

11 ways to fit exercise into your life

Want to get into shape? Of course you do.

Every January begins the same: You vow to eat better, exercise and become healthier and fitter. A few months later you read an article on “bikini bodies by June” and wonder, “What happened to those vows?”

You are not alone. 60 percent of people drop their fitness resolutions within six months of making them. This year, be one of the 40 percent who succeeds. With these 11 steps, it's easier than you imagine.

1) Consistency. Make exercise a part of your life. It doesn't matter what it is or how much, just move your body. Be consistent. Small moves add up and make a difference if performed regularly. No one mastered anything by doing it only occasionally.

2) Fit exercise into your life, not vice versa. A little here, a little there is better than nothing at all. Try to increase your daily physical activity. Take the stairs, park farther away, bring groceries in one bag at a time, pace while you talk on the phone, or conduct meetings standing up. The more you move throughout your day, the more calories you burn.

3) Play. Your child can ride his or her bike or scooter while you run or walk briskly. Throw a ball around together. Hula hoop. Play tag, swim or dance. Make fitness a family affair and everyone benefits, both physically and emotionally.

4) Gather with friends. Instead of meeting at the local coffee house, grab your friends and walk. Go on bike rides together, hike the hills or dance the evening away. There is strength in numbers.

5) Exercise before work or during your lunch hour. Morning and lunch hours at gyms are usually less crowded. Pick a gym close to work so you can shower and head straight (or back) to the office. Exercising earlier in the day can boost your success rate, too, as unscheduled events tend to disrupt evening workout plans.

6) Make workouts shorter but harder. You can make changes to your body and health in a short amount of time, especially if you put some effort into it. Instead of resting between sets, alternate between exercises or circuit train. Work each muscle until it fatigues and train several muscle groups simultaneously. Keep the intensity high when time is premium.

7) Use your heart. Add some heart rate raising elements to your strength-training program. Perform jumping jacks, skips or shuffles between sets, or try bench step-ups. Keep your heart rate elevated during the standing portions of your workout to maximize calorie burn.

8) Less than an hour? No problem! Block out 30-minutes for exercise most days of the week. Work your core and lower body one day, upper body the next, cardiovascular system the following. You will be surprised at how much you can accomplish with a minimal investment of time. Find the hour of day that works best for you and be consistent.

9) Do it with love. Indoor cycling? Martial arts? Tennis? Boot camp? Aquatic fitness? Find a form of exercise that really appeals to you. If you anticipate the workout, you are more likely to stay true to it in the long run.

10) Fake it 'til you feel it. Instead of considering exercise punishment, treat it as, well, a treat. Look forward to your workouts — they are a break from your stressful day. They boost your mood, give you time for yourself (or to socialize with other like-minded individuals) and help you feel energized. Tell yourself how much you are looking forward to your sessions. Pretty soon you will believe it.

11) Consistency. A typo that consistency is repeated twice? No, because consistency is the key. Once you begin to skip workouts, return to elevators instead of stairs and no longer walk the kids to school, the days turn into weeks, the weeks turn into months and the months turn into years - years of doing nothing. Do something as many days of the week as you can, even if it's only 10 or 15 minutes. Day after day of some form of exercise will reap rewards, but day after day of nothing will not. It doesn't have to be long, it doesn't have to be that hard, but it has to be regular.

About your resolution? You, and only you, have the power to make this year's resolution stick. Do it. And have a fitter 2008.



About the Author:

Helen M. Ryan is an ACE-certified personal trainer, Spinning® instructor, and freelance fitness writer. She can be reached at helen@trainertoyou.com.

Written by HELEN M. RYAN