

Making a new exercise program work for you.

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Most people will agree they believe that exercise is good for them because we intuitively know that it is. Why then do only 8% of men and 3% of women in the USA do any regularly scheduled exercise? Many people who actually start a fitness program only continue for several weeks then stop. Anyone can get in an exercise rut where inspiration and motivation drops, and there are many reasons for this. Most people will agree they feel great, or at least a lot better, when they regularly exercise. And most people will agree that once they have stopped exercising for any length of time it becomes exponentially harder to get going with it again. Ok, so we know the reasons why we need to exercise, eat right, balance work and relaxation, and we know that when we do we are all the better for it. So what's the problem? I will devote a series of articles in the future on this topic because it is big, and it is important. Of course you can read articles until you are blue in the face, but the fact is something needs to change. A change in your list of priorities, and this involves lifestyle changes, no small task but certainly achievable. This starts with coming up with your "compelling why". Your "compelling why" is more than just goals. Goals (other than just exercising itself) may be to lose weight, improve your body shape, reduce chronic back pain, the list could be endless. Not to say goals are not important. In fact they are absolutely necessary and will determine how you go about doing what you need to do. No, I am talking about your "compelling why". For example, why is losing weight important to you? Really explore this and see where it goes. Possibly you are starting to suffer from reoccurring knee pain that is a result from carrying additional weight. If you project down the road a bit you may see if this progresses it may interfere with your ability to enjoy the outdoor activities that are important to you, play active games with your kids or new grand child, or could lead to more widespread chronic conditions that would affect the quality of your life and possibly those around you. Your "compelling why" needs to be deep and palpable. Sometimes initially it is easier to make changes in and for ourselves for someone else's benefit, like our children. What ever is a very deep motivation is important. It will get you through the tougher beginning times until the benefits of your changes take hold and the habits of the past are in the past. If you don't have your "compelling why" you don't have any reason to go to the gym, take that walk, or make the changes you need to make.

You'll never feel any real sense of accomplishment and absent of any sense of accomplishment it's going to be hard to enjoy your routine or stick to it. This may all sound very difficult, but really it is not especially when approached with help, guidance and support.

Now that you have connected and explored your "compelling why" it's time to set some basic goals. Setting a goal helps you design your program and to track your progress. Having a goal that is reasonable and achievable is very important. It becomes a great motivator and just as the sight of the finish line gives a runner the strength to make the final dash at the end of the race, as you get closer to achieving your goal you'll feel more drive to go to the gym or do your exercise program. Having help setting your goals can be very important. Many people starting a exercise program feel overwhelmed as to where to start and what specifically would benefit them. For example, if you want to lose weight and improve your body shape, contrary to popular belief, I would recommend resistance training, not cardiovascular exercise as the primary mode. Resistance training builds muscle, which has the highest metabolic rate of all our tissues. The more muscles you have, the more calories you burn, even when resting! Cardiovascular training does the opposite, and tends to take muscle off your body. Now many women might say they don't want to bulk-up and look like a body builder. By adjusting your program accordingly this would not happen, even though you would be adding muscle mass. If however your concern is a family history of cardiovascular disease and you want to do what you can to avoid this for yourself, then it is important to include cardiovascular exercises that will address this (in a safe fashion).

Once you've set your goal, you need to make achieving it fun. For some of us exercise is an exciting part of our day, but anyone is subject to boredom of repetitive exercises. Of course doing anything repetitively without variety tends to get old pretty quickly. This is a sticking point for many people. So to keep motivated it is important to have variety of different methods to keep your exercise routine interesting. As an example of applying the variety principle to any activity lets take walking for instance.

1. Change your route regularly.
2. Alternate between walking briskly for a given period (1-3 minutes for example) and at a more relaxed pace for the same period.
3. Alternate the terrain. Find some trails, walk through the park, find hills , take short cuts.
4. Get a dog and take it for walks, or offer to take your neighbors dog for a walk.

5. Have a walking buddy.
6. Get an inexpensive pedometer and see if each week you can total more steps (this includes at work, shopping, and doing errands).

All exercise counts. You will be surprised at how creative you can get, and how much better you will start feeling. Comparing your starting baselines every couple weeks with your progress will be reinforcing. Over time you will learn enough about exercise and know enough exercises to keep it interesting.

If you get stuck or unsure how to proceed, or lack inspiration, ask for help. Hire a fitness professional to design a personalized exercise program for you, that you can then do by yourself at your gym or at home. You can check in when you need the help and support or to learn new exercises. Make sure you select a well-trained professional who will listen to your goals and help you to reach them, not someone who will just give you the latest one-size-fits-all fad workout.

So to keep yourself fit and healthy remember this simple formula. Find your "compelling why", set a goal and make getting there fun. Add a little variety to your workouts and you'll find yourself getting results that you never thought possible.