

Working in Working out

Richard R. Rubin, PhD, CDE

Exercise is as close to a panacea or “magic pill” as anyone could dream of. In fact, if it were possible to create a medication with the benefits of exercise, those who owned the patent would be very wealthy. Better mood, more energy, closer to normal blood glucose levels and weight, and a longer, healthier life – who could ask for anything more?

1. Make activity a priority

Of course some people could ask for something more – enough time to work in their workouts. Let’s face it – we are all busy, and finding time for all the things we need to do is a big challenge. That’s especially true when it comes to something like exercise. Very few people really enjoy exercise, so if you do, you are one of the lucky ones. For the rest of us, finding time to exercise is really hard.

That’s why it is so important to make exercise a priority.

First, think about why you want to be more active and healthier. That reason can’t be what your doctor told you or what your spouse told you, because these reasons rarely keep people “with the program” over a long period of time.

The reasons you persist have to be personal, positive reasons such as:

- Being around to see your grandchildren grow up
- Being able to work in the garden
- Doing other things that really matter to you

Making activity a priority also means *planning*. You have to schedule your exercise, just as you schedule anything else that really matters to you.

Keeping activity a priority is also easier if you *accentuate the positive*. Keep in mind the benefits you will get if you are active, not the problems you will have if you don’t. And keep track of the benefits of your efforts.

- Do you have more energy?
- Are you sleeping better?
- Do you feel better about yourself?
- Has anyone complimented you on your appearance?

You can also move activity up your personal priority list by looking at the other things you spend time doing. Is there anything on the list you could cut out or cut down? Are

there things you spend time doing that you could ask others to help with, or to do themselves?

2. Find ways to increase activity throughout the day

Here are some tips to help you find the time you need to stick with your activity plan.

Short bouts of exercise really work: In one study, researchers compared two groups of exercisers, those who did short (10-minute) workouts, and those who did longer bouts (20-40 minutes). Compared to the long-bout exercisers, the short-bout exercisers:

- Stuck with their workouts more consistently
- Exercised more days a week
- Exercised more total time each week
- Lost more weight

Knowing you can break up your exercise into shorter bouts might help you stick with your exercise plan.

Plan to exercise early or late: If you are an early bird, try to fit in your daily exercise – or at least part of it – before you start your day. If you are a night owl, find some exercise you can do at home before you go to sleep. Exercising early can give you energy for the day ahead; exercising late can help you sleep better.

Take a walk on your lunch break: See if you can find an indoor route as well, in case the weather is bad.

Combine exercise and socializing: Instead of meeting a friend for coffee or lunch, take a walk together. Try to find friends who will take regular walks with you. You are much more likely to exercise if you have someone doing it with you--you feel committed and it's much more fun.

3. Be more active in general

Use the stairs: When you are at work or out shopping, use the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator whenever you can. Ten minutes of stair climbing, burns the same number of calories as 10 minutes on a "stair stepper" at the gym.

Park at the back of the lot: When you park your car at work or when you go shopping, pick a space at the back of the lot. You probably won't waste any time, because spaces close to the door always take longer to find than those farther away.

Exercise while you are doing other things at home

- Walk around the house while you talk on the telephone, or do simple stretches while you are on hold
- Do a few minutes of exercise while you are waiting for the washing machine or the dryer to finish
- Exercise while you are watching television. You can do light weight lifting, and if you have the money and room for exercise equipment, you can get your workout in while you watch your favorite shows. An added benefit: if you exercise while you are watching television you are likely to do less snacking – a real bonus when it comes to weight control.

4. Find ways to make activity more enjoyable

Treat yourself. If that beautiful sweat jacket would help you get out and exercise more often, buy it. If that new aerobics tape will help you start working out, get it.

Do what you like to do. Walking is a great, inexpensive exercise that you can do anywhere. But it doesn't have to be the one you choose. If dancing, biking, swimming, circuit training at the gym, or any other active exercise appeals to you, make that your primary choice.

Seek variety. Keep things interesting by varying your exercise. If you are a dedicated walker, have a few different routes, including at least one that is indoors, so the weather won't be a barrier. Also consider mixing your walks with any of the above activities that appeal to you.

Join an exercise group. Most YMCAs and senior centers offer a variety of exercise classes. Take advantage of these opportunities to enjoy a structured program that's led by a professional. And enjoy the added benefit of the company of the other class members.

Never forget what you have accomplished. Pay attention to the personal benefits you experience as you get more active, whether it's feeling fitter, losing weight, sleeping better, improved mood, or anything else you might notice. This will help you maintain your motivation for sticking with your activity program, and even doing a little more.