



# CREATING A PHYSICAL 'HEALTHY HABIT'

Exercise is good for your heart, bones, muscles, weight, and sleep.

Staying fit can even help you to live a longer and healthier life. What is not to like?

You'll get more benefits from exercise if you make it a regular habit, rather than a once-in-a-while burst of heavy activity. Even small amounts can do your body some good: Just 10 minutes of aerobic activity each day can lower your risk of heart disease.

If you haven't exercised in a while, don't try to do too much at once. Instead, start slowly building up how long or hard you work out over time.

How do you motivate yourself to turn exercise into another part of your normal routine? Here are a few tricks to make exercise a healthy habit:

## FIND SOMETHING FUN

Choose exercises you like and that are comfortable for you. You're more likely to make time out of your day for a workout, activity, or class if you enjoy it. If music pumps you up, try a Zumba or Spin exercise class. If you like fresh air and trees, plan bicycle rides through the park. If you're competitive, join a local sports team. Try to choose exercises that you look forward to, not something you have to force yourself to do just because it's good for you. Enjoyable activities are more likely to become habits:

- Think about how and where you like to exercise: indoors or outdoors, alone or with a group, at a gym or at home.
- You don't have to do the latest fitness fads that you read about on social media if it isn't right for you. If it suits you to just walk on a treadmill while you listen to a podcast, that's great!
- Do a variety of activities so you don't get into a rut and quit altogether.

## MAKE IT CONVENIENT

Exercise will become a habit when it fits into your normal schedule. If you tend to wake up early, plan to work out in the mornings before you shower. If you usually watch TV in the early evening, keep hand weights nearby so you can do some reps while you catch up on your favorite show.

Try to combine your workout with things that are already part of your daily life:

- Take brisk walks with your dog
- Dance to music while you clean the house
- Climb a few flights of stairs instead taking the elevator
- Have a little extra time? Walk to the shops instead of driving

## PUT IT ON YOUR CALENDAR

Schedule workouts just as you do other appointments. If you plan to do a morning walk or spin exercise class three times a week, put that time into your schedule and let people know you're booked.

Try to set up regular exercise appointments in your calendar:

- Find a workout buddy so you're more likely to show up and exercise
- Create a recurring appointment in your mobile phone or computer so it's always blocked off as time when you're busy
- Set up reminders or alerts that pop up on your phone screen ahead of your workouts

## SET REALISTIC GOALS

You can't form habits overnight. It's a journey. Set realistic goals for exercises and you're more likely to keep it up and make it a habit. Maybe think about creating rewards to help you stick to a long-term workout routine:

- Plan to do five 10-minute walks each week
- Write down your plan and include a reward for when you meet your goal
- Once you hit that goal, reward yourself. Book a massage. Download a new audiobook. Plan a picnic in the park



## STAY FLEXIBLE

Sometimes, your schedule changes. You have a bigger workload. You have an injury. You move to a new home that's too far from your old gym. This can throw you off your workout routine.

Don't give up. You can get back on track. Create new exercise habits if your old ones don't work for you anymore.

Always adjust your workout habits to fit your new normal:

- Find a gym, park, or walking path near your new home
- Sign up for an exercise class that fits into your new work schedule
- If you're getting over an injury or illness, start to exercise again at your new pace or fitness level. Slowly build up your stamina and strength

## TRY TO CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Turn your workouts from temporary 'I'm-bored-in-the-house' into a lifelong habit that you love!

Whether you're a fan of the fitness challenges circulating around or not, challenges are an excellent way to begin a fitness habit and hold yourself accountable to staying on track to hit your fitness goals at home. Whether it's a daily fitness challenge or weekly fitness challenges, take control of developing your fitness habit.

You don't have to go big - adjust your challenges according to your fitness level. They could range from completing 10'000 steps a day to completing a 5km run, nailing a handstand, or even just improving flexibility. Have some fun with it and think about what you would love to achieve over the coming weeks. It will give you something to focus on whilst also keeping your body active and healthy.

## BE CONSISTENT:

Consistency is key! Staying consistent is one of the biggest factors when it comes to developing a healthy habit, especially in keeping workout motivation. And one of the simplest ways to stay consistent is to trick your brain into developing a fitness habit with some simple steps.

Commit to your workouts and position your workout calendar somewhere prominent. Every day you do a fitness activity that moves you closer to your goal, cross out the day and celebrate! There's a simple neurological loop at the core of every habit and it consists of three parts:

- Cue: When you're yet to tick off a workout off your calendar, your brain will register that it's time to schedule something active
- Routine: Get active and get your fitness in the bag
- Reward: The physical act of crossing off another day of fitness will make you glow with success, along with your pumping endorphins

There's a reason why fitness trackers keep a running total of days that you got active. As soon as you start seeing wobbles in your consistency, it spurs you to get moving again and close those gaps.

## ADD VARIETY INTO YOUR HOME WORKOUTS:

At-home workouts can get tedious if you just stick to the same YouTube videos or workout sequence day-in, day-out. Boredom kills motivation.

Once you've got your habit calendar set-up, the next step is to add variety to keep your fitness interest. Studies show that people taking part in a new form of exercise reported higher levels of positive feelings. They also expressed greater interest in regular workouts, rather than those who repeated the same old tired routines.



## **FOCUS ON THE 'FEELS'**

Now more than ever, caring for your mental health is so important. Being isolated at home and not having the usual everyday social interactions can be an intense change of life for many.

Psychologists find that preventing disease, weight-loss and general health improvements were not strong enough reasons to get people to stick to healthy habits and stay motivated to kick goals. Instead, look to the short-term outcomes and immediate rewards, such as improved mood, lowered stress levels and increased energy.

Putting aside time to exert yourself physically can work wonders on your mental state, so be sure to factor activity into your days. Get your blood pumping and work up a sweat or just have some time to focus on yourself through yoga, meditation, or gentle stretching. Hold onto those feels when the endorphins kick in.

Be proud of getting your fitness ticked off for the day - it really is a satisfying feeling.

Notice the positive and rewarding experience of a workout so it becomes something you CHOOSE to do. Not something you HAVE to do. And that's what we're all striving to achieve: a fitness habit that won't ever be a chore.

