Keys to Staying Physically Active

Once you have made the decision to become physically active or increase your activity, keep in mind these keys to success.

1. Enjoy what you are doing. One of the secrets to maintaining physical activity over time is to choose activities you enjoy! Some people prefer structured classes, others need to be productive or purposeful, while still others work hard at recreational activities. Many do a combination. The important thing is to want to do it more!

   “[Walking with friends is important] for the accountability of doing it. But you just had me trigger a thought. When I would walk by myself, back in my high school days, I think it was better for me ‘cause then I didn’t have the stress of thinking of all the stuff we talked about. Like sometimes we do get into some pretty big issues when we’re talking and walking. So probably to get a real good high out of walking, I need to do it by myself.”
   
   Female, mid 30’s

   “I really enjoy walking if I plan to, . . . [but] if I get to the far end of the ranch somewhere, and the pickup won’t start, and I have to walk home, when I get home I am just fuming.”
   
   Female, mid to late 70’s

   “When I think of walking, I don’t think of it as being exercise. I think of it as getting to go visit with somebody.”
   
   Female, early 40’s

2. Choose activities that you are comfortable doing. If you do not feel safe in water, water skiing may not be your top choice for frequent activity. To feel safe and comfortable, increase intensity, frequency and duration gradually as you are ready. Abusing your body with excessive exercise can lead to injuries and/or feelings of self-punishment.

   “I kind of outgrew the basketball because there’s too much danger of getting injured.”
   
   Male, almost 60

   “I do more walking [than running]. Running hurts my knees more and more.”
   
   Male in his 40’s
3. **Fueling your body is crucial.** For some people, being physically active is not enjoyable because they start being active at the same time they start a diet. If you increase physical activity while simultaneously starting a diet, energy level will likely be low. Without fuel, physical activity is not invigorating. It becomes a chore and is not much fun. It is increasingly difficult to be physically active when you are underfed, especially if carbohydrate intake is too low.

4. **Celebrate yourself!** The important thing is to move. When you are physically active, give yourself a pat on the back and know that you made a choice for better health.

   “I enjoy [physical activity] . . . just because it's a break from the regular day. It's some time to just focus on me and to work on something to improve myself.” *Female in her 30's*

   “When I am physically active . . . it helps me emotionally. . . . I think it even helps me with my confidence. . . . Even though I can't fit into the jeans that I fit into when I was running marathons, if I'm physically active, I feel a lot better about myself.” *Female in her 20's*

**Motivational Ideas:**

- Post your goal where you will see it often (bathroom mirror, calendar, kitchen cupboard).
- Place an inspiring note on your refrigerator or work area.
- Find a coach or mentor who has been successful at the behavior change you’re attempting.
- Be a coach or mentor for someone else.
- Record your feelings about your progress daily – perhaps each night before going to sleep.