

8 TIPS FOR MAKING FITNESS A HABIT



W E L L N E S S S E R I E S

Introduction

It's tough to become one of the fitness faithful. Starting an exercise routine is easy. Millions of people do it every day. The problem is with sticking to a workout program or exercise schedule. Sometimes life just seems to get in the way and before you know it, your unquenchable desire to get fit, lose weight, look and feel great, and improve your health fades slowly away.



This often happens because you attempt to adopt some exercise program that doesn't fit into your schedule. Other times you start off too quickly, not matching your initial entry into exercise with your current level of fitness. Wouldn't it be great if there was some proven way to make fitness an unconscious habit in your life, so without even thinking about it on a daily basis, you looked after your health?

Actually, there are several ways to do exactly that.

You just have to make fitness and exercise a habit. Habits take time to form. That means in the beginning you will have to consciously stick to some plan of action. Then over time, instead of being a conscious effort, a habit becomes an unconscious and automatic performance, behavior or action. When you take the necessary steps to habitually get in shape, lose weight, look after your health or pursue some other aspect of fitness, and you do so automatically and regularly, you have a much greater chance of succeeding in your endeavors.

The following 8 tips, techniques and tactics help you create automatic fitness habits out of conscious behaviors. This means getting fit, which may be something you have struggled with in the past, becomes a part of your regular routine. Regular fitness efforts can positively impact you mentally, physically and emotionally, so let's get started with some strategies and practices that can help you achieve your fitness goals.

(While mental, emotional and spiritual fitness are certainly important, this short report is focused primarily on physical fitness.)

1 – Focus on feeling good and being healthy, and not achieving a particular set of numbers.

Dr. Diane Klein wondered why some people would no sooner skip their regular exercise routine than miss eating on a daily basis. Alternately, why do many others have such a problem sticking to a fitness plan?

She began her research by asking long-term fitness fanatics who had worked out regularly for an average of 13 years their secrets to success. A great majority of the men and women she polled said they were not trying to attain a particular waist size, a certain weight, or some other numerical, physical metric.

They wanted to be healthier, which would in turn make them feel good mentally and physically. This was the premier reason why they stuck to their exercise plans day after day, month after month, year after year. If you focus on losing 20 pounds or dropping 4 inches off of your waist, it seems that is not the best path to success to make fitness a long-lasting habit.

Focus on fitness itself, the act of exercising and working out, rather than some specific, measurable goal. If you do this, the numbers you are looking to achieve will fall into place.

2 – Focus on several activities, not just one.

Developing habits that stick often means taking boredom out of the equation. As you are well aware, maybe in your own experiences, giving up on a workout program is easier when it doesn't engage you mentally. One way to make sure you never become bored in your fitness efforts is to constantly change your routine.

One day you may lift weights, the next day you enjoy walking or hiking, and the following day is spent competing in a local sports league you joined. Aside from keeping your brain happy and boredom-free, you benefit physically from "muscle confusion". Repetitively exercising in the same routine, with the same motions, limits your physical rewards.



When you continually change the type of stress you are putting on your body and the body parts you engage (confusing your muscles with different types of movement and exercise), you promote overall fitness.

Participating in many enjoyable fitness-related activities rather than just one also has an added bonus – you can always find something to do to make physical health a habit regardless of the weather, and whether you are at home, at work or traveling.

3 – Share your commitment.

People report feeling lower levels of self-esteem when they skip a workout. When they skip several in a row, there is a very real danger of chucking any fitness plans altogether. Wanda Stevens is a stay-at-home mom a living in Austin, Texas. She uses her friends as a way to make sure she sticks to her exercise plans.

She says that there are often times in her busy schedule when she would like to miss a planned exercise routine. So what she does is get someone else to join her in her commitment. She can rationalize to herself that taking a day off is no big deal.

However, if she has committed to joining a friend in some type of fitness activity, she simply will not let them down. Share your commitment with a friend or family member who also wants to improve their fitness level, and remind each other of the dedication you both have made when one of you feels a little lazy.



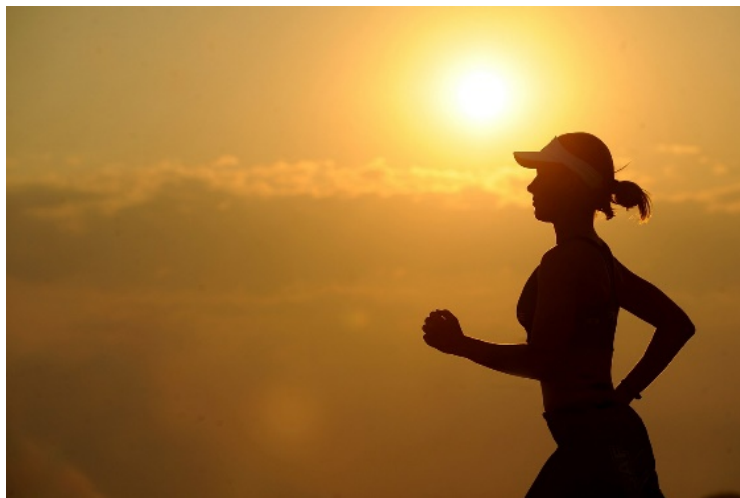
4 – Exercise before you do anything else in the morning.

When you first wake up your mind and body are fresh. Before you fill your brain with the many disturbances, interruptions and daily responsibilities you have to schedule, get out and get moving. This is an age-old "trick" that delivers an extremely high success rate in making fitness a habit for the long-term.

If you have children, get up before they do. Go to sleep an hour earlier, and wake up an hour earlier the following day if you have to. Consciously repeat this behavior for 3 to 4 weeks, performing your exercise routine in the morning before you do anything else.

If you want to work out at a gym or health club, find one that is located between your home and your work. Establishing this "first thing in the morning" habit means committing to your fitness before the world has a chance to interfere.

This means not checking in on Facebook, powering on your smartphone, pulling up your email, watching the local morning newscast or fixing breakfast first, and then exercising. Get up, splash cold water on your face to wake up, and start your fitness program.



5 – If fitness first thing in the morning is impossible, prioritize it after work.

You will find this harder to do than if you employ the previous tip. However, some situations do not allow for early morning fitness plans. If this is your scenario, exercise on your way home from your job or workplace. Just remember that you should never, ever, ever go home first after work, with the intention of hitting the gym afterwards.

Subconsciously, this could be a way for you to supply yourself with excuses that crash your workout plans.

As mentioned in the above tip, find a fitness avenue that is located between your workplace and your home. If you have to pack a change of clothes, a towel, and any fitness equipment or accessories before work, do so. This means you leave work and immediately exercise, before your cozy couch and health-hindering television can interfere.

6 – Start recording everything.

Did you know that habits are easier to develop when you involve as many of your 5 senses as possible? When you write something down, you are engaging your vision and your sense of touch. If you want to make this process even more successful, as you journal your activities, plan them, and record the results, speak what you are writing out loud.

You can alternately write down your fitness schedule, and then the results you achieve, and read your journal aloud every night before going to bed and every morning upon waking. Whenever you measure anything, your mind senses this as an important activity. Simply logging every planned exercise session, and the experiences and the results you experience, goes a long way to reinforcing fitness as a regular habit.



7 – Notice, and congratulate yourself for, small wins and fitness victories.

It is easy to notice progress when you have to buy a new pair of pants that is two or three sizes smaller than you used to wear. When you step onto a scale and notice 20 pounds of weight loss, that is another clear indication that you are doing something right.

You should also be on the lookout for mini-indicators of progress as well.

Regular physical activity offers a slew of benefits. Sleeping better, being able to focus more clearly and having more energy that doesn't come from refined sugar or some other unhealthy, man-made concoction are all signs that your health is improving. Look for these minor symptoms of physical fitness and good health, as they just may be the smaller, more frequent rewards you need to appreciate to stick to a regular fitness program.

8 – Buy a reliable pedometer.

There are plenty of pedometer applications you can download to your smartphone. Some phones come loaded with these types of fitness trackers and others. Pedometer apps and software that tracks the number of steps you take that work with your smartphone or tablet are not the most accurate pedometers.

If this is the only type of pedometer you can access, do so by all means. As mentioned earlier, anytime you measure and track something, you engage your brain, and this routine can quickly become a positive habit. If you have as little as \$10 to \$30 to invest, it is recommended that you buy a standalone pedometer device. They are much more accurate than mobile electronics applications that do the same thing, and having one on you is a reminder to walk more.

You carry your phone on you anyway, so it is easier to forget that there is an application on your phone tracking how many steps you take.

Keep your pedometer on you at all times. You may be surprised to find that you are consciously checking your step count a dozen or more times a day. This simple and inexpensive fitness tip will have you walking more and sitting less, in a daily effort to log the recommended 10,000 steps a day that lead to multiple health rewards.

