

# For Fitness Sake!

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As the holidays come to a close and we begin a new year, often another chapter begins, one where we promise ourselves to get back in shape and get the weight off.

Whether our motivation is to lose weight or look and feel better, the best reason is perhaps is to improve our health. In fact, one of the best pieces of advice I can give to a patient whose sole intent to lose weight, but is having trouble doing so, is to focus on getting healthier rather than the number on the scale.

Even without losing weight or achieving the six-pack, exercise has been proven to lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, colon cancer, breast cancer, lung cancer,

depression and anxiety, and early death, among others. Even more, the positive health effects of exercise include prevention of falls, improvement of cognitive function, increased bone density, and overall better functional health.



As much as we health care providers harp on our patients to get moving, the onus of course falls on the individual patient to find, and keep, the motivation to exercise. Unfortunately it is often hard to find when we work full time or maybe even hold two jobs and are also going to school and not to mention taking care of the family and kids. We can all empathize with that; who isn't exhausted after a long day? The last thing we want to do then is change clothes and hop on the treadmill when we need to get dinner on the table.

The near-infamous New Years' Resolution is great but it is a hard wagon to stay on. The answer is this: Find a way to make exercise part of your lifestyle, rather than thinking of it as something else you need to shove in a day. Here are a few helpful tips to make it happen.

**-Start small.** Often the New Years Resolutions fail because we go from nothing to working out five times a week starting Jan. 1. A sudden change in lifestyle is much harder to maintain than gradually kneading exercise into our lives. So, start small and slowly move up the activity ladder.

Climb the stairs at work a few times each day; sneak a thigh master on your lunch break in your office or under your desk; walk for 10 minutes in the morning before work and then another 10 minutes around the parking lot at lunch. Individuals who engage in brief physical activity such as 15 minutes daily, have a three year longer life expectancy compared to those who are inactive . More exercise is better than less, but even a small amount to start is beneficial.

**-Spread the word, join a group.** Tell your friends, family, co-workers that you're really trying to change. Their encouragement in your new lifestyle will boost your volition to continue it. Even more, consider exercising in groups or join an exercise class. The social support reduces the individual burden of exercise duty.

**-Exercise how you like.** Find your groove: What kind of exercise appeals to you? I suggest starting with brisk walking, jogging, swimming, or a work out or dance DVD, anything that you enjoy and works in your schedule.

**-Mix it up.** Once you find an exercise type you like, find another one with which to mix it up. As humans, we stop doing something if we get bored. This tip also helps if there are certain other prohibitive factors like the weather or the work meeting ran late.

**-Set a goal.** Consider the Couch to 5K app on your smart phone or plan on doing your first 5K run/walk in February, then plan on beating that time in June. Again, instead of setting a weight loss goal, set a fitness goal.

I recommend focusing on aerobic activities such as those mentioned above, to start. These "cardio" workouts are the best to lose and maintain weight loss, reduce your health risks, and live longer.

Once you have worked up to three to four times a week of aerobic activity, strength training, also known as anaerobic exercise, can be filtered in. Strength training such as weight lifting builds lean muscle mass and increases bone density. Light weight lifting is excellent for the post-menopausal woman to fight osteoporosis.

Mostly, remember that as you slowly implement these changes you are weaving exercise into your life. And as you focus on your overall well being with time, rather than an overnight transformation, you are more likely to achieve your goal, which is to take control of your health. Here's to a healthier new year!

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***The health information provided herein is not intended to replace the advice or discussion with a healthcare provider and is for educational purposes only. Before making any decisions regarding your health, speak with your healthcare provider.***

1. [Wen CP, Wai JP, Tsai MK, et al. Minimum amount of physical activity for reduced mortality and extended life expectancy: a prospective cohort study. Lancet 2011; 378: 1244.](#)