

Making Fitness Fun

Source: Lifeworks

Staying fit is vital for good health, yet it can be hard to stay motivated and make the time to exercise regularly. Here are some tips on how to keep the momentum going.

Make fitness fun

The best way to turn exercise into a part of your normal routine is to make it something you enjoy.

Here are some more strategies to make fitness fun:

Buddy up. Work out with someone you enjoy spending time with – a friend, roommate, family member, partner, or spouse. This gives the activity a little of the social element that makes many things more enjoyable. If no one you know is available the same time you are, ask your current network of friends if they know someone looking for a fitness partner.

Make it a team effort. Take classes at a gym or participate in team sports to add a sense of accountability – especially if you have teammates depending on you. Seeing others making similar efforts and accomplishing goals can also provide motivation.

Cross-train. Learn a number of different workouts (both cardio and strength) and alternate for variety. It's healthy to do an assortment of activities and work different muscles, and it keeps exercise from getting monotonous.

Listen to music. Upbeat music that makes you feel good also makes workouts more fun. In fact, music can boost performance. According to sports psychologist Dr. Costas Karageorghis, "Music lowers your perception of effort. It can trick your mind into feeling less tired during a workout, and also encourage positive thoughts."

Get outside. Fresh-air activities (running, team sports) stave off boredom by adding variety to where you go and what you see during your workout. Plus, being outside can also improve brain function, mood, and mental health.

Be creative. If you're unable to do your regular activity, know what alternatives are available. With just a little room, it's possible to get a full workout in any space – home, office, hotel, or park. Optional equipment includes an exercise mat, a couple of small weights, and a few routines (TV, online, app).

Join a group

Check your community for fitness or health groups – gyms, organizations, and online. See if your employer offers any fitness groups at work. These types of groups or programs might include:

- walking programs

- community races
- company sports teams
- incentives for biking to work
- on- or off-site fitness classes and personal training
- healthy cooking and nutrition programs
- discounts at gyms and other fitness facilities
- local bike or hike clubs

Once you've found a group at your company or in your community, the following tips will help you get going:

Sign up. If you sign up, you'll be more motivated to follow through and meet the challenge.

Encourage co-workers or friends to sign up with you. Participating with people you know can give you a big mental boost toward following through and achieving your fitness goals.

Log your activity. Keep a record of your progress throughout the challenge so you can see how far you've come.

Stay positive. If you fail to meet a particular fitness goal or if you progress more slowly than you'd hoped, don't give up. Instead, use it as additional motivation to keep going and as a clue to help you learn what you might have to change to move closer to the goal. Remember, putting in the effort and making progress is much more important than reaching an arbitrary number in an arbitrary length of time.

Know the numbers

Regardless of your type of exercise, some people are motivated by seeing scores, measurements, and statistics. Some numbers that might help include:

Competition. If you have a competitive streak, take advantage of it by getting involved in a competitive sport or activity. Running, rowing, basketball, weight lifting, and bike racing are just a few possibilities. A fitness challenge may include competing against other participants. You and a few friends might create a friendly wager based on achievements. Compete against yourself, aiming for improved personal records. Remember to compete against negative thoughts or preconceptions about exercise.

Track and measure it. Sometimes tracking measurable factors like weight, body fat index, cholesterol, or endurance provide motivation. Body parts can also be measured – arms, hips, waist. Seeing these numbers move in a healthy direction gives you a positive feeling that helps you keep going.

Set a goal. Whether it's a 5K race, a mini triathlon, or just fitting into a specific pair of jeans, setting a realistic goal can help you persist.

Set a regular time. When you make exercise a part of your normal routine, just like taking a shower or eating dinner, it becomes a fact of life rather than a chore or something you can put off or ignore. Check it off once you've completed your exercise, and watch the number of active days add up.

Getting started with regular exercise is the hard part. Now, with a few more tips on how to make it fun, social, and measurable, you have more tools to help you maintain your activity level.