

# Finding Time for Fitness

Thinking about getting more physically active? That's good. Regular exercise improves physical health and mental wellbeing. It significantly reduces the risk of heart disease and other life-threatening conditions. It helps with reaching and maintaining a healthy weight and staying mobile and self-sufficient later in life. And yet, a large percentage of Americans don't get the recommended 30 minutes or more of exercise per day, most days of the week.

## *Step one: assess your priorities*

If you think you're too busy to spend 30-60 minutes per day being active, keep a log of everything you do for a week so you can identify blocks of time you could swap for or combine with exercise. Do you watch two hours of television per day? Trade some of that time for playing your favorite sport, or set up a treadmill or exercise bike in front of the TV. Do you meet with friends several times a week for lunch or coffee? Turn your coffee dates into power-walks. Once you've identified blocks of time that are conducive to getting active, schedule four to five half-hour time slots for exercise. Start slowly, and consult your doctor before beginning an exercise routine.

Say you've tracked how you spend your time for a full week and it only proves what you knew all along: virtually every waking hour is filled by obligations. The challenge to find time (and energy) to exercise is real and daunting. But you can do it, and here's how.

## *All work and no play...*

With some jobs, you never see the light of day let alone the inside of a gym. If that's your situation, use one or more of these tips to make time for exercise:

- **Get up earlier.** Not everyone's a morning person, but try it and you might surprise yourself. Get up early, roll out of bed and hit the gym or the running trail. Or take a brisk walk to your favorite coffee shop.
- **Use your commute.** Can you walk or bike to work? You can also consider parking further from the office or getting off the bus a few stops from work.
- **Take a mid-day exercise break.** Put it on your calendar and treat it like any other meeting or appointment.
- **Don't go straight home!** Instead, grab a healthy snack after work and then join a pick-up game or swim a few laps before heading home.
- **Do not work weekends if you can help it.** If it's unavoidable, at least set a limit on the number of hours you'll work, and stick to it. Plan something active, such as dancing, gardening or hiking, for every weekend.



## Working parents

What if you work full-time and have kids? Hopefully you've spotted tips you can use in the sections above, but here are a few extra ideas especially for you:

- **Steal ten minutes here and there.** Park further from your destination or get off the bus a few stops early; take the stairs instead of the elevator; wear a pedometer and try to increase the number of steps you take every day.
- **Go outside for 10 minutes with the kids** even though it's almost dinnertime. (Once you've mustered up the energy it takes to get out the door with little ones, you might find the outdoor play refreshing and want to stay out longer.)
- **Play!** Freeze dance, duck-duck-goose and tag can get your heart rate up more quickly than you'd imagine, so you can get in a decent amount of activity with a few 15-minute games per day.
- **Turn Saturday or Sunday into a family adventure day** and see what fun, active adventures you can dream up: hiking, biking, kite-flying, visiting an amusement park, challenging your older kids to a game of kick-the-can. Anything that gets the whole family moving!

This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral health care advice, or as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

## Need Help?

Looking for more ideas? From daily living services to stress management, your EAP can help you keep up with daily demands and find time for exercise.

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