

GET ACTIVE, STAY ACTIVE

Health and Wealth

Invest for life!



After a long and cold winter, you're feeling lousy because, once again, you have failed at your attempts to keep up your New Year's resolution to be physically active. Perhaps you're lying in bed, upset because you slept through your early-morning workout. Or, maybe it's the end of your workday, and you're scolding yourself because you didn't go for a walk during your lunch break. How are you going to get motivated to be more active, you wonder?

It's common to feel unmotivated to be active during the period between New Year's and the warmer summer weather. However, even someone new to physical activity can combat this problem with a little preparation and guidance. Here are some tips to help you overcome the obstacles you face in rekindling and maintaining your motivation:

1. Set goals. Establishing goals using the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-limited) approach can energize your attempts to make regular physical activity part of your life.

Specific - Be specific about the new behaviour that you want to adopt. For example, a goal to begin a walking program is better than a general desire to be more active.

Measurable - Set a benchmark for success, such as "I will walk 30 minutes at least three times a week for one month". Chart and document your progress toward your goal.

Achievable - The goal should be challenging - neither too easy nor too hard. For example, aim to increase the pace of your 30-minute walk instead of increasing the time walked during the second month.

Realistic - Be realistic about what you can achieve with the time and energy that you have. Assess your current fitness level and set your goals accordingly. A number of short-term, "mini-goals" can be better than a single, long-range goal.

Time-limited - You should be able to achieve your goal within a set time. If your goals are too open-ended, you may procrastinate or become bored. In general, goals set for longer than 6 months are too long to keep you interested and motivated.

2. Find a buddy. If you're having trouble sticking to your plan, find a partner. You'll be less likely to cancel a physical activity session if you have a friend who's relying on you. Write down dates to be active in your diary and commit to them as if they were medical appointments or work-related meetings.

3. Choose enjoyable activities. Not fond of a certain activity? Then don't do it. If you are a solo-sports oriented person, don't force yourself to do group exercise classes. If you dread going to the gym, don't sign up for a club membership. You'll be more inclined to stick with a plan if you're doing activities that you enjoy.

4. Try something new. Sticking to one form of physical activity can get monotonous, so shake up your routine to prevent boredom. Also, regularly switching from one type of physical activity to another is a good way to maximize health benefits and avoid injury. Three types of activities should be included in your routine:

Endurance activities help your heart, lungs, and circulatory system stay healthy and give you more energy. Examples include walking, cycling, swimming, and dancing. Aim to participate in endurance activities 4-7 days a week.

Flexibility activities help you to move easily by keeping your muscles relaxed and your joints mobile. This includes gentle reaching, bending, and stretching actions, such as yard work, yoga, and Tai Chi. Aim to engage in flexibility activities 4-7 days a week.

Strength and balance activities help your muscles and bones stay strong, improve your posture, and help to prevent diseases like osteoporosis. Weight and

strength-training routines, spring house cleaning, and heavy yard work are some examples. Aim to take part in strength training and balance activities 2-4 days a week.

5. Every little bit counts. For good health and to maintain a healthy body weight, Canadians of all ages should accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity on most, if not all, days of the week. But, if weight loss is your goal, you should increase activity to 60 minutes on at least 5 days of the week. Accumulate "active minutes" throughout the day to reach your goal (e.g. in blocks of at least 10 minutes added up throughout the day). Also, make use of everyday opportunities to increase your physical activity levels, such as taking the stairs or parking further away from your final destination.

6. Reward yourself. Sustain your motivation by rewarding yourself for reaching your goals. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, like a nice meal or new exercise gear. Share your accomplishments with family and friends; their encouragement will motivate you to continue working toward your goals.

Whether you're getting ready to conquer your lack of motivation or just looking to get active in preparation for the summer, consider the tips provided above and commit to an active lifestyle for you and your family.



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