



Overcoming your exercise obstacles

Seven common excuses keep many people from the benefits of exercise. Here's how to overcome these barriers and enjoy being more active.

"I don't have time to exercise." "Exercise is boring."

Does this sound like you? If you've used these or similar excuses to avoid exercise, you're not alone. Two out of three Americans are not getting enough exercise. Don't let these excuses stop you from exercising.

Here are the top seven barriers to exercise and ways to hurdle over them:

- 1. No time.** Spend a week identifying 30-minute time slots that you can set aside for exercise. Then mark your day planner accordingly. Find ways to work in physical activity into your everyday life. Park further from your office, take the stairs instead of the elevator, ride your bike to the grocery store. Other time "obstacles" to hurdle:
 - Travel for work. Choose a hotel with a fitness center or pool. Pack a bathing suit and a pair of sneakers.
 - Family obligations. Fit in exercise with the kids. Play together. Find time to work out when the kids are at school or staying with a friend.
- 2. Lack of support from family or friends.** Tell your family or friends that you want to be more active. Ask them to support your efforts. Get your spouse/significant other or friend to jog or play tennis with you. Find a group, join a gym or a hiking, biking or running club.
- 3. No energy.** We all have times when we are more energetic. If you are a morning person, maybe a before-work workout is best. If you feel an energy boost after work, then you may want to hit the gym on your way home. Others find time in the middle of the day.
- 4. No will power.** If you're saying this, you may need to write yourself a contract. It may be as simple as writing down a time to exercise in your calendar or date book. You are more likely to do it if you write it down. Choose an activity you enjoy. To stay motivated, choose a reward to work toward and keep you going. Working out with a buddy (tennis partner, walking companion) will also keep it fun and keep you motivated.
- 5. Fear of injury.** Talk to your doctor first to get the go-ahead to exercise. If it has been some time since you've exercised regularly, start out slowly so you don't get hurt. Choose a low-impact activity that won't injure your knees or other joints. Choose activity that's appropriate for your age and ability level. Remember to warm up and cool down before and after exercise.
- 6. Lack the skill.** If you can walk, you can exercise. In fact, you can build an entire exercise routine around walking. If you always wanted to learn to swim or play tennis, now is the time. You may want to take a class to develop new skills.
- 7. Lack of resources.** This barrier may be related to money or location. You don't need to join an expensive gym to exercise. All you need is a pair of sneakers or comfortable walking shoes. Go to a nearby park or make up your own route in your neighborhood. If there's no park nearby or your neighborhood is not pedestrian-friendly, then find a recreation program or health facility at work. And don't let the winter keep you from staying in shape. Take your walking routine to the mall. Work out in the privacy of your home with your favorite aerobics DVD.

You probably know that exercise has many benefits, such as warding off heart disease and diabetes. Exercising 60 to 90 minutes a day can help you to reach a healthy weight. Keeping a routine of 30 to 60 minutes a day helps you stay at a healthy weight. You can even benefit if you break up your exercise program into several 10-minute intervals a day.

So don't let these excuses keep you from cashing in on the fun and the healthy returns. Check with your doctor to find out what a good activity level is for you, and then quit making excuses!

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Exercise your depression away

Feel blue and low-down? Get moving. Physical activity is one of the best things you can do if you are battling depression.

Are you running from depression? How about walking, swimming or biking? If not, try it. Physical activity is one of the best things you can do for yourself if you are battling depression.

Research has shown that:

- **Exercise can ease symptoms of depression.** It can help anyone, at any age or fitness level, but it has the most dramatic effects on those who are the most unhealthy.
- **Exercise is as good as antidepressants at reducing depression.** If your depression is mild, exercise alone may be enough to help lift your mood. If you have major depression, the greatest benefit comes from combining exercise with antidepressants and psychotherapy.
- **Almost any type of physical activity can improve mood.** People often choose walking or running, but even non-aerobic activities such as weightlifting can help. The main thing is to get up and get moving and keep at it.

Exercise and mood: what's the connection?

Research suggests that exercise increases the level of serotonin in the brain. Serotonin is a chemical that affects mood, sleep, appetite and sex drive. Low levels of it have been linked to depression. Exercise also stimulates the production of endorphins, "feel-good" chemicals in the brain, and helps reduce the level of cortisol, a stress hormone.

Physical activity can help you:

- Sleep better
- Feel better about yourself
- Gain a sense of accomplishment
- Take an active role in your mental and physical health
- Keep depression at bay after your recovery

Taking the first step

By its nature, depression makes it tough to get motivated to take care of yourself. If you hardly feel like getting out of bed, you may wonder where you'll get the energy to exercise.



The first step is to talk with your doctor. This is especially important if you haven't been exercising or have a chronic health problem. A doctor can tell you what type and level of exercise is safe for you. If you're not taking an antidepressant, your doctor may prescribe one or recommend a counselor.

Next, try these strategies to help you get started and be successful:

- **Pick an activity you like.** You're more likely to stick with it if you enjoy it.
- **Identify your roadblocks.** Think about the things that get in the way of exercise, and make a plan for how you will overcome them. Can't afford a gym? Walk or ride a bike. Too cold or wet outside? Walk at a mall. Too tired in the morning? Exercise over the lunch hour. If you anticipate the problems, you can find ways around them.
- **Enlist a workout buddy.** Having a companion to exercise with often helps people stay motivated. If you're walking, a dog can be an eager and supportive partner.
- **Start out slowly.** At first just aim for 10 minutes a session. Over time increase activity to 30 or more minutes most days of the week.
- **Cut yourself some slack.** There may be days you just don't feel up to exercising. If you miss a day or can only do 10 minutes, that's fine. Just get back on track the next day.
- **Remember the benefits.** Physical activity can improve your mood, and it can also strengthen your heart and bones, help control your weight and cut your risk for many diseases. Each time you exercise, you're doing something positive for your health.
- **Be patient.** It may take a few weeks to see an improvement in your mood. If you don't notice any change in this time, talk to your doctor about increasing the intensity or trying another activity.



9 ways to exercise when you don't have the time

Think you have no time to exercise? These strategies will help you get fit in just minutes a day.

We all know exercise can help us improve our health and lose weight. Yet, 25 percent of adults don't exercise at all, according to the U.S. Surgeon General.

Hectic schedules may be to blame. Who has the time to exercise when juggling work, school, family and more? It's worth squeezing it in, though, because regular exercise can relieve daily stress and lift your mood. At the same time, you can reduce your risks of diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Aim to be active for at least 30 minutes most days, but it's okay to start slowly. Find activities that you enjoy. You only need to find a few minutes a day to start getting the health benefits. First, check with your doctor before you start or increase your activity level.

Tips for fitting in fitness

- **Wake up a little earlier.** Start by setting your alarm clock just 5 minutes earlier. Do stretches and jumping jacks before getting in the shower, or follow a short exercise DVD.
- **Find a workout buddy.** Exercising with a friend is more fun than working out alone and a good motivator. Ask a coworker to go for a walk during lunch or see if a neighbor wants to shoot hoops.
- **Change into exercise clothes before leaving work.** You'll be ready for a short walk as soon as you get home.
- **Schedule your fitness activities.** If you put exercise on your calendar like other appointments, you're more likely to do it.
- **Acknowledge your successes.** Keep a log of all the times you make a healthy choice to move more, such as by taking the stairs instead of an elevator. After the first week, reward yourself with a new pair of sneakers or a cool new water bottle.

- **Create a home (or desk) gym.** If you have equipment always at the ready, it will be easy to steal five minutes to use it. A jump rope, a stability ball, exercise bands and dumbbells don't cost much or take up much room.
- **Move while you watch TV.** Don't sit idly - or worse, get a snack - during commercials. Do sit-ups or jog in place instead.
- **Play games with your kids.** Don't just watch while your kids play outside - join in their fun. Play tag or Duck Duck Goose, or just toss a ball back and forth. If your kids love video games, think about swapping their console for the Nintendo Wii. The whole family will break a sweat using special controllers to compete at boxing, tennis, golf and bowling.
- **Exercise while you work.** Raise your activity level and productivity with neck rolls or arm raises (push hands out to the side and then up toward the ceiling). Or do a few modified push-ups on the edge of your desk.

Stepping it up

After you've built short periods of activity into your day, think about times when you could lengthen each burst by a few minutes. The key is to start small and ramp up gradually.

Even if you're worn out from a busy day, try to make time for fitness. Regular exercise actually boosts your energy level. Exercise, along with restricting calories, is also important for weight loss and maintaining a healthy weight.

Next time you look for an excuse to skip exercise, remind yourself of the benefits. You're helping yourself feel good, look better and live longer. Who wouldn't want that?



Can exercise keep you mentally sharp?

As you get older, are you having more and more “senior moments?” Although forgetfulness seems to come hand-in-hand with aging, could it be that something as simple as exercise could help enhance your memory?

Exercise may be the best wonder drug of them all - maintaining not just your body, but your mind as well.

Scientists are finding that exercise actually may help prevent mental decline as we age. Regular exercise may enhance memory, planning and organization skills, as well as the ability to juggle mental tasks.

Researchers believe regular exercise - for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week - can help keep your brain sharp. Exercise improves how well the body can pump blood to the brain, helping it perform better. Scientists speculate that activity stimulates the growth of nerve cells in the hippocampus, the region of the brain involved in memory.

Another positive effect deals with lowering blood pressure. This is important to most adults, particularly as they age. In fact, most elderly people do have high blood pressure. Those with uncontrolled high blood pressure are more likely to have trouble thinking, remembering and learning.

Activity can also help with depression, a common problem among the elderly. Depression can affect memory and concentration. Exercise helps relieve feelings of depression by increasing blood flow and improving how the brain handles the chemicals that are responsible for mood.

You can't beat exercise. Not only can it help your brain, it can also keep your muscles and joints strong - all important for helping prevent falls, dealing with arthritis, strengthening your heart, improving your energy levels, and warding off health problems such as diabetes and certain cancers. Even if you have lived a sedentary life up until now, you can still limber up to help keep your brain - and your body - in shape.

First, be sure to check with your doctor before starting any exercise. Together, you can choose a routine that is safe for you.

- Get at least 30 minutes of activity - most or all days of the week - that makes you breathe harder. You can break up those 30 minutes throughout your day by taking a 10- or 15-minute walk in the morning, another at lunch and a third in the evening. To tell if you aren't working hard enough, give yourself the “talk test.” If you can talk without any effort, you aren't working out hard enough. If you can't talk at all, you are pushing too hard.
- Don't neglect your muscles. If you don't use them, you'll lose them. Strong muscles help you with numerous everyday tasks such as grocery-carrying and having the ability to get out of your chair on your own.
- Work on your balance. Stand on one foot, then the other. If you're able, try not to hold onto anything for support. Stand up from sitting in a chair without using your hands or arms. Every now and then, walk heel-to-toe.
- Be sure to stretch as part of a well rounded routine of strength and conditioning exercises. This can help prevent back pain and helps you remain limber. Never stretch so far that it hurts.