

Make Active Habits Stick

FACT SHEET

2024 Annual Lesson Series



If your doctor gave you a prescription for exercise, would you follow it? Exercise is like medicine for many reasons. Obviously, physical activity strengthens muscles, and it also prevents blood vessels from getting damaged and clogged. In turn, this helps prevent heart attacks, strokes, and even some types of dementia. In fact, regular exercise can be as good as medication at preventing diabetes and heart disease in at-risk people. And, it is even more effective than drugs for stroke recovery.

You can realize both immediate and long-term benefits from physical activity. Some immediate benefits include better mood, improved memory, better ability to concentrate, and better decision making. You may feel less anxiety, your blood pressure may be lower, you may have better insulin sensitivity, and exercise can help you sleep better.

Regular physical activity can postpone and prevent many chronic conditions. It can also treat and even reverse some chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Other long-term benefits include a lower risk of depression and anxiety, lower risk of dementia and cognitive impairment, and it aids in maintaining a healthy weight. Exercise can lower the risk of developing some cancers, especially breast, prostate, and colon cancer.

What does “regular” exercise mean?

To answer this question, refer to the *Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans*, which are based on the latest science. They include specific recommendations for different ages and stages of the lifespan. Key messages and guidelines for adults are to move more and sit less throughout the day and to “move your way.” For greatest health benefits, adults should do at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate intensity activity or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic physical activity per week. (Or, use a combination of moderate and vigorous.)

Moderate intensity is working at a level where you can barely carry on a conversation, but not sing. Vigorous is when you are able to say a few words, but not a sentence. Adults should also do muscle strengthening activities that involve all muscle groups on two or more days per week.

How are we doing?

Even though most people are aware of the powerful benefits from exercise, they don’t get enough. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 47% of U.S. adults meet Physical Activity Guidelines for aerobic physical activity and only 24% meet the guidelines for both aerobic and muscle-strengthening activity. In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO) projects the economic burden of physical inactivity to reach nearly \$300 billion by 2030.

So, why don't people get enough physical activity? Some of the common barriers include lack of motivation, not enough time, and lack of access to exercise facilities and equipment. Some people just don't like to exercise or be active, they are too tired, or they are not sure what type of activity is good or how to do specific exercises.

Let's explore some of these barriers to leading an active lifestyle. Hopefully something here will direct you toward a path to make active habits stick.

Barrier – Lack of motivation

Lack of motivation is one of the leading barriers to physical activity. Although many people understand the significant benefit of moving more and sitting less, some individuals just haven't quite found their "why" or they have a negative view of physical activity. The right "why" is the motivator that makes you genuinely want to prioritize physical activity. This comes from within, it's internal. Here are a few ways to move towards more intrinsic motivation:

- Think about the types of activities you truly enjoy. If you dread a certain type of exercise, stop doing it! Focus on activities you enjoy and actually look forward to doing instead.
- Pay attention to the immediate benefits that correspond with any changes in movement you've made. Do you feel more energized? Less sluggish? More focused? Less stiff? These impacts on daily well-being are meaningful because you can see an immediate return on your investment.
- Identify things you value most in your life and think about how moving more and sitting less can contribute to those values. For example, "I value being a productive employee, and I know that taking a daily walk with my dog after work helps me feel less stressed and more focused at work." Another example, "I value time with my grandchildren. I know that stretching, doing some strengthening exercises and walking will help me be more active with them."

Barrier – Too tired to exercise

After a long day of work, some people may be too tired to squeeze in more physical activity or exercise and be tempted to spend the rest of their day sitting. Or, they may have a condition which makes them feel too tired to exercise. Research shows that when you make the conscious effort to be active instead of choosing to sit, your bodies will respond positively. Exercise changes

your brain and rewards you for movement by lifting your mood, relieving stress and pain, and improving your focus. These benefits will only increase when you choose to get active in ways you enjoy and incorporate a warmup with stretches and start slowly. Change your view on exercise and physical activity as a "gift" to feel better rather than a "chore" you must do. If you are too tired by the end of the day to complete an exercise you enjoy, move that activity to the beginning of the day when you have more energy.

Barrier – Lack of facilities and equipment

You may have the impression that it takes a gym membership to become physically active, but it doesn't! If you have the internal motivation to move more, you can get active anywhere. Take it outside and walk on a sidewalk, find a hiking trail, or walk instead of driving while running errands. The opportunities to move are endless when you get creative and seek out ways to move more. Get active indoors by turning on music and intentionally taking more steps when cleaning or take more trips up and down the stairs. Free apps are available to motivate, track, and help you sustain physical activity and exercise.

Barrier – Lack of time

There are 24 hours in each day, and it's up to you to decide how you will best use your time. When you're just starting to become physically active, start small; over time, these changes will become a daily norm. Take a 5- to 10-minute walk around the block during your work break and increase the duration over time to create tiny habits that will make a big impact. It's important to remember that you do not need to get the daily recommended 30 minutes of physical activity all at once. Feel free to break this up throughout the day. Set reminders on your calendar or within a phone app and plan ahead for the day. Making a plan will reduce your chances of staying inactive or allowing work or other tasks to get in the way. An example of planning ahead could be that you have a pair of walking shoes and a hat in your office to allow for walks over lunch. Or, plan to get to work 5 minutes earlier so you can park further away to increase activity.

Support to make active habits stick

Social support

Individuals who sustain active habits often utilize social support. This can be as simple as sharing information, praises, or encouragement, but social support is often most helpful when it comes in the form of an exercise buddy, or someone who will share the load at work and/or home. Self-care is incredibly important. Sometimes all you have to do is ask for help to ensure you can take time for yourself to allow you to take care of others. Here are some ideas to get the social support you need:

- Ask for help around the house or for help making dinner. Ask a friend if they would like to go on a hike or they know of anyone who enjoys hiking. You never know until you ask.
- Utilize online communities for support. Look for groups who have the same healthy living goals as you.
- Talk to coworkers or neighbors to see if they would be interested in a daily or weekly exercise challenge.

Be specific with your social group when it comes to supporting common goals. For example, saying “we will encourage each other to be more active” is too vague, but “we will walk together during our 15-minute morning break on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday” is much more specific.

Plan for setbacks

There will always be periods of time when you get off track. Setbacks come in many shapes and sizes and may last for days or even months. Common triggers for a setback are illness or injury, schedule changes, family responsibilities, weather, holidays, no social or family support, and boredom.

When a setback occurs, be flexible and adapt. Don’t beat yourself up. Go back to your “why” for being active. Take time to refocus and think about the benefits you noticed when you practiced healthful habits. Did you have more energy, did you get better sleep, did you feel more confident?

Next, examine the obstacles that got in the way of practicing these habits. Create an action plan that takes into account the barriers you just identified and start back slowly if you have been inactive for a number of weeks.

(Refer to the K-State Research and Extension publication MF3053, “Action Plan for Healthy Living” for more detail on making an action plan.)

Remember: When you encounter a setback it’s important to focus on activities you enjoy, so being active is a “gift” and not a “chore” you must complete.

Creating the habits

Now that you have a plan of action and know which activities you would like to incorporate throughout your day, it’s time to make them a habit. To create tiny habits throughout the day, make a plan to complete them right after an existing habit is already in place. BJ Fogg, Director of the Behavior Design Lab at Stanford

SITUATION/OBSTACLE:

MY PLAN

University offers the following steps to create your own tiny habits:

1. Think about the tasks you do consistently throughout a typical day, *such as sending an email, text, or making a call.*
2. Then, think about a small behavior (that includes movement) that you would like to do consistently throughout your workday, *such as standing up and stretching.*
3. Finally create your tiny habit: *After I send an email, I will stand up and stretch my arms and legs.*

Tiny habits work because you’re adding the new habit to an existing task you already do. Think about other ways you can fit small bits of physical activity into your day and write them below:

1.	2.
3.	4.

Adapt as you age

Now that you have incorporated physical activity into your daily routine and created a habit of staying active, it’s important to keep with it and adapt as you age. Your preferences for physical activity will change over time so keep an open mind to allow yourself to stay active. Remember your “why” and how important self-care is to not only your health but those you love, and know that your “why” for being active may also change as you age.

Have fun creating tiny habits of physical activity throughout your day and enjoy the stress relief, increased energy, and overall healthier lifestyles associated with moving more and sitting less.

Terms and definitions:

Aerobic physical activity: Involves moving large muscles, such as those in your arms and legs and is sometimes referred to as “cardio” or “endurance.” This activity gets your heart beating faster and you breathe harder. Examples include walking, dancing, biking, tennis, basketball, swimming, etc.

Muscle strengthening activities: Improve the strength, endurance, and power of muscles. Examples include, but are not limited to, pushups, lifting weights, working with resistance bands, squats, and climbing stairs.

Moderate intensity exercise: Activity that raises your heart rate and causes you to break a sweat. When you’re exercising at a moderate intensity you are able to talk but not sing. Examples include, but are not limited to, brisk walking, playing doubles tennis, pushing a lawn mower, light jogging.

Vigorous intensity exercise: Activity that raises your heart rate and breathing more than during moderate intensity exercises. During this rate of activity, you are not able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath. During vigorous intensity exercise, you are not able to sing. Examples include, but are not limited to, running or jogging, swimming laps, biking fast or on an incline, playing singles tennis, or playing basketball.

Resources:

Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans: health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/physical-activity-guidelines

Physical Activity Intervention Research Laboratory, Kansas State University: hhs.k-state.edu/kines/research/pair/

Exercise or Physical Activity, cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/exercise.htm

How Much Physical Activity Do Adults Need? cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/adults/index.htm

WHO highlights high cost of physical inactivity in first-ever global report, who.int/news/item/19-10-2022-who-highlights-high-cost-of-physical-inactivity-in-first-ever-global-report

Physical Activity and Your Heart, nhlbi.nih.gov/health/heart/physical-activity/types

Real-life Benefits of Exercise and Physical Activity, nia.nih.gov/health/real-life-benefits-exercise-and-physical-activity

Four Types of Exercise Can Improve Your Health and Physical Ability, nia.nih.gov/health/four-types-exercise-can-improve-your-health-and-physical-ability

Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything, by BJ Fogg, Ph.D., tinyhabits.com/book/

Action Plan for Healthy Living, Fact Sheet. ksre-learn.com/MF3053

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