

Newsletter

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Barriers to fitness: Overcoming common problems

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If you don't include physical activity in your daily routine, what's stopping you? Consider common barriers to fitness — and practical strategies for keeping your exercise program on track.

Sticking to a regular exercise schedule isn't easy. After all, there are plenty of potential hindrances — time, boredom, injuries, self-confidence. But these issues don't need to stand in your way. Consider practical strategies for overcoming common barriers to fitness.

Barrier: I don't have enough time to exercise

Setting aside time to exercise can be a challenge. Use a little creativity to get the most out of your time.

Squeeze in a few 10-minute walks throughout the day. If you don't have time for a full workout, don't sweat it. Shorter spurts of exercise spaced throughout the day offer benefits, too.

Get up earlier. If your days are packed and the evening hours are just as hectic, get up 30 minutes earlier twice a week to exercise. Once you've adjusted to early-morning workouts, add another day or two to the routine.

Claim the back row of the parking lot as your own. Or park a few blocks away and walk quickly to your destination.

Rethink your rituals. Your weekly Saturday matinee with the kids or your best friend could be reborn as your weekly Saturday bike ride, rock-climbing lesson or trip to the pool.

Barrier: Exercise is boring

It's natural to grow weary of a repetitive workout day after day, especially when you're going it alone. But exercise doesn't have to be boring.

Think of it as an activity. If you choose activities you enjoy, you're more likely to stay interested. Remember, anything that gets you moving counts.

Vary the routine. Rotate among several activities — such as walking, swimming and cycling — to keep you on your toes while conditioning different muscle groups.

Join forces with friends, relatives, neighbors or co-workers. Enjoy the camaraderie, and offer encouragement to one another when the going gets tough.

Check out exercise classes or sports leagues at a recreation center or health club. Learn new skills while getting a great workout.

Barrier: I'm self-conscious about how I look when I exercise

Don't get down on yourself! Remind yourself what a great favor you're doing for your cardiovascular health, or focus on how much stronger you feel after a workout. Praise yourself for improving your stamina and making a commitment to lifelong fitness.

If you're still uncomfortable exercising in the presence of others, go solo at first. Try an exercise video or an activity-oriented video game. Consider investing in a stationary bicycle, treadmill, stair-climbing machine or other piece of home exercise equipment. As you become healthier and more at ease with exercising, your self-confidence is likely to improve as well.

Barrier: I'm too tired to exercise after working all day

No energy to exercise? Without exercise, you'll have no energy. It's a vicious cycle. But breaking the cycle with physical activity is one of the best gifts you can give yourself.

Try a morning dose of exercise. Remember the suggestion to get up 30 minutes earlier to exercise? Hop on the treadmill or stationary bicycle while you listen to the radio or watch the morning news. Or step outside for a brisk walk.

Make lunchtime count. Keep a pair of walking shoes at your desk, and take a brisk walk during your lunch break.

Be prepared. Put workout clothes on top of your dresser, socks and all. Keep a full water bottle in the fridge. Have an exercise video queued up and ready to go when you get home at night.

Hit the hay earlier. Running on empty is no way to face a full day. Go to bed earlier to make sure you're getting enough sleep.

Barrier: I'm too lazy to exercise

If the mere thought of a morning jog makes you tired, try these thoughts on for size:

Set realistic expectations. If your mental bar is too high, you might give up without even trying. Start with a walk around the block. Don't give up if you feel worn out. Take another walk around the block tomorrow. Keep it up, and eventually you'll no longer feel worn out. That's progress!

Work with your nature, not against it. Plan physical activity for times of the day when you tend to feel more energetic — or at least not quite so lazy.

Schedule exercise as you would schedule an important meeting or appointment. Block off times for physical activity, and make sure your friends and family are aware of your commitment. Ask for their encouragement and support.

Barrier: I'm not athletic

Natural athletic ability isn't a prerequisite to physical activity. Try something simple, such as a daily walk. Better yet, team up with friends who are in the same boat. Have fun while helping each other work out. Don't worry about becoming a superstar athlete or joining the hard-bodied athletes at the fitness club. Simply focus on the positive changes you're making to your body and mind.

Barrier: I've tried to exercise in the past and failed

Don't throw in the towel! You can't see it when you lower your cholesterol or reduce your risk of diabetes, but that doesn't mean you aren't doing yourself a great favor. Re-evaluate what went wrong, and learn from your mistakes.

Pace yourself. Start small and build up to more-intense workouts later, when your body is ready.

Set realistic goals. Don't promise yourself you're going to work out for an hour every day, and then get down on yourself when you fall short. Stick with goals you can more easily achieve, such as exercising 20 minutes a day, three days a week for the first month.

Remember why you're exercising. Use your personal fitness goals as motivation — and reward yourself as you meet your goals.

Barrier: I can't afford to buy expensive equipment or join a health club

You don't need a membership at an elite gym to get a great workout. Consider common-sense alternatives.

Do strengthening exercises at home. Use inexpensive resistance bands — lengths of elastic tubing that come in varying strengths — in place of weights. Lift plastic milk jugs partially filled with water or sand. Do push-ups or squats using your body weight.

Watch an exercise video. Try videos on dance aerobics, cardio-kickboxing, yoga or tai chi. For variety, trade exercise videos or games with a friend.

Start a walking group. Round up friends, neighbors or co-workers for regular group walks. Plan routes through your neighborhood or near your workplace, along local parks and trails, or in a nearby shopping mall.

Take the stairs. Skip the elevator when you can. Better yet, make climbing stairs a workout in itself.

Try your community center. Exercise classes offered through a local recreation department or community education group might fit your budget better than an annual gym membership.

Barrier: I'm afraid I'll hurt myself if I exercise

If you're nervous about injuring yourself, start off on the right foot.

Take it slow. Start with a simple walking program. As you become more confident in your abilities, add new activities to your routine.

Try an exercise class for beginners. You'll learn the basics by starting from scratch.

Consider working one-on-one with a personal trainer. Get a customized fitness tutorial from a certified expert, who can monitor your movements and point you in the right direction.

Barrier: My family and friends don't support my efforts to exercise regularly

Remind those close to you of the benefits of regular exercise — and then bring them along for the ride!

Get your kicks with your kids. Sign up for a parent-child exercise class. Pack a picnic lunch and take your family to the park for a game of tag or kickball. Splash with the kids in the pool instead of watching from your chair.

Propose a new adventure. Instead of suggesting a workout at the gym, invite a friend to go to an indoor climbing wall or rent a tandem bicycle for the weekend.

Do double duty. Volunteer to drive your teens to the mall, and then walk laps inside while you wait for the shoppers. Try the same trick at your child's school during lessons, practices or rehearsals.

If necessary, have a heart-to-heart with your loved ones. If they don't share your fitness ambitions, ask them to at least respect your will to get fit.