

Weight Management: Exercise for Weight Control



When people think of losing weight or staying at the same weight, they most often think "food." They look at changing what they eat. But a big part of managing your weight is exercise.

When you exercise, you burn calories, making it easier to lose or stay the same weight. Exercising also lowers your risk for many diseases, even if you do not lose weight. Being active can protect you from heart disease and may reduce your chance of having high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity, anxiety, depression, osteoporosis, low back pain, and some cancers. If you already have one or more of these problems, getting more fit may help you control other health problems and make you feel better.

The right exercise for you

How do you get started? The first thing to do is find an exercise that you like. It makes no sense to start an exercise that your friends do or that is popular if you do not really like it. To find the right exercise for you, answer these questions:

- Do you prefer being active by yourself or with others?

- Do you enjoy being outdoors when possible, or would you rather be indoors?
- Do you prefer activities that involve some contact or no contact? Contact activities include soccer and basketball. Noncontact activities include walking, aerobics, and cycling.
- Do you prefer to compete with others or with yourself? Or would you prefer not to compete at all?
- Do you feel better in the morning, midday, or evening? Which part of the day will work best for fitting in physical activity?
- How much money do you want to spend on your activity? Think about gear, fees, and other costs.
- Are you willing to take classes or get instruction to learn a new activity?
- Have you talked to your doctor about becoming more active? You may have a health problem that limits what you can do. Your doctor may also suggest activities based on your weight.

Once you have picked an activity, make it part of your life. You can do this by scheduling it on your calendar, much as you would any other important appointment. Make it a priority, and do not let it slide for other activities. Let your friends know when you are doing it, so that they will not ask you to do things at this time. They may even want to join you!

If you have picked an activity like walking, jogging, or cycling, you can make it part of a daily routine. For example, you could walk or bike to work, or drive partway and walk the rest of the way. You could make your lunch hour your exercise time.

What's stopping you?

Even when you know why exercise is important, you may not do it. For a few days or a week, write down why you do not exercise. Then write down how you can overcome this problem. Here are some common reasons and what you can do to change things. Add more as you need to.

- "I have no time." "I am too busy."
You may feel overwhelmed or fear change. Look at other people who are active and are about as busy as you. Talk with them about how they fit in exercise. Think of ways to manage your time better. Try shorter periods of activity spread throughout the day, such as three 10-minute walks.
- "I will look silly." "I am too old." "I am out of shape."
You may fear that you'll look bad or won't know what to do. Take a class with others that look or feel like you do. Avoid places that make you feel embarrassed. Walk, or try an exercise DVD at home. Ask for help from a personal trainer or a friend.
- "I'll have a heart attack." "My knees are bad."
Many people have a fear of injury. See your doctor for a checkup and ask about what you can do safely. Read or talk with others about preventing injuries.
- "What if someone is better than me?" "What if I cannot do it?"
To overcome a fear of failure, set specific goals. If your goal is to become more active than you now are, it will be hard to fail. If your goal is to look like the people in health club ads, then you may not act because this goal is not realistic.

Staying focused

Even if you have made exercise part of your routine, there will be days that you do not feel like it. Try to stay focused and motivated. What motivates you is up to you—everyone responds to something different. Here are a few things you can try to keep your interest up.

- Set weekly or monthly goals you can reach. For example, plan to walk briskly at lunch a few days a week for a certain amount of time. Avoid setting goals that compare you to someone else.
- Keep a record of what you do. Circle the days on a calendar when you exercise. Or use a notebook to write down all the things you do to be active.
- When you reach your first goal, reward yourself with a movie or some gear for your activity. Do not use food as a reward.
- Change your activity. If you find more than one thing you like doing, do them all! For example, on some days, take a walk. On others, ride a bike or take the dog for a hike. An activity like washing the car, housework, or gardening can count as exercise if you do it at a moderate pace.
- If it helps you, find an exercise partner. A buddy can keep you going just by expecting you to show up. He or she can also watch your progress, discuss your schedule with you, or relax with you after a workout. Pick someone who is at about the same level of fitness as you.
- Don't focus on weight. Being active is good for you no matter what you weigh. Check your progress by how you feel, how much energy you have, and how your clothes fit.