

How can I make exercise work for me?

Sure, you're ready to start an exercise regimen as part of your new healthy lifestyle, but exactly how are you going to find the time? Fitness experts say that exercising for just 20 to 30 minutes three or four days a week can dramatically improve a person's weight, mental state and overall well-being. So if you think you are too busy to include exercise into your regular routine, consider the following options:

Exercise at home: There are many exercises you can do in the comfort of your own home. A few quick sets of sit-ups and push-ups each day can tone your body. Consider purchasing an inexpensive set of dumbbells and learning some simple exercises to build muscle. Exercise videos and other home exercise equipment can help you get an aerobic workout, as can walking, running, jogging or riding a bicycle. Consider taking part in outdoor activities like hiking as a way to replace sedentary indoor activities such as watching television.

Exercise on breaks from work: Try taking a 20-minute walk at a brisk pace over your lunch hour. If you have stairs in your home, consider making a couple of laps up and down them to get your heart rate up. When you drive somewhere, park in a space farthest from the door. At home or at the office, take occasional short breaks to do push-ups and stretching exercises throughout the day.

Make fitness a priority: To get the results you want from any fitness program, you need to stick with that program on a regular basis. You should not consider exercise as a chore, but as something that improves your quality of life.

Don't take on too much: Like overly restrictive diets, overly ambitious workout goals will only end in frustration and failure. Understand that you are busy and start small, adding new exercises as your fitness and motivation improve.

Winter Hurdles

As it gets colder outside and the daylight hours become shorter, it gets harder to fight the urge to just stay inside, snuggled up by a fire, watching TV or reading a book. You will feel better and have more energy, however, if you stick to your fitness goals this winter. The colder months are a perfect time to wrap up in warm clothes and find an adventure in the crisp invigorating air. Another benefit of winter workouts is greater calorie burn because your body has to work harder to stay warm.

Walking or Jogging

If you enjoy walking or jogging outside, don't allow the cold weather to stop you. Just make a few adjustments as the temperature drops.

- Dress warmly in layers, making sure to cover your head, hands and feet
- Consider wearing a base layer that wicks moisture away from your skin and an outer layer that blocks the wind, rain or snow
- Your winter running or walking wardrobe should include reflective strips or a light due to limited daylight in the winter months
- To avoid injury, do extra warm up exercises; it takes the body a little longer to warm up in the winter
- Keep in mind that streets and sidewalks will be slippery; wear shoes that provide a good grip
- Shorten your stride to provide better balance and traction on slippery pavement
- Drink extra fluids; it's easier to dehydrate in colder weather
- Start into the wind and return with the wind at your back to limit your exposure

Sometimes the hardest part of running in winter is just staying motivated, especially when you find yourself running in the dark and the cold. Try these tips to stay on track:

Set a Goal: Plan to run a 5K or half marathon once the weather warms up, or just try to reach a specific number of miles run each month.

Find a Virtual Partner or Group: Knowing that by not showing up you are letting down others can give you that little extra push you need to get out the door on those cold mornings. Keep track of each other's efforts.

Try Fun Runs: There are plenty of virtual 3K and 5K fun runs during the winter months. Knowing that you're part of a bigger group can take some of the sting out of any chilly wind.

Fun in the Snow

If you just can get motivate to run outside during the winter, you can still get your exercise in by going out to play. Enjoy the winter wonderland by starting a snowball fight, building a snowman, going sledding, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, downhill skiing, snowboarding or ice skating. The best part about these activities is that they don't feel like exercise.

Keep in mind a few tips when enjoying the wintry weather:

Embrace the snow. It will only be around for a few months, so jump right in.

Be careful. Watch out for sleet, black ice and broken concrete.

Bundle up. Wear hats, gloves and wicking materials to stay dry and prevent hypothermia and frostbite.

Moisturize. Drink plenty of water; use lotions and creams; apply sunscreen, especially if you're at high altitudes, like on the ski slopes.