing weight and changing physique. Exercise can help you in many ways more than what is seen from the outside. Exercise can help improve physical function, mental health and can help reduce chronic disease risk for conditions like cardiovascular disease and cancer. Widen your perception to all the health benefits of physical activity.
- **Immediate results from exercise include positive mental outlook.** Even short bouts of activity can reduce stress and improve mood through the release of endorphins in the brain. Compare how you feel mentally before and after physical activity. When you connect exercise with these positive feelings you start to realize a more immediate benefit. In addition, long term physical activity can cut your risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

- Regular exercise improves the quality of sleep. People who exercise harder report better sleep compared to those that are sedentary or less active.

Evaluate your priorities:

- **Is your health one of your top priorities?** If not, this could keep you from starting and sticking with exercise. Until you place a high value on health and the many benefits of a physically active lifestyle, your efforts will probably fall short. People make time for things that are important to them. Be honest. Where do health and a physically active lifestyle fit into your value system?
- **If exercise feels like one more thing on the to-do list, it is time to reframe your thinking.** By thinking of exercise as a "get to do" instead of a "have to do" the inner voice is messaging a positive experience. If you find yourself saying "I have to exercise" and it seems like drudgery imagine if you start telling yourself "I get to exercise". The inner voice is powerful. What is yours saying?
- **Plan ahead by marking your workout time on your calendar.** Find some time at lunch or plan to get up 30 minutes earlier a few days a week. Treat exercise like any other appointment. Rate the importance of last minute schedule changes. If you wouldn't miss work or break plans with a friend then you shouldn't change your plans to work out.

Embrace your successes:

- **Have you tried exercise in the past but fell short by not meeting your goals?** While we tend to focus on failures, think about what went well and your successes. If your goal was to exercise five days a week and you consistently made it three days, identify what went right to make that happen. It is also important to spend some time deciding if past exercise goals were too ambitious. You may need to scale back expectations to meet other demands in your life.
- **People keep exercising because they have found something they enjoy about it.** Maybe it's the sense of achievement or the camaraderie. Are you looking forward to your next workout or do you dread it? Or maybe it's the comfort in knowing that you took time to invest in yourself. Finding the joy in physical activity instead of viewing it as one more thing on the to-do list will keep you motivated.



Track your progress and get connected:

- **Setting goals can help you focus and set a clear direction for what you intend to accomplish.** Be specific about your exercise plan when you are writing down your goals. "Getting in shape" is vague compared to "I will walk Monday, Wednesday, Friday for 45 minutes before dinner." This lays out an intentional plan for what the exercise is, when it will take place and for how long. Those that write down goals and record their exercise do better with long-term behavior change.
- **Use a fitness app or some other tracking device.** There are many available that can track your workouts and link you to like-minded people. Getting socially connected and tracking your progress can keep you going, especially if you appreciate healthy competition. Not into apps? Step counters and journals can also be powerful motivators. Check your progress throughout the day and if you fall short of your goal, then work in extra steps to get there.
- **Recruit an exercise buddy or two.** Companionship makes exercise fun and creates accountability. Incorporating the social aspects of exercise can keep you engaged. Letting a friend down may be harder than letting yourself down. Group training sessions or walking the neighborhood can be great times to reconnect with friends and to become fit at the same time.

Find opportunities to be active:

- **If your schedule doesn't allow for a full workout, figure out ways that you can get shorter bursts of activity in.** Even short bouts of activity carry many benefits.
 - **Are you waiting for the kids to finish practice?** Take a lap or two around the field.
 - **Do you have an extra 10 minutes at lunch?** Try walking the stairs or hitting the street with a co-worker.
 - **Do you need to refresh your neck and back after a day at the computer?** Keep resistance bands in your desk drawer or tighten up your core by trading your chair for a stability ball.
- **Avoid long periods of sitting by standing up and moving throughout the day.** Standing can boost metabolism, increase circulation and improve lipids. Standing for five minutes of every hour is related to healthier cells. For example, movement sends more oxygen to the muscles and brain which can improve productivity. Try talking on the phone, folding laundry or doing computer work standing up.
- **Variety is key to keep exercise fun and engaging.** Try a new group exercise class, or round up some friends for a few sessions with a personal trainer. With so many exercise options, there is some form of activity for everyone. An open mind and sense of adventure can keep you motivated and looking forward to your next workout!

Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

Prior to Exercise

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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