

Get Motivated to Get Fit!

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It's cold out. You don't have the right clothes. There just isn't time. You're so tired There are 101 excuses not to exercise, and we've all used some of them at one time or another. Who doesn't need a little motivation now and again?

One clear motivation is good health. Along with other health benefits, a report from the American Institute for Cancer Research found that moderate levels of physical activity for 30 minutes a day lowered the chances of cancer developing. One reason exercise helps prevent cancer is its role in weight management – excess body fat is a key risk for cancer development. Now scientists are finding that regular physical activity in itself may help fight cancer. Exercise regulates the body's hormones. High levels of some hormones play a role in certain cancers, such as post-menopausal breast cancer. Physical activity may also strengthen our immune system, promote healing, and reduce cell inflammation.

But knowing we should become more physically active and doing it are quite different. A growing number of research studies are exploring how teaming with others can provide the incentive to start – and stick to – regular exercise. Everyone is different, but here are a few suggestions you may want to consider.

Find a Buddy: For many, having an exercise partner can transform a routine, possibly dull obligation into a lively experience. The buddy benefits are many: chatting during an activity can make the time go by quickly and help regulate your pace; guilt of disappointing someone may help you stick to a scheduled activity; and sharing the woes and joys of exercising can be the impetus to keep at it. Simply having an exercise reminder from your buddy can be encouragement. A recent study found that people who received exercise-reminder phone calls from health educators averaged almost 3 hours of walking per week, compared to about 2 hours for the no-reminder group.

Snag a Four-Legged Friend: It may come as no surprise that owning a dog can spur people to walk. A study of Canadians found that dog owners spent more time in mild and moderate physical activities and walked an average of 300 minutes per week compared to non-dog owners, who walked 168 minutes per week. A large 2006 U.S. study found that 42% of dog walkers were walking their dogs for at least 30 minutes a day. Don't have a dog? You could always volunteer to walk the neighbor's or one from a shelter.

Rise to the Challenge: The National President's Challenge kicks off on March 20. This is a new fitness program that encourages all Americans age 6 and older to make being active part of our everyday lives, no matter what our activity or fitness level, and challenges us to join or start an exercise group in our community. You can learn all about it at www.presidentschallenge.org. Remember, it only takes a small change, and you can do it if you tell yourself you can!

Source: The American Institute for Cancer Research, www.aicr.org.