

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Making Exercise a Part of Your Life



Making physical activity or exercise a habit can be a challenging task. There are a few critical issues you should consider to ensure long term adherence to your exercise program.

What motivates you?

Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivators or your desire to do something based on internally motivated reasons, rather than relying on or requiring external factors. These motivators tap into reasons for change that are personally meaningful to you, either through enjoyment inherent in the activity itself or through associated values and priorities that are important to you.

We all have unique reasons which compel us to make that initial 'health' change. However, it is essential to understand why you want to exercise as this is what will keep you motivated when life becomes too busy.

These reasons can be very specific like the examples below:

- Running a half marathon in under 1 hr 45 mins
- Fitting back into an old pair of jeans

They may simply be things that have happened or that you have thought about recently:

- Having your first child

- Alarming information gathered in your last health assessment, after speaking with health professionals eg. high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol
- Death of someone very close to you by a lifestyle related disease e.g. heart attack
- Seeing someone's quality of life reduced due to poor mobility e.g. fractured hip because of weak bones

How to be SMART when goal setting!

There are many different goals an individual can set in order to achieve a particular health outcome. *General goals* relate to the benefit you want to achieve and these are the ones we normally tend to set (e.g. "I want to lose weight"). However, it is imperative to set a *specific goal* that involves the action or behaviour you are going to incorporate into your lifestyle to achieve your overall general goal (e.g. "I am going to walk home from the train station every second day").

There are also other factors which have an impact on effective goal setting and they can be remembered using the SMART principle.



SMART Principles

Specific – Make your goal detailed, not general. Make your intention and method very clear.

Measurable – How will you track your progress with your specific goal? Apply numbers to it.

Attainable – Ensure the goal is within your scope and you have the tools and/or resources to actually achieve it.

Realistic – Setting goals that are too big can be detrimental. Consider what is realistic within the time-frame you have set.

Time-bound – Be sure to set a time frame. If there's no end point, then there's no accountability for getting it done by a particular date.

An example of a SMART goal would be: "I am going to go for a 30-minute brisk walk in the evenings after work, 3 days a week and track progress starting from Monday".



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Minimising the barriers

The traditional approach is that you need to remain highly motivated to adhere to an exercise program. Unfortunately, we hit many "speed bumps" in our life, which are referred to as *barriers*. These barriers then lead to what is known as "motivational fatigue". The classic example of this is joining a local gym. You begin working out 4-5 times a week, but after a while, barriers get in the way and eventually you can't remember the last time you went to the gym.

Listed below are a few common barriers most people face and how you can overcome them.

- **Lack of time:** No two weeks are the same but dedicate some time on a Sunday to plan how you will fit in your physical activity for the week. Keep your options open. For example, if you have a commitment that takes up one of your planned 30 minute sessions, you could do an extra 15 minutes on 2 sessions the following week to make up for lost time.
- **Lack of energy:** Research has shown that exercise has been found to increase energy levels post exercise, releasing endorphins which make you feel better. As a bonus exercise has also been shown to improve sleep patterns!
- **Unfavourable weather:** Unfortunately we cannot control the weather but we can control when we exercise. Getting out at lunch time can be a great way to avoid the cold weather in winter a exercising in the evening is a great way to bypass the heat of summer. During those wet raining days, have a think about what you could do around the house to stay active (e.g. step ups or strengthening exercises).

- **Lack of equipment:** Be creative! Think about what equipment you do have and what you can do with it. If you are thinking of adding resistance training to your program, you may want to purchase free weights or join a local gym.
- **Boredom:** After a while, any exercise program can become boring therefore it may be important to change facets of your program. Try something new like that dance class you've been thinking about or recruit peer support in the form of family, friends or pets, all of which have been found to be effective strategies to overcome this barrier.

GROW with your exercise program!

The GROW principle can help you defeat many of the previously mentioned barriers and assist you in setting an agenda for fitting exercise into your lifestyle. The GROW principle can help you take your general goal (e.g. losing weight) and help refine it into a specific goal with a detailed action plan.



GROW Principles

General goal: What do you want to work on and achieve? At this point ask yourself deep down why you want to achieve this goal and figure out your intrinsic motivators to keep you on track.

Reality: What are you currently doing regarding the general goal? What have you done in the past? What were the barriers in the past and what has helped you overcome these barriers? What works for one person may not work for another. Thus, it is important to think about what will fit into your lifestyle and what you could do should barriers arise.

Options: What are all the potential ways you can achieve your general goal? Generate a list of options to tackle your general goal. It may be a good idea to brainstorm ideas and then assess what is feasible for you.

Write it down: This is where you assess all your options and generate an action plan for the upcoming weeks. Think about the steps needed to achieve the goal and cues or prompts to keep you on track. It is also important to have support from family and friends, which will come in handy in those tough times. Most importantly, you also want a back up plan in case things are not working or life just gets in the way. Remember to track your progress!