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# Overcoming Barriers to Exercise: Finding Time, Staying Motivated

The benefits of physical activity are well known. Physical activity can help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease, lower blood pressure, maintain a healthy body weight and improve cholesterol profiles. Despite all of the advantages of exercise, an estimated 60 percent to 70 percent of the American population does not engage in regular physical activity.

Two of the most common reasons people do not engage in regular physical activity are lack of time and loss of motivation. To be successful in an exercise or activity program, you must overcome these barriers and make a commitment to yourself and your health.

## Motivation

It can be difficult to stay motivated to stay active, especially if the routine is boring and not enjoyable. The good news is that physical activity does not have to be boring! In fact, you should choose activities you enjoy to keep you motivated. Choose something fun. Try these strategies:

*Add variety to your exercise routine.* Adding new exercises not only will keep you interested and motivated, it will also help your body make continual health and fitness gains. Add a resistance training (strength training) component to your existing routine, take a new class or try a new machine.

*Join a gym or take a group fitness class.* Making this investment in your health may help motivate you to attend on a regular basis. While at the gym you can consult with an exercise physiologist or personal trainer. If your gym does not employ these fitness professionals you can locate one in your area to arrange for a consultation. The physiologist or trainer will work with you to design activities that suit your abilities, needs and goals. They will also be able to make recommendations as you progress.

*Find an exercise buddy.* Asking a friend or family member to join you will make the activity more enjoyable and help pass the time more quickly. Try to find a person with a similar fitness level and fitness goals. This will allow you to progress at a comparable pace.

*Set specific, measurable and attainable goals.* Reaching your goals will help keep you motivated and help you track your progress. Ideally, set several short-term goals and a timeline for achieving them. Use short-term goals as building blocks to your long-term goals. An example of a short-term, measurable goal might be to increase aerobic activity by bicycling 40 miles per week. At the same time, this short-term

goal could lead to a long-term goal of increasing HDL (*high-density lipoproteins*, or so-called “good” cholesterol), to 55 mg/dl. Your doctor or exercise professional can help you establish goals and develop an action plan to attain them.

## **Time**

Now that you’re motivated to participate in regular physical activity, how will you find the time to get it done? Lack of time is probably the most common justification people use for not exercising regularly. However, motivated people will find many strategies to help find the time to exercise.

- *Make time for activity.* Choose a time of day that you are consistently free. Rather than watching *Good Morning America*, take the dog for a long walk or ride your bike to the park. Not a morning person? Use your lunch break to take a walk with a coworker. Go for a walk after dinner. Find a time during the day that will allow at least 30 minutes for physical activity.
- *Spread your exercise time throughout the day.* If you can’t find 30 continuous minutes to exercise, break your routine into smaller time periods. Lift weights for 15 minutes before you leave for work and go jogging for 15 minutes when you come home. Perhaps family obligations prevent you from finding time for activity. Why not include family members in your activity? Take the kids to the park, go for a hike or go swimming at the local pool. Not only will you find time for activity, but you will also set a positive example for your children and others.
- *Schedule your time to exercise as though it were an important meeting with your manager.* Write it into your planner so that it becomes part of your daily routine. Invest your time and effort into your health by making it a priority.

Place your health among your highest priorities. Once you make a commitment to yourself and your health, you will find enough time to exercise.

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