

Top ten tips for motivation and change

Are you one of those people who feel that they need to or would like to be more physically active? It doesn't have to be the first of January for you to make a pledge to be more active for your health. Now is as good a time as any. Would you like a few pointers to help you on your way?

1. Make personal reasons list

Rather than general stuff about 'getting a bit fitter', your list should be specific to you e.g.

I am going to do more physical activity because...

- I want to be able to play with my grandchildren.
- I want to be able to walk to the shops without getting out of breath.
- I want to follow my doctor's advice to lower my blood pressure.
- I want to feel comfortable about my appearance in public.

2. Think 'challenge' not 'barrier'

It's easy to make excuses e.g. the weather, lack of time, too tired, 'don't know where to go', 'don't have the right gear'.

Rather than look upon these issues as insurmountable barriers, think of them as challenges to be overcome i.e. turn negative issues into positive ones.

3. Choose an activity you enjoy and will keep doing

There is no point in choosing an activity to help you improve your health if you don't enjoy it – you'll probably give it up and become de-motivated. So, choose something you actually enjoy doing and will continue to enjoy. Even better, enjoy several different activities; variety is the spice of life, after all.

4. Set achievable and intermediate goals

If you can't run round the block yet, then 'I'm going to run the London Marathon' just might be an unachievable goal. If you don't do anything at the moment, then 'I'm going to the gym five times a week, starting tomorrow' is probably not realistic. So, be reasonable when setting goals e.g. 'I'm going to jog round the block by the end of next week' followed eventually (if you achieve the first intermediate goal) by 'I'm going to complete the local Race for Life'. It would also be sensible to consult your doctor if you have previously been inactive for a long time.

5. Be flexible

Having planned an activity, it's not the end of the world if due to unforeseen circumstances you have to cancel it: you can do something else instead or re-schedule the planned activity. Every little bit of activity helps.

6. Avoid 'all or nothing'

This relates closely to the previous two points: don't give up if you can't do everything you want to do. It's not 'all or nothing'. You'll still feel the benefits from doing some of it. Perhaps you've given yourself too much to do and need to re-evaluate, or maybe it's just a bad week!

7. Integrate active living into your day

Regardless of how many scheduled or 'formal' activities you do, you can become more physically active by including short tasks within your everyday routine e.g. use the stairs, take stretch breaks when working at your desk, park the car further away from the supermarket doors, leave the car behind when you can etc. These short tasks just take a little thought and will have a positive, cumulative effect on your physical health.

8. Exercise with a friend

Well done if you're a very self-motivated person. However, most of us appreciate a bit of friendly help. You and a friend can motivate each other and help each other along. You're more likely to succeed through not wanting to let your friend down.

9. Keep a record

A few simple notes in your diary of type of activity, how long it took and how you felt can help you progress. It's well known that self recording can lead to a sense of achievement.

10. Reward yourself

Look forward to rewarding yourself with a treat such as a meal out or a new item of clothing but only when you have achieved at least an intermediate goal! How about putting a pound in a piggy bank every time you exercise, then look forward to spending it when you hit your targets.