

Bench These Six Exercise Excuses

The benefits of exercise are many—equaled in number only by our excuses for avoiding it.

Just one in four U.S. adults works out at low to moderate intensity for 30 minutes most days of the week or at vigorous intensity for 20 minutes three days a week. Those are the levels the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends.

"People will find any excuse for not exercising," laments Heather Moreno, author of *Achieving Physical Wealth*.

Some of those excuses—I weigh too much, I'm too old, I have too many health problems—are in themselves strong arguments for increasing physical activity. It's harder to see through other reasons that show up in surveys asking why people don't exercise.

Moreno and Gillian Hood-Gabrielson, a California fitness motivation coach, suggest these ways to work around the most common excuses.

"I don't have the time"

This is the granddaddy of exercise excuses. With the demands of work, family, and other obligations, it seems plausible. Except when you consider that lack of exercise—and the poor health that follows—can affect the quality of every waking moment. Here's how to overcome the excuse:

- Make exercise a priority. If you think of exercise as being as important as brushing your teeth or any other "essential" routine, you'll find time.
- Avoid the "all or nothing" trap. If you can't find 30 straight minutes to work out, try for three 10-minute blocks—or even one 10-minute block. A little exercise is better than none. Be flexible.
- Incorporate movement whenever you can. Walk instead of driving. Climb stairs instead of riding the elevator. Do calisthenics, stretch, or ride an exercise bike while you watch television.

"I don't have the energy"

This is the catch-22 of excuses. In most cases, exercise gives you more energy. Here's how to get beyond this excuse:

- Gauge your true energy level. Tell yourself you're only going to exercise for five minutes, and if you truly don't have the energy to go on, you'll stop. Most likely you'll find that you feel better and want to keep going.
- Ditch activities that are less essential than exercise. "We all get involved in a lot of good things, but people are running themselves ragged," Moreno says.
- Get more sleep. This may seem obvious, but many people watch TV or read in bed. Reclaim that time for what you truly need: slumber.

"I don't like exercise"

Moreno suggests you think back to your childhood. "When we were kids, we ran and jumped and played all the time, and then we grew up and it became 'exercise,'" she says.

Here's what to do:

- Add movement to something you like to do. If you play golf, walk the course. If you like music, listen to your favorite tunes as you walk. Take a stroll with family or friends.
- Connect exercise to something you value. "Being a good parent or being productive at your business is easier when you exercise because you handle stress better and have more energy," Hood-Gabrielson says.

"I don't know what to do"

"This is a legitimate excuse for a lot of people," Hood-Gabrielson says. "There is so much information out there that it can be confusing." Here's how to sort through it all:

- Do what you already know how to do. Start with walking.

- Invest in a pedometer or heart monitor. Thirty minutes of exercise is roughly 10,000 steps or a moderate increase in your heart rate. That's your baseline. Shoot for gradual improvement. A University of Tennessee study showed that pedometers give people an incentive to increase their activity level.
- Hire a personal trainer for two or three sessions. That's enough to learn the basics of resistance training or a cardio routine.

"I don't see results"

What this usually means is, "I'm not losing weight as fast as I want to." That can be a major demotivator, Moreno says. Here's how to overcome it:

- Stay away from the scale. A University of Michigan study found that women who exercised to lose weight spent 40 percent less time exercising than women whose motives were not related to body shape.
- Stick with it. Real change tends to happen slowly.

"It's too cold, wet, or hot"

Weather is going to be a factor, but a little preparation can knock out this excuse:

- Invest in home exercise gear. A jump rope and exercise bands may be all you need.
- Buy an exercise video. You might borrow a video from the public library or rent one to see if you like it before buying.
- Take a walk in the mall. It's heated in the winter and air-conditioned in the summer.

Information courtesy of UnitedHealthcare and StayWell.