



## **Finding the time to exercise**

According to a report published by The Information Centre on behalf of the NHS<sup>1</sup>, we should all be doing 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity at least five times a week. That's five sessions of walking, swimming, dancing, cycling, gardening or even skating over the course of a week.

### **Making exercise part of your daily routine**

If you walk the dog, do the school run on foot, or cycle to work regularly, the chances are your daily lifestyle helps to keep you fairly fit and trim. But if you don't have a ready-made reason to get active most days, then you may need to think about how you can include some time for exercise in your weekly routine.

For many of us who are already leading busy lives juggling work and social commitments — often while also running a household and fulfilling our family's needs — finding the time and motivation to exercise regularly can feel like the straw that finally broke the camel's back. But there's no doubt that many of us need to change the way we think about exercise and see it as an opportunity rather than a burden.

### **What's stopping us from exercising?**

The Information Centre report shows that in the 12 months from 2005 to 2006, three in ten adults had not taken part in any form of active sport — either because they couldn't find the time, they weren't interested or, more commonly, because their health wasn't good enough. The irony is that the less exercise you do, the less energy you're likely to have.

According to a report published in Psychological Bulletin and reported in WebMD.com, more than 90 percent of studies on exercise and fatigue showed that sedentary people who completed a regular exercise programme reported less fatigue and improved energy levels compared to groups that did not exercise<sup>2</sup>. So if you want to shake off the snoozes, it's time to look lively.

### **Start gently and build up gradually**

At first, you're not aiming to break any records. It's enough simply to start building in five minutes of exercise at a time — perhaps with a short walk — until it feels like part of your daily routine. Then you can gradually increase the amount of activity each day, eventually aiming for half an hour of exercise five times a week.

If you've not exercised for a while, or you're recovering from an illness or having a baby, it's especially important to ease yourself in gently, by gradually increasing the time and frequency that you are active. Nothing is more likely to send you back to the sofa than stiff muscles and a sore ego.

### **What does it take to get you moving?**

Perhaps one of the real barriers to exercise is the idea of doing an, 'active sport'. If the very thought of squeezing into a lycra two-piece makes you lose the will to live, you're hardly likely to be bounding with energy.

Instead, you're more likely to enjoy the experience if you see it as a well-deserved leisure activity, some time for yourself, an investment in your own well-being. You could even find an activity to share with your partner or friends and make it more of a social activity than a physical chore.

### **Find an activity you enjoy**

The secret to getting enough exercise is to pick an activity that you enjoy, rather than a punishing exercise regime. A game of badminton, a trampolining session or a salsa class, is as likely to give your laughter muscles a work out, as it is to get you fit. So think fun, not just fitness.

Once you've found an activity that inspires you, you're already half way to discovering the motivation needed to keep going every week. The good news is, that needn't mean going anywhere near an expensive gym or sweaty sports hall...

### **Get out and get active**

For a free and easy way to get fit, the great outdoors has it all. It costs nothing to enjoy. It offers something for everyone. And it's just on your door-step.

Exercising outdoors also offers a real boost to your mental health and wellbeing —benefits that you're unlikely to enjoy stumbling through a step class with Miss Perfect Pins.

According to a 2007 report by MIND<sup>3</sup>, "Exercising outdoors in a green environment is a lot more effective in enhancing your mood and improving your self-esteem compared to the equivalent amount of exercise indoors.

"Participating in a green outdoor walk can significantly reduce feelings of anger, depression, tension and fatigue, while also making you feel more active and energetic, so it offers an ideal way of getting rid of those blues."

### **Burn off the calories outside**

Being outside can help get rid of excess weight too. For a woman of the average weight (10 stone 3.5 pounds<sup>4</sup>), half an hour's brisk walk will burn off 130 calories<sup>5</sup>. Studies show that walking can also help to control your weight,

reduce body fat and benefit your heart, as well as helping to prevent osteoporosis and type 2 diabetes<sup>6</sup>.

If you're ready for a higher energy work-out, a half hour jog covering two and a half miles would burn off 261 calories, while cross-country running increases your calorie burning to 294<sup>5</sup>.

For the more adventurous, 30 minutes rollerblading works off approximately 228 calories<sup>5</sup>. Cycling at 12 to 13.9 miles per hour could burn off around 261 calories<sup>5</sup>, while increasing the speed to 20 miles per hour would burn off about 522 calories<sup>5</sup>.

### **Reclaim your evenings**

Yes it's true: after a busy day, it's all too tempting just to collapse in front of the television and do nothing more lively than channel surfing. But if you're fed up with reality TV and boring repeats, it could be just the motivation you need to reclaim your evenings and discover how you can boost your energy levels after dark.

Instead of zoning out in front of another season of Strictly Come Dancing/On Ice/Britain's Got Talent, zone in on your own dance moves by checking out the action at a local dance class. It's a fantastic way to enjoy some exercise in the evening, whether after work or after the kids are in bed.

### **Dancing less strictly**

With the wave of interest in dance prompted by the reality shows, there is now a wider range of classes available in more styles of dance than ever before. You can choose a style that involves dancing with a partner — such as salsa, swing and ballroom. Or go it alone with today's street styles — like funk, hip hop and jazz dance.

If you're looking for a fun way to exercise, learn some new moves and meet new people, dancing regularly will boost your health and happiness in more ways than one. You'll be upping your heart rate, as well as toning your legs, bum and tum, all while you're gaining a new skill and literally having a ball.

### **Indulge in a gym membership**

If you're still not sure about getting active outside or on the dance floor, you could of course indulge yourself with a monthly gym membership (preferably without expensive tie-ins). A gym might not be your idea of heaven, but when the weather is wild outside, it could provide a welcome sanctuary for your fitness aspirations.

You'll get advice and encouragement from the fitness instructors. You'll probably find a whole range of different classes available. Plus if you choose a health club with a spa, you may well be able to entice yourself into

developing a regular pilates or yoga regime with the promise of a long, hot soak in the jacuzzi afterwards...

## Summary

- Make exercise part of your daily routine
- The more you exercise, the more energy you'll have
- Gradually increase the time and frequency you are active
- Find an activity you enjoy
- Rethink exercise as a social or leisure activity
- Get active in the great outdoors
- Turn the TV off and do something more interesting instead
- Dance your way to boosting your health and happiness
- Indulge in a gym membership.

## References:

1. Statistics on obesity, physical activity and diet, England 2006:  
<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/opan06/OPAN%20bulletin%20finalv2.pdf>
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3. The mental health benefits of green exercise activities and green care, February 2007:  
<http://www.mind.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/AB6A5D50-5237-42F6-8F7C-A3395EB96B51/0/essexdata.pdf>
4. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3616904.stm>
5. All totals given according to Calorie Burn Calculator at <http://www.csgnetwork.com/caloriesactburned.html>
6. Source: Davison & Grant 1993, US Dept of Health 1996, British Heart Foundation 2000,  
<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/INFO/everyone/health.html>

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A wide range of women's health resources are available at [www.healthywomen.org.uk](http://www.healthywomen.org.uk)

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