

How to Exercise and Lose Weight on a Busy Schedule

Whether their goal is to lose weight, gain muscle, stick to a diet plan or program, improve their cardiovascular health, or simply to maintain their current fitness level many people all have one common enemy---TIME.

For most of us, the #1 challenge in the quest to stay in shape and/or lose weight is not exercising itself but being able to actually fit an exercise program into our busy schedules.

So how do you do it? How do you balance the demands of family, career, important errands, relationships, organizational responsibilities, and working out? I have found that there are five keys that will help you to be able to fit a consistent workout plan into your already hectic life.

1. **Commit to a specific schedule**

When you fail to plan you plan to fail. Don't try to haphazardly fit your workouts into your schedule without any rhyme or reason. Don't think you're guilty? If you've every told yourself "I'll workout as soon as I get some time", you were in direct violation of this key principle.

In order to set yourself up for success, you will need to take the time to literally write your workouts into your weekly schedule. In order to be effective, you will want to be following your exercise program at least 3 days per week. Anything less would be kidding yourself.

Therefore, right in the midst of all of your appointments, "to-do" lists, etc., should be a *written* plan for your weekly workout routine, so that you will never be in the dark as to when you committed to yourself to go.

2. **Utilize the weekend**

Take advantage of the fact that it only takes 3-5 days per week to put together an effective, results-producing workout. One trick to help you pull it all off is to workout on the weekends. One of the benefits to this course of action is that your schedule is more flexible and under your control during this time.

What is also means is that when the hectic weekdays roll back around, you will only be responsible for working out 1-3 days during the work week.

3. **Keep your workouts as a high priority**

One of the biggest mistakes that even many people who have scheduled a workout program into their schedule make is allowing it to be bumped off of their schedule to easily.

Although things will occasionally come up that will cause you to have to reschedule the workout you had planned, you must be vigilant in making sure that only the most important emergencies are allowed to temporarily take you off of your plan.

In the event that one of those important emergencies does happen and you can't make it to your workout, reschedule with yourself to make it up on the next possible day that you are available to do so. If your own health, fitness, and efforts to lose weight are not a priority to you, they certainly won't be so to anyone else.

4. **Enroll others in your goals**

Don't go at this alone. Let the important people in your life know what you are up to. You love interest, spouse, parents, children, co-workers, and close friends will often pitch in and help you to meet your fitness or weight loss commitment to yourself if you make them aware and ask for their support.

Leverage these relationships to delegate some of your normal responsibilities or even allow you to shift appointments that you have with them as you restructure your schedule for your workout. If any of them are into exercise or trying to lose weight themselves, don't hesitate to form a buddy system with them as you move forward with your program.

5. Don't beat yourself up

No matter who you are, there will be times in your workout program that you just aren't able to keep it up as you would like due to outside demands. Don't be too tough on yourself on this.

Remember that it is what you do *consistently* over a long period of time, not what you do in spurts, that truly counts. Just make sure that you get back on the horse full force as soon as you can and continue to press forward, doing your best to avoid slacking off again.

No matter what goals you have for health, fitness, or weight loss, you CAN fit an effective exercise program into that hectic schedule of yours and be amazingly successful at getting the exact results that you want!

Exercise 101

Exercise benefits, guidelines and principles for weight loss and health

At its most basic, exercise is any type of physical exertion we perform in an effort to improve our health, shape our bodies and boost performance. Obviously that covers a broad range of activities and, luckily, there are plenty to go around whether you want to lose weight, get healthy or train for a sport.

The Benefits of Exercise

I could (and will) go on and on about all the things exercise can do for you, both physically and mentally. The great thing about it is that you don't need much to get the benefits. Even just a few minutes a day can improve your health, well-being and help you:

- Lose weight
- Reduce stress
- Relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer
- Boost your mood
- Give you more energy
- Help you sleep better
- Increase bone density
- Strengthen the heart and lungs
- Improve your quality of life

Motivating Yourself to Exercise

While it's important to know basic exercise guidelines and principles covered on the next few pages, I think the most important step in starting an exercise routine is exploring the idea of motivation. Without that, all the advice in the world won't do you any good. It's important to remember that motivation doesn't just happen. It's something you make happen each and every day. If you have multiple reasons to exercise, you'll always have something to get you moving, even when motivation is short. The hardest part of exercise is getting started...if you can get that far, you've won half the battle. Some ideas:

- Remind yourself of your weight loss goals
- Think of a future event to get ready for (a wedding, a vacation, etc.)
- Consider how much energy you'll have to get more things done
- Imagine how relaxed you'll feel after a workout
- Think of your exercise time as the only time you may get to yourself all day
- Remind yourself how good you'll feel by following through
- Promise yourself a reward for completing your workout
- Think of all the diseases and illnesses your workout could protect you from
- Remind yourself that this workout is necessary to reach your goal

The Basic Principles of Exercise

There are some basic principles that govern the world of exercise, and knowing them can help you set up and manipulate different components of your workout.

The F.I.T.T. Principle

FITT is an easy way to remember the exercise variables you can manipulate to avoid boredom and to keep your body challenged:

- **Frequency** - how often you exercise
- **Intensity** - how hard you exercise
- **Time** - how long you exercise
- **Type** - the type of exercise you're doing (e.g., running, walking, etc.)

When you workout at sufficient intensity, time and frequency, your body will improve (also called the **Training Effect**) and you'll start to see changes in your weight, body fat percentage, cardio endurance and strength. When your body adjusts to your current FITT levels, it's time to manipulate one or more of them.

For example, if you've been walking 3 times a week for 20 minutes and you've stopped seeing improvement, you could change your program by implementing one or more of the following ideas:

Frequency - Add one more day of walking

Intensity - Add short bursts of jogging, speedwalking or hill training

Time - Add 10-15 minutes to your usual workout time

Type - Do a different activity such as cycling, swimming or aerobics

Changing any of these variables every 4 to 6 weeks can help you keep that training effect going.

Progressive Resistance (the Overload Principle)

In order to improve your strength, endurance and fitness, you have to progressively increase the frequency, intensity and time of your workouts. A simple way to stimulate your body is to try different activities. If you normally walk on the treadmill, try riding the bike which will use different muscles and allow you to burn more calories. If you've been doing biceps curls with dumbbells, change to a barbell.

Specificity

This principle is just how it sounds...how you exercise should be specific to your goals. If you're trying to improve your racing times, you should focus on speed workouts. If your main goal is simply health, fitness and weight loss, you should focus on total body strength, cardio and a healthy diet. Make sure your training matches your goals.

Rest and Recovery

While we often focus on getting in as much exercise as possible, rest and recovery is also essential for reaching your weight loss and fitness goals. While you can often do cardio every day (though you may want to rest after very intense workouts), you should have at least a day of rest between strength training workouts. Make sure you don't work the same muscles two days in a row to give your body the time it needs to rest and recover.

Cardio, Strength Training and Flexibility Guidelines

How much and what type of exercise you do will depend on your fitness level, goals and time constraints, but a complete exercise program should include cardio, strength training and flexibility exercises.

Cardio Guidelines

Cardio exercise is any rhythmic activity performed continuously and can include activities like walking, running, aerobics, cycling, swimming and dancing. Cardio strengthens the heart and lungs, increases endurance and burns calories which helps you lose weight. While you should always stick with a cardio program that fits with your fitness level, the general guidelines for cardio exercise include:

- 20-60 minutes of continuous or short-bout exercise
- 3-5 days a week
- Working between 77% and 90% of your maximum heart rate
- Varying the intensity, time and type of your workouts

You don't have to do all your cardio at once.

Strength Training Guidelines

Strength training is another form of exercise that works the body in a different way than cardio. With strength training, you lift weights (dumbbells, barbells, resistance bands, machines, etc.) to strengthen the muscles, bones and connective tissue. Strength training is just as important for weight loss as cardio. By lifting weights, you build lean muscle tissue which raises metabolism and reduces body fat as long as you're also watching your calorie intake.

The general guidelines for strength training are:

- Choose 8-10 exercises, targeting the major muscle groups (lower body, chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps and abs)
- For beginners, do one set of 8-16 reps of each exercise to fatigue. More advanced exercisers can do 2-3 sets.
- Train each muscle group 2-3 non-consecutive days a week
- Work each exercise through its full range of motion and use good form

Flexibility Guidelines

While stretching is often the most overlooked exercise, it's one of the most important for keeping us agile as we get older. And, unlike the rigors of cardio and strength training, it's relaxing and it feels good. Stretching can be done anytime throughout the day, but it's also important to stretch after your workouts, especially if you have any chronically tight areas. The guidelines for stretching are:

- Stretch your muscles when they're warm (after your warm up or, even better, after your workout)
- Do static stretches with a focus on tight areas such as the hamstrings and lower back
- Stretch a minimum of 2-3 days a week...even better would be every day
- Stretch within your range of motion. Stretching shouldn't hurt.
- Hold each stretch for about 15-30 seconds and do 2-4 reps of each stretch

Don't forget that yoga workouts are a great way to both stretch your body at the same time you build endurance and promote relaxation and stress-reduction. Pilates also promotes flexibility along with core strength and stability. Both of these activities are a great addition to a traditional cardio and strength training routine.

Test your Fitness IQ

Whether you're new to exercise, or consider yourself to be a fitness expert, you can always learn something new about working out. This quiz will test you on general topics of cardio exercise, strength training, and flexibility. What are you waiting for? Test your Fitness IQ!

1

What type of rhythmic exercise uses large muscle groups continuously?

- A - Yoga
- B - Aerobic exercise
- C - Cardiovascular exercise
- D - Muscular endurance training
- All of the above
- B and C only
- B, C, and D

2

There are 5 components of fitness. Which of the following isn't one of them?

- Body composition
- Warm up
- Aerobic fitness
- Flexibility
- Muscular strength
- Muscular endurance

3

How many aerobic (cardio) exercise sessions should you aim for each week?

- 1-2
- At least 3
- 7
- As many as you feel like

4

True or False: Your workouts don't have to be continuous. You can break them up throughout the day into smaller segments (at least 10 minutes each) and achieve the same benefits.

- True
- False

5

How much water should you drink during a workout?

- Drink when you feel thirsty
- It depends on how much you sweat
- 8 ounces every 15-20 minutes

6

Which of the following is an appropriate warm up?

- A - Stretching before exercise
- B - Walking at a moderate pace for 5 minutes
- C - Doing several lightweight repetitions of a strength training exercise
- All of the above
- A and B only
- B and C only

7

When is the best time to stretch?

- Before you workout
- After you workout
- Any time of day

8

What might happen if you don't properly cool down after exercise?

- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Blood pooling
- Muscle soreness
- All of the above

9

How high should you elevate your heart rate during an aerobic (cardio) workout?

- As high as possible—100%
- Between 85% and 95%
- Between 60% and 85%
- Moderately—about 50%

10

True or False: You should do cardio for at least 20 minutes per day.

- True
- False

11

Inactive people who do not strength train will lose _____ of muscle per year, starting after age 20.

- 0 pounds
- 1/4 pound
- 1/2 pound
- 1 pound

12

How often should you strength train with each major muscle group?

- Once a week
- 2-3 times a week
- 4-5 times a week
- Everyday

13

Which of the following factors affect your flexibility level?

- A - Age
- B - Gender
- C - Level of activity (exercise history)
- D - Temperature
- All of the above
- A and D only

14

True or False: As long as you're working hard, you don't need to change your workout routine.

- True
- False

15

You should get clearance from your doctor to begin an exercise program if you:

- A - are pregnant or nursing
 - B - have a chronic condition
 - C - are overweight
 - D - are middle-aged or older and have never exercised before
 - E - are a smoker
 - All of the above
 - A, B, D, and E only
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