

Overcoming Physical Activity/Exercise Obstacles

Can you identify with one of these? If so, talk to your family doctor about it. If you have a concern that is not on this list, tell your family doctor what that is.

“I have no time.”

Start slowly, build it into your day and increase lifestyle physical activity first. To get started, increase your activity only a few minutes a day. A recent study showed that women who walked one hour per week at a rate of 3 mph (one mile in 20 minutes) reduced their risk of heart disease by 50%.

“I’m too old.”

It’s never too late to start! A study of nursing home residents, aged 90 to 96, lifted weights for eight weeks. At the completion of the eight weeks, strength gains averaged 174%, thigh muscles increased 9% in size, and walking speed increased 48%!

“Exercise is boring.”

The trick is to distract yourself with something you like to do: watch TV, tape your favorite movie and watch it only while you’re exercising or listening to music or books on tape. Building physical activity into your day (e.g., walking to work) does not usually pose the same boredom problems as formal exercise. Research shows that people who stick with exercise report that they get less bored as they gain the benefits of feeling better, having more energy and improving health.

“I’m too tired.”

Energy begets energy. If you don’t have the energy to get started, select a time when you know you might have the most energy. Try getting up earlier in the morning so that you can finish and get on with your day, or try starting on the weekend when you may not be as tired. If you repeat exercising enough to make it a habit and gain some benefits, you may be more likely to continue, even when you are tired.

“I’ll have a heart attack.”

The risk of being sedentary is greater than the risk of exercise. The risk of heart attack increases for sedentary people who try vigorous exercise, not for people who start slowly. Most sedentary individuals can begin a moderate exercise program safely. Ask your doctor to discuss your risk with you.

“I don’t like to exercise.”

Reasons for exercising vary: to prevent weight gain, for fitness, or to feel better and more energized. Start slowly with manageable goals and pleasurable activities. Take the dog for a walk or get an exercise bike and use it while watching a movie.

“It hurts.”

It shouldn’t. The new guidelines suggest moderate-intensity activity, not the vigorous, “No pain, no gain” type. If it hurts because of an injury, be sure to discuss this with your doctor. There may be a treatment that could help, or activities that could help avoid the pain. For instance, people with arthritis usually find water activity more comforting, so swimming or a water class may be an option for them. There are also many specialized exercise videos now available, designed for people with pain or other exercise limitations.



“I’m intimidated.”

You don’t need to join a gym to become physically active. Start by increasing your activity level during the day. Build it into your life: park your car away from an entrance and walk, use stairs rather than an elevator.

“Every time I try I quit.”

Changing behavior can be complex and difficult. Physical activity is no exception. It may be helpful to look at the reasons why you failed in the past. What mistakes did you make? What set you up to fail? Have you repeated those same mistakes? What can you do to make it different than before?