

# Overcoming exercise hurdles

How to conquer six obstacles that can get in the way of being active.

**O**ur bodies are built for physical activity. Movement and regular exertion can trigger healthful changes in almost every cell type, tissue, and organ system. Going without exercise contributes to a long list of health problems, especially during and after middle age. Yet most American adults don't get the minimum amount of aerobic exercise recommended by health and fitness experts and government guidelines. They suggest the equivalent of 30 minutes of moderate exercise, such as brisk walking, or 15 minutes of vigorous exercise, such as jogging or swimming, five days a week, plus two sessions of strength training to build muscle.

One reason might be that exercise can seem more daunting than it actually is, especially if you're older or have chronic health conditions. Here are some easy steps to get you started.

## "I NEVER HAVE ENOUGH TIME."

Slightly more than half of the unsuccessful exercisers in a 2004 survey of 21,750 readers by CONSUMER REPORTS blamed a lack of time for preventing them from exercising. Successful exercisers, on the other hand, made exercise a priority.

An easy way to begin is by making everyday routines more physically active. For instance, try walking or bicycling to work, even if only partway. If that's too much of a leap, start parking a few blocks from the office, store, or other destination to get in more walking, and take the stairs instead of the elevator.

A few brief bouts of moderate exercise can be as beneficial as one longer, continuous workout for improving aerobic fitness and maintaining a healthy weight. So without having to carve out time for a half-hour on a gym treadmill, you can get a similar benefit from walking for 10 minutes before and after work—to and from the train station, for example—and adding a 10-minute walk at lunch.

If you join a gym, choose one that's close to your home or workplace, preferably within two to four miles, to minimize

travel time. To save even more time—not to mention money—skip the health club and set up a home gym. You don't need fancy equipment; a few dumbbells or resistance bands, a stability ball, and some exercise videos or DVDs will do nicely.

## "I'M TOO OLD TO START NOW."

It's never too late to start exercising for aerobic fitness and muscular strength. One study followed inactive men who started exercising at age 50. By age 60, they had achieved survival rates comparable to men who had been active for far longer. No matter how old you are, your muscles will respond quickly to training. Men and women in their 80s and older who started resistance training in clinical trials gained strength as rapidly as younger adults did.

If you're a man over 45 or a woman over 55 and have been sedentary, you should get a physician's clearance before jumping into a vigorous workout routine. Even for moderate exercise, it's best to consult a physician first if you have arthritis, diabetes, or another ongoing health problem, or if you've had symptoms like chest pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath.

## "MY HEALTH ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH."

Exercise is a proven treatment for diabetes, depression, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, peripheral vascular disease, and other problems common in older age. In a clinical trial involving people with osteoarthritis of the knee who did weight training, for example, pain scores fell by nearly 50 percent and walking speed over uneven ground almost doubled after eight weeks, compared with people in a nonexercising control group, who saw no improvement.

Many frail, chronically ill people and their caregivers assume, incorrectly, that exercise isn't safe. But only a handful of health problems make exercise out of the question, such as retinal detachments, spinal instability, a recent heart attack, and extremely advanced heart failure.

