



BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS TO EXERCISE

HOW TO START (OR RESTART) AN EXERCISE PROGRAMME

How many times have you told yourself you were going to start exercising? Are you thinking about an exercise programme but have not yet committed to one? Here are some tips to get you over the first hurdle (so to speak).



THINK ABOUT THE BENEFITS ... AND BARRIERS

The benefits of physical activity are well known. Regular exercise can help prevent illness, improve physical fitness, and boost your mood. However, when it comes time to get moving, many of us still reach for the TV remote control rather than our training shoes. Understanding what keeps you from exercising, and how to overcome those barriers, can help you set an exercise programme in motion.



FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES

When starting an exercise programme, aim to meet the recommended guidelines for basic physical activity. For adults, this includes at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as walking, on five days a week. You can also choose 20 minutes of vigorous activity on three days a week, together with strength-training exercises twice a week.

Remember, everyday activities such as housework and gardening also count towards your physical activity goals.



TEN TIPS TO HELP YOU GET GOING

1. Set goals

Set a long-term goal of what you want to achieve, then set short-term goals to help you work towards your long-term goal. Make sure your goals are achievable. For example, start with a short-term goal of walking briskly for 10 minutes a day or parking far away from the shop, or taking the stairs instead of the lift.

2. Evaluate your goals

Evaluate your short-term goals. If you have reached them, set new ones to slowly build up your fitness. If you did not, reassess and adjust them – do not give up!

3. Change direction if you need to

If you find that it's just not possible to reach your short-term goals, change direction. Try something different. If you just can't motivate yourself to go to the gym, join a dancing class, a walking club or something else that better fits your personality and interests.

4. Celebrate when you achieve your short-term goals

Take a long bath, take a selfie, spend some time outdoors or talk to a friend. Do something you enjoy to celebrate achieving your goal. This can motivate you to set new, more challenging goals and achieve them.

5. Short bouts of exercise count

Research shows that exercise does not need to be completed in one long session to deliver health benefits. Short bursts of activity throughout the day can be just as effective. Whenever possible, try to include several shorter exercise sessions in your daily routine.

6. Move away from the “all or nothing” approach

Instead of starting with a structured training programme, focus on staying active throughout the day by building different types of physical activity into your daily routine. For example, you could take a 20-minute walk during your lunch break, or choose the stairs instead of using the lift or escalator.

7. Exercise does not have to be exhausting or painful

Moderate exercise offers many of the same health benefits as vigorous physical activity. To ensure you are exercising at an appropriate intensity, you should still be able to breathe comfortably and hold a conversation while exercising, even as your heart rate and breathing increase.

8. Planning is important

It is easy to place exercise low on your list of priorities. However, it is important to set aside dedicated time each day for physical activity and consider how exercise can fit into your daily routine.

9. You don't need expensive equipment to start an exercise programme

If your exercise programme includes walking, a good pair of training shoes is the only essential investment. Home workouts can also be effective using simple, low-cost equipment such as dumbbells and resistance bands.

10. Get your family involved

Support from your family can make a real difference, especially on days when motivation is low. Involving children in physical activity also helps them develop positive habits early, encouraging a lifelong commitment to a healthy and active lifestyle.



GET A CHECK-UP TO RULE OUT HEALTH RISKS

Although physical activity is beneficial for overall health, the risk of certain heart-related events can increase during exercise, particularly for individuals who have been inactive for some time. It is important to have a medical assessment to rule out potential health risks before starting a new exercise programme.

In particular, speak with your Healthcare Professional before starting an exercise programme if you answer “yes” to two or more of the following questions:

- Are you a man over the age of 45, or a woman over the age of 55?
- Do you have a close blood relative who had a heart attack or heart surgery at a relatively young age (before 55 for a father or brother, or before 65 for a mother or sister)?
- Do you currently smoke, or have you stopped smoking within the past six months?
- Is your blood pressure higher than 140/90 mmHg¹?
- Do you take medication for blood pressure?
- Is your blood cholesterol higher than 5.0 mmol/L²?
- Have you never had your blood pressure or blood cholesterol levels measured?
- Are you physically inactive, meaning you do less than 30 minutes of physical activity on at least three days a week?
- Are you more than 10 kg (or 22 pounds) overweight?
- Do you have a chronic medical condition?



IN SUMMARY

Experts recommend that adults aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on five days a week, or 20 minutes of vigorous activity on three days a week, together with strength training twice a week. Simple approaches, such as fitting short exercise sessions into a busy day and involving your family, can make it easier to get started and stay active. As both moderate and vigorous exercise may increase the risk of a heart-related event, it is important to have a medical assessment to rule out any potential health risks before beginning an exercise programme.



¹ millimetres of mercury (a blood pressure reading)

² millimoles per litre (a blood sugar reading)