

Physical activity - overcoming the barriers

Finding the time and interest to build physical activity into your daily life can sometimes be difficult. We can all come up with lots of excuses to avoid exercise. We've looked at some of the common barriers people raise, and offer some tips on how to move past them.

Some common excuses that keep us sedentary

Six common barriers to doing physical activity include:

- 'I don't have enough time'
- 'Exercise is boring'
- 'I don't know how to be active'
- 'I'm too tired'
- 'It's too hot', 'It's too cold', 'It's raining'
- 'I don't feel like it.'

Below are a range of suggestions to help you overcome the more common barriers to exercise.

'I don't have enough time'

If you think this is an excuse you might use, try to:

- Keep a diary of your daily activities for a week. Use the diary to assess how much spare time you actually have – you may have more time than you thought.
- Try to break up your exercise sessions into two 15-minute blocks, or even into three 10-minute blocks, if finding a spare 30 minutes each day to exercise is difficult. You'll still reap the fitness benefits.
- Involve your family. For example, instead of playing board games or watching television together, why not get outside. You could play backyard cricket, go to your local swimming pool or take a walk through the park.
- Take a brisk 15-minute walk at lunchtime.
- Try to incorporate physical activity into your daily life. For example, get off the bus or train one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way. Take the stairs instead of the lift.

'Exercise is boring'

Sometimes lack of interest is the problem rather than lack of time. If you think exercise is boring, why don't you:

- Exercise with a friend, join a local walking group or take up a team sport. Physical activity doesn't have to be a solitary pursuit.
- Think back to physical activities you enjoyed as a child. Did you love to roller skate, ride your bike or jump on a trampoline? Did you play a team sport? Revisit these activities and you may find them just as enjoyable today.
- Change the way you think about physical activity. Don't think that exercise must be painful or dull in order to be 'good' for you. Physical activity is all about getting more movement into your day. The activities should also be fun. Think about pursuits like dancing, gardening or sex.
- Mix it up. Plan to participate in a range of physical activities.
- Consider using exercise equipment at home (such as a stationary bike or treadmill) so that you can work out while watching your favourite television programs.

'I don't know how to be active'

There are lots of people ready to help you when you're ready to get moving. Suggestions include:

- See your doctor for suggestions and support when embarking on a physical activity program.
- Contact your local community centre. Most centres offer a range of physical activity classes at modest prices.
- Visit your local gym or sports centre. Most gyms, sporting clubs and dance clubs offer an introductory free first lesson. Take advantage of these free lessons to help find an activity that appeals to you.
- Pick something that really interests you. What sport do you enjoy watching on television? For example, if you never miss the Australian Open, perhaps taking up tennis would interest you.
- Ask any of your physically active friends if you can come along during their next exercise session
- Learn about a variety of opportunities for physical activity in your area from 'Go for your life' website www.goforyourlife.vic.gov.au

'I'm too unwell or unfit'

There's something for everyone to do, even if you're not feeling the best. Sometimes activity can actually help you feel better too. Suggestions include:

- See your doctor for a full medical check-up before starting any physical activity program, particularly if you are obese, over 40, haven't exercised in a long time or have a chronic medical condition. Your doctor can assist and support you to make changes to your lifestyle.
- Investigate your medical condition. Talk to your doctor or local support group, or browse through Better Health Channel articles to find physical activities that may be appropriate for you.
- Choose an activity that feels comfortable. For example, swimming may be suitable because the buoyancy of the water supports your body.
- Start slowly. Begin by exercising for about 10 minutes every day. Gradually increase the time and intensity as your fitness improves.
- Don't push yourself too hard. If an activity hurts, decrease the intensity or stop altogether. Pain is a sign that there is something wrong.

'I'm too tired'

Life can be exhausting but, amazingly, the more active you are, the more energy you will have for everything else in your life. Suggestions include:

- Try to be active on most days of the week and you'll soon feel more energetic. The fitter you are, the more energy you have.
- Rearrange your schedule if you can, so that you can be active in the morning rather than at night.
- Exercise during your lunch break or build activity into your commute to work by cycling or walking part or all of the way.
- Improve your diet. Healthy foods can boost your energy levels.
- Try to get more sleep.

'It's too hot', 'It's too cold', 'It's raining'

There's always something you can do, regardless of the weather. Suggestions include:

- Have a variety of indoor and outdoor activities to choose from so that weather can't interfere with your exercise plans.
- Choose indoor activities, such as working out to an exercise video or stationary cycling, on days when you don't want to exercise outdoors.
- Work out in a gym or swim at your local pool.
- Take a brisk walk through your local air-conditioned shopping centre.
- Choose weather-specific activities such as skiing or snow-play in winter or swimming in summer.

'I don't feel like it'

Changing our habits isn't easy, but once you start to feel better you will see the benefits of the changes you've made. If you don't feel like being active, try to:

- Identify your barriers to physical activity.

- Browse through the Better Health Channel and read up on the benefits of physical activity. For example, regular exercise eases depression and anxiety, aids in weight loss, improves sleep and helps to manage back pain. Find personal reasons to motivate you to become more active.
- Choose solitary pursuits like working out to an exercise video if you feel uncomfortable exercising in front of other people.
- Make sure your goals are reasonable. Avoid the 'all-or-nothing' trap of thinking that physical activity is a waste of time if it can't make you super-fit or super-slim.
- Plan ahead for periods of physical activity. Make appointments with yourself in your diary.
- Find yourself an exercise buddy. You are more likely to commit to regular physical activity if you have someone else relying on you.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Local council
- Neighbourhood gym
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 739 899
- BHC Activity finder

Things to remember

- The best sort of physical activity is the one you enjoy because that is the one that you will maintain.
- Identify your personal barriers to exercise.
- Try to incorporate physical activity into your daily life – for example, take the stairs instead of the lift.
- Find physical activities that appeal to you. Exercise doesn't have to be dull.

Want to know more?

For references, related links and support group information, go to More information.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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