

Six steps to creating your exercise habit

By Sarah Bolitho

You know exercise is good for you. You know all the benefits of being more active. You also know that being inactive is not good for your health. But what you may not know is how to include more exercise in your already busy life.

Regular exercise is an important habit to create, and it is the 'regular' that is the hard part, so here are six steps to help you create that exercise habit:

1. **START where you are.** There is no way you will go from doing no activity or exercise at all to an hour a day overnight. Start with 10 minutes – or even five – twice a week at the same time and build up gradually from there. Do this for one or two weeks, then add another day, then increase to 15 minutes and so on. Before you know it, that half hour a day will be part of your daily life.
2. **MAKE it fun.** We keep doing what we enjoy doing, so make sure you add enjoyment into your activity. Listen to a podcast, walk with a friend, pick a walking route with spring flowers, follow an online class that feels manageable – whatever makes you look forward to your activity or exercise session makes it more likely you will do it.
3. **STAY consistent.** Do something at the same time each day. If possible, schedule it at the start of the day, even if this means getting up 15 minutes earlier, as then it is done and won't get side-lined by other daily chores or commitments. If this is not possible, or realistic, choose a time that is convenient – for example, on your coffee break (take your drink with you), after lunch or before the afternoon school run. Treat it like a dentist appointment or brushing your teeth and write it into your diary for the same time of day. This means it is more likely to become a habit that sticks.
4. **GET ready.** Get everything you need ready the evening before. It only takes a minute to lay out your kit for a walk, a cycle, the gym or a yoga session but it means you can get up, get dressed and get going.
5. **KEEP going.** It takes more than one day to create a habit, so give it your all for at least three weeks – longer if possible. This is why choosing something you enjoy is so important, as you will want to do it. And track your progress every day – including how much easier it gets to complete your activity and any benefits you start to feel.
6. **BE realistic.** As with any change, be realistic about what you can do; if you have never run before, then don't start with running – start with walking. If you want to improve flexibility, start with a simple routine for your tightest muscles once a day, increasing gradually to include other muscles and longer stretches. If strength is your goal, then bodyweight exercises will get you going before you move onto resistance equipment or weights. Start small and progress slowly but regularly and, as you get fitter or stronger or more supple (or whatever you want to achieve), you will develop the motivation to keep going. But those small steps are vital at the start!

Remember that any change is more likely to be successful and sustainable if you start small and stay consistent. It can take upwards of 21 days to create a new habit and 60 or more to make it stick, so take it a day at a time and see how quickly it becomes a regular habit.