

## Overcoming Barriers to Physical Activity

*“If you can find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn’t lead anywhere.” —Anonymous*

Given the health benefits of regular physical activity, we might have to ask why two out of three (60%) Americans are not active at recommended levels. There are barriers that keep Americans from being, or becoming, regularly physically active. Understanding common barriers to physical activity and creating strategies to overcome them may help you make physical activity part of your daily life.

### Suggestions for Overcoming Physical Activity Barriers

#### Lack of Time

- Identify available time slots. Monitor your daily activities for one week. Identify at least three 30-minute time slots you could use for physical activity.
- Add physical activity to your daily routine. For example, walk or ride your bike to work or shopping, organize school activities around physical activity, walk the dog, exercise while you watch TV, park farther away from your destination, etc.
- Make time for physical activity. For example, walk, jog, or swim during your lunch hour, or take fitness breaks instead of coffee breaks.
- Select activities requiring minimal time, such as walking, jogging, or stairclimbing.

#### Social Influence

- Explain your interest in physical activity to friends and family. Ask them to support your efforts.
- Invite friends and family members to exercise with you. Plan social activities involving exercise.

#### Lack of Energy

- Develop new friendships with physically active people. Join a group, such as the YMCA or a hiking club.
- Schedule physical activity for times in the day or week when you feel energetic.

#### Lack of Motivation

- Convince yourself that if you give it a chance, physical activity will increase your energy level; then, try it.
- Plan ahead. Make physical activity a regular part of your daily or weekly schedule and write it on your calendar.
- Invite a friend to exercise with you on a regular basis and write it on both your calendars.

#### Fear of Injury

- Join an exercise group or class.
- Learn how to warm up and cool down to prevent injury.

#### Lack of Skill

- Learn how to exercise appropriately considering your age, fitness level, skill level, and health status.
- Choose activities involving minimum risk. Select activities requiring no new skills, such as walking, climbing stairs, or jogging.
- Exercise with friends who are at the same skill level as you are.
- Find a friend who is willing to teach you some new skills.
- Take a class to develop new skills.

## Suggestions for Overcoming Physical Activity Barriers (continued)

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| <b>Lack of Resources</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Select activities that require minimal facilities or equipment, such as walking, jogging, jumping rope, or calisthenics.</li><li>■ Identify inexpensive, convenient resources available in your community (community education programs, park and recreation programs, worksite programs, etc.).</li></ul>  |
| <b>Weather Conditions</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Develop a set of regular activities that are always available regardless of weather (indoor cycling, aerobic dance, indoor swimming, calisthenics, stair climbing, rope skipping, mall walking, dancing, gymnasium games, etc.)</li><li>■ Look on outdoor activities that depend on weather conditions (cross-country skiing, outdoor swimming, outdoor tennis, etc.) as “bonuses”-extra activities possible when weather and circumstances permit.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Travel</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Put a jump rope in your suitcase and jump rope.</li><li>■ Walk the halls and climb the stairs in hotels.</li><li>■ Stay in places with swimming pools or exercise facilities.</li><li>■ Join the YMCA or YWCA (ask about reciprocal membership agreement).</li><li>■ Visit the local shopping mall and walk for half an hour or more.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Family Obligations</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Bring a small tape recorder and your favorite aerobic exercise tape.</li><li>■ Trade babysitting time with a friend, neighbor, or family member who also has small children.</li><li>■ Exercise with the kids-go for a walk together, play tag or other running games, get an aerobic dance or exercise tape for kids (there are several on the market) and exercise together. You can spend time together and still get your exercise.</li><li>■ Hire a babysitter and look at the cost as a worthwhile investment in your physical and mental health.</li><li>■ Jump rope, do calisthenics, ride a stationary bicycle, or use other home gymnasium equipment while the kids are busy playing or sleeping.</li><li>■ Try to exercise when the kids are not around (e.g., during school hours or their nap time).</li></ul> |
| <b>Retirement Years</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Encourage exercise facilities to provide child care services.</li><li>■ Look upon your retirement as an opportunity to become more active instead of less. Spend more time gardening, walking the dog, and playing with your grandchildren. Children with short legs and grandparents with slower gaits are often great walking partners.</li><li>■ Learn a new skill you’ve always been interested in, such as ballroom dancing, square dancing, or swimming.</li><li>■ Now that you have the time, make regular physical activity a part of every day. Go for a walk every morning or every evening before dinner. Treat yourself to an exercycle and ride every day while reading a favorite book or magazine.</li></ul>   |

Source: Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.