

Staying Motivated

Is motivation your biggest fitness hurdle? If you're like most people, knowing you *should* exercise and *wanting* to exercise are two very different things. But you don't have to resign yourself to the attitude that exercise is a necessary evil. In fact, research shows that many people who are long-term exercise "maintainers" keep at it because they have learned to want to exercise, rather than exercising just because they have to.

The secret of these maintainers is called "intrinsic motivation." People who are intrinsically motivated perform behavior for its own sake rather than for the rewards or outcomes the behavior might produce. That doesn't mean it's wrong to want to get healthy, lose weight or increase your longevity through exercise—just that "outcome" reasons like these are unlikely to be enough to keep you exercising for a lifetime.

How can you become intrinsically motivated? Jay C. Kimiecik, PhD, a professor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a consultant on exercise programming for a number of health and fitness organizations, offers these practical tips for learning the *right* way to keep yourself motivated for a lifetime:

Shift Your Focus From the Outcome to the Process. Instead of setting long-term goals that relate to outcomes like weight loss, set goals that relate to participation (i.e., how many times you will work out this month, what type of exercise you will do).

Set a Clear Goal for Each Exercise Session. Don't be vague, or you're likely to focus on boredom, discomfort or other negative experiences. Is your goal for this workout to run fast, focus on

EXERCISE EXPERIENCE FORM	
COMPLETE THIS FORM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER YOUR EXERCISE SESSION. IT WILL IMPROVE YOUR AWARENESS OF THE EXERCISE EXPERIENCE AND HELP YOU FOCUS ON THE PROCESS RATHER THAN THE OUTCOMES.	
How enjoyable was the activity?	_____
Were you satisfied with how you did?	_____
Did you attain your goals?	_____
How well were you concentrating?	_____
Did you wish you'd been doing something else?	_____
Was this activity important to you?	_____
Were you in control of the situation?	_____
Did the activity challenge you?	_____
Did your skill level match the activity?	_____

your breathing, move gracefully or test your endurance limits?

Practice Your Concentration During Exercise. Mental strategies can help you experience "flow," an optimal psychological state characterized by intense absorption in your workout, a clear sense of your goals and a feeling of letting go. Flow is a positive feeling you'll want to replicate regularly. Before you can experience flow, however, you must learn to become aware of how the exercise experience feels to you. Two strategies you can use to increase your awareness during exercise are to concentrate on your breathing (e.g., by inhaling when your left foot strikes the ground and exhaling when your right foot strikes the ground), or to focus on your movements (e.g., by saying the word "left" or "right" every time your left or right foot hits the ground). You can also create your own ways to focus on posture, alignment, breathing or other aspects of your exercise experience.

Tune Into Feedback. Take time after your workout session to note how your

body felt and what you thought about. (See the "Exercise Experience" form.) Did you feel in control, challenged, satisfied? After the session, did you feel happy or sad, alert or drowsy, excited or bored, tense or relaxed?

Balance Challenge With Skill. This is important for avoiding both boredom and anxiety. Make sure your workout is neither so challenging that it makes you uncomfortable nor so easy that it makes you yawn! This requires changing your program as you become more skilled. ●

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