

How To Make Exercise Work For You

By Paul Chek

Ask anyone you meet in the street or at work if they believe that exercise is good for them and you're likely to get the intelligent answer, "Of course!" Why? Because we all intuitively know that exercise is good for us. So why do only 8% of men and 3% of women in the USA do any regularly scheduled exercise? The figures for New Zealand are definitely better, but the percentage of people doing any type of regular physical activity has declined over the past decade, rather than increased. As a reader of NZ Fitness you probably do some type of daily exercise, but more than likely know someone who doesn't or who starts a fitness program, only to stop a few weeks later. And anyone can get stuck in an exercise rut, where our inspiration and motivation drops. As a man in love with the life process and very well informed as to the necessity of exercise for physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health, it is my sincere desire to share one of the methods I've learned in my career regarding how to make exercise work for you.

SET A GOAL THAT IS MEANINGFUL TO YOU!

Before you start any kind of gym routine or workout program, it is always important to set some sort of goals (other than just exercising itself). If you don't have a reason to go the gym, you'll never feel any real sense of accomplishment and absent any sense of accomplishment it's going to be hard to enjoy your routine or stick to it. Setting a goal also helps you to track your progress. And just as the sight of the finish line gives a runner the strength to make the final dash at the end of a race, as you get closer to achieving your goal you'll feel more drive to go the gym or do your exercise program.

When you have a goal in mind, it is also much easier to choose exercise types as well as exercises. For example, if you want to lose weight and improve your body shape, contrary to popular belief, I would recommend resistance training, not cardiovascular exercise. Resistance training builds muscle, which has the highest metabolic rate of all our tissues. The more muscles you have, the more calories you burn, even when resting! Cardiovascular training does the opposite, and tends to take muscle off your body. This is particularly related to the fact that prolonged steady-state type cardiovascular exercise, such as running on a treadmill at a constant pace for 30 minutes, stimulates high levels of stress hormones called glucocorticoids. Glucocorticoids are antagonistic to strength and muscle development. On the other hand, sprinting can have the opposite effect since it stimulates anabolic or tissue-building hormones, provided your sprinting program is properly designed. The difference in exercise types explains why distance runners and sprinters have different bodies. Distance runners tend to be so skinny because their training is antagonistic to building muscle, while sprint training is anabolic and results in the heavily-muscled sprinter's body.

Although many people's motivation to exercise is to lose weight or drop dress sizes, your goal does not need to be esthetic at all. It may be to take your kids camping, get in shape to play for your local touch rugby team, dance the night away at your 25th high school reunion or simply come home after work each day and have energy to enjoy your hobbies. Whatever you choose it

must be important to you otherwise when it is “inconvenient” to exercise, your goal will not be enough to motivate you to get up and get out there.

GET EXCITED ABOUT YOUR GOALS!

Once you’ve set your goal, you need to make achieving it fun. For some of us, exercise is an exciting part of our day. Those that love to exercise typically know enough about exercise and know enough exercises to keep it interesting. But if you do anything repetitively without variety, it gets old pretty quick. That’s the sticking point for lots of people, especially if you aren’t an athlete or experienced in the gym. So to keep motivated, you need to be able achieve your goals using a variety of different methods to keep your workout routine interesting. Now you may be saying, “But I don’t know how to do anything in a gym and I’m not an athlete...” That’s OK. We can apply the variety principle to any activity, such as walking. Here are a few ideas to make walking more enjoyable:

- * Change your route regularly.
- * Alternate between walking briskly for a given period (1 to 3 minutes for example) and at a more relaxed pace for the same period.
- * Alternate the terrain. Find some trails, walk through the park, find hills, take short cuts.
- * Get a dog and take it for walks. Or, get a big dog and it will take you for walks! There are plenty of people who would be happy to lend you their dog from time to time!

If you don’t have much of an exercise aptitude due simply to lack of exposure, there are many things that you can do. To begin with, most gyms have a variety of classes going on and the methods of exercise range from the calmer and less invasive yoga and Pilates methods, all the way to cardio kickboxing. Try out different classes with different instructors and find the ones that appeal to you. Then add these into your exercise routine. Classes can also be helpful if getting to the gym is a challenge for you; since they start at a set time you have an external motivation to get there on time.

Don’t let the fact that you don’t have a gym near you or the fact that you may be unfamiliar with a gym get in the way of setting fitness goals either! Both of these problems are easy to fix. If you don’t live close to a gym, you can reach your goals with a few simple pieces of equipment, like the Swiss ball and a bit of knowledge. To get you started, my article in the last issue of NZ Fitness has a whole circuit based on Swiss balls. If you want to improve your strength and stamina at work, or for most sports such as soccer, touch rugby, tennis, netball, snow sports, or even golf, keep your eyes open for my next article on medicine ball training. There are also numerous books and DVDs available to help you achieve your fitness goals at home or at a fitness facility.

Whether you exercise at home or at a gym, there are now more exercise toys and tools than ever before as well. As I mentioned earlier, the Swiss ball is great piece of equipment that can be used in all sorts of ways. You can also incorporate medicine balls, wobble boards, Bosu balls, and functional exercise machines like the Pro Fitter. Not to mention the virtual smorgasbord of cardiovascular conditioning machines. If you are an elliptical trainer addict for example, try a rowing machine for a change. Many of these toys are inexpensive, can be delivered direct to your

home or are available in many gyms and can provide fun exercise alternatives to avoid boring repetition in your routine.

If you really lack inspiration, then hire a fitness professional to design a personalized exercise program for you, that you can then do by yourself at your gym or at home. Make sure you select a well-trained professional who will listen to your goals and help you to reach them, not someone who will just give you the latest one-size-fits-all fad workout!

So to keep yourself fit and healthy remember this simple formula. Set a goal and make getting there fun! Add a little variety to your workouts and you'll find yourself getting results that you never thought possible before.

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