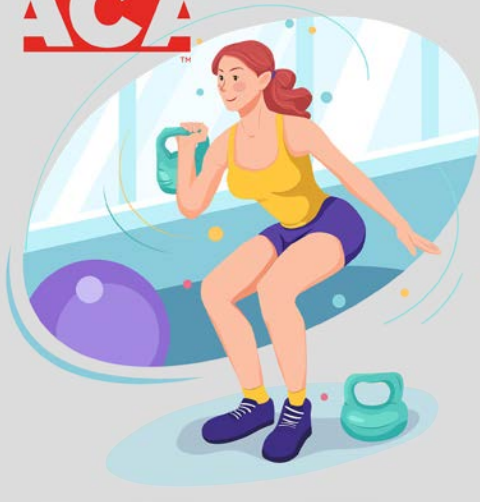


Healthy Living



How to Get Moving

Maintaining a consistent exercise routine is important, but physical activity recommendations of 30 minutes a day or 150 minutes a week can be daunting for people who have been inactive for an extended period. How do you start an exercise routine? Mathew DiMond, DC, DACRB, EMT, FICC, a member of the ACA Council on Physiological Therapeutics and Rehabilitation, shares some of his tips on how to get moving and keep moving, especially after a period of inactivity.

What Happens When We Are Inactive?

“Brief periods of inactivity usually aren’t that big of a deal,” Dr. DiMond says. “However, with COVID, there have been a lot of people that, on some end of the scale, used it as an opportunity to be more stationary and less active in general.”

Periods of inactivity can happen for a variety of reasons: illness, injury, surgical procedure, or simply a lack of exercise. Our bodies respond differently depending on our baseline fitness and level of inactivity, but there are some general effects that commonly occur due to inactivity. “Long-standing inactivity will lead to more fatigue, tiredness, and lethargy,” Dr. DiMond explains. “Physiologically speaking, if you’re left for weeks, months, certainly years, that will create changes in baseline vital signs: resting heart rate, respiration, metabolic needs and demands. Depending on where you are in the lifespan, muscle fiber types can start to change, and that can be of detriment. In the more elderly population, decreasing load demands can have a negative impact on the quality of compact bone.”

For these reasons, it’s important to start moving again after a period of inactivity. But it can often be difficult to get started.

Start Moving...

Dr. DiMond’s first tip for getting active is a simple one: just start. “First and foremost, you just have to start doing anything. Whatever it is that you’re willing to do,” he says. To start out, it’s important to find an exercise routine that’s right for you. “It doesn’t matter what it is, as long as you’re starting somewhere and you’re doing it. You have to do the thing that you’re going to be willing to do. Make it fun.”



...And Keep Moving!

After getting started, the most important thing is consistency. “The human body, and the human mind for that matter, like normalcy,” Dr. DiMond explains. “Wherever you currently are is what your body likes to do. That initial effort can be monumental as a requirement to actually get going. Being consistent with it will create that habit that we’re ultimately going for. We want a habit of physical activity so that we can ensure that it’s embraced throughout the lifespan.”

Picking an activity that you enjoy can make a huge difference in your ability to remain consistent with your exercise. Dr. DiMond also recommends finding a way to stay accountable. “For example, one of the things I love so much about CrossFit is that there’s a huge social component to it. People like it so much because they get to do it with other people. There’s a community, and that really helps inspire, drive, and motivate people to focus on their health goals and move forward.”



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Be Safe

Starting to move again after being inactive is important, but it's also important to do so safely. Overexerting yourself can lead to injury.

"Some people used the pandemic as an opportunity to be more active. There was a bit of a shift because people weren't going to work, and because they were home more, they were trying new things, new exercises. Because of that, there was a bit of an uptick in certain exercise-induced injuries because people were exercising too much compared to what they were used to."



Dr. DiMond says that after a period of inactivity, you should assume that your capacity for activity will be diminished. It's important to be aware of your limits and focus on what works for you, rather than trying to compare yourself to anyone else or to your previous fitness level. It's also important to be mindful of any pain you experience while exercising.

"You know your body," Dr. DiMond says. "Pain is a good thing; it tells us that something is starting to be wrong. Not that you necessarily need to change, but you probably went a little too far. Back off and make sure that whatever it is you're doing, you're doing it at a comfortable level."

Stay Motivated

Just as exercise can improve our mental health, inactivity can also have a mental impact. Like everything in our bodies, our mind is a tool and we have to keep it sharp. By not moving, you're not challenging your brain to interact with its environment in new ways. Mental agility is about interacting with your environment in meaningful ways. Moving around and interacting with different people and environments help keep our minds agile.

The mental effects of inactivity can also come into play when you start moving again. Motivation can be a challenge for people who start to move after a period of inactivity. "Willpower is not enough," Dr. DiMond says. "It's not an endurance muscle. It's something that can be used to get you started, but it's definitely not going to be what keeps you going long term."

Dr. DiMond encourages people to define their goals in terms of "what" instead of "why." Ask yourself what you are trying to accomplish and create metrics based on that goal. Do you want to run a 5K? Do you want to walk your dog every day or be able to pick up your grandchild? Determine your "what" and set metrics to achieve it.

"An initial goal to start moving is great, but the motivation that gets you started won't necessarily be the motivation that keeps you going. Reevaluating your goals and finding new ones can help keep moving you forward. It ultimately comes down to identity: how do you see yourself? What you tell yourself every day matters. Find the goals and the true spirit of what you're trying to accomplish. But the bottom line is, just get started."



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