

25 Ways to Make Time for Fitness

Too busy to work out? Doubtful. The truth: Finding moments to move is entirely within your grasp.

Gina DeMillo Wagner / March 2011

Most common excuse for not exercising?

Survey says: "No time." But examine that excuse at close range and you'll see it's usually about something deeper, says Lavinia Rodriguez, PhD, clinical psychologist and author of *Mind Over Fat Matters: Conquering Psychological Barriers to Weight Management* (iUniverse, 2008). "Typically, it's lack of motivation, lack of enjoyment, negative associations, fear or maybe low self-esteem," she says.



Busy as we may be, we have less trouble finding time for television, social networking or even dull household tasks, Rodriguez observes, because there simply aren't the same steep psychological barriers to those activities.

"Most people are in denial about their health," says fitness-industry icon Richard Simmons. "We all have reasons for not exercising, but it all comes down to time management and fear. Fear you'll get hurt. Fear of embarrassment. Fear of failure."

But what we'd be better off being afraid of, he says, is what will happen if we *don't* exercise. How will a sedentary lifestyle be affecting you next year? In five or 10 years?

"Will you have time for multiple doctors appointments?" he asks. "Will you have the time and money to take medication every day to treat high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes?" Just as important, what do you stand to *gain* by finally taking your health off the back burner?

If you want to exercise, you'll make the time. We interviewed psychologists, exercise scientists, celebrity trainers, authors and busy everyday people to get a handle on the 25 most promising strategies.

1. Make a Plan.

"The best way to make time for exercise is to have a written plan," says Chris Evert, 18-time Grand Slam tennis champion. "Decide on the best time for exercise in your schedule and actually enter it into your computer or cell-phone calendar as a repeat event. This way it shows up daily and there's less chance of you scheduling something during that time. Also, when you check your schedule in the morning, you'll see it there and form a mental picture of when and how you'll be exercising that day, which helps you stay motivated."

2. Subdivide Your to-do list.

Rather than making one long to-do list you'll never complete, divide your list into three categories, advises Lisa Druxman, MA, exercise counselor and founder of the Stroller Strides (www.strollerstrides.com) and Mama Wants Her Body Back (www.mamawants.com) programs. "It's not enough to get things done," she says. "You need to get the right things done. It's OK to have dirty clothes in your hamper. It's OK if you don't read every email the moment you receive it. It's not OK to cheat your health." Druxman suggests the following to-do list makeover:

- Take out a sheet of paper and create three boxes that represent the most important parts of your life (e.g., family, work, yourself).
- List the top three to-dos that would make the most difference in each category. For family, it might be cooking or helping with homework. For work, it might be returning phone calls or completing a presentation. For yourself, include exercise, plus something else nurturing, like calling a friend or having a healthy lunch.
- Finally, block out times on your calendar for those specific to-dos, and honor those very specific commitments.

Having trouble deciding which to-dos are most important? "Think about the things that will have the most impact not just today, but a year from now," Druxman says

3. Find five minutes.

Even if your day is packed with meetings and other commitments, you absolutely can eke out five minutes for yourself, says Simmons. And that simple act of self-care has the potential to change your life. "I tell people it's OK to start very, very small." A five-minute walk now can easily turn into daily 30-minute walks a few weeks from now. "You have to start somewhere," he says.

4. Limit screen time.

Don't aimlessly surf cable channels or the Internet, says Rodriguez. That's a surefire way to waste time you could be spending in more active ways. Before you sit down, set a time limit (consider keeping a kitchen timer nearby to alert you when time's up). Most of us occasionally watch shows we don't love because we're bored, notes Franklin Antoian, CPT, founder of iBodyFit.com. "Consider trading just 30 minutes of that low-value television time for exercise," he says. "My guess is you won't miss it."

5. Be an active watcher.

When you do watch TV, make the most of it. Do some ball-crunches, planks, yoga poses, squats, lunges or pushups while you're watching. Keep fitness equipment, such as a kettlebell, resistance bands and a jump rope, near the TV. Or use the commercial breaks to mix in brief cardio intervals. Run in place or up and down the stairs; do some burpees or jumping jacks.

6. Delegate like crazy.

Reassess household chores: Can the kids do laundry? Can your spouse cook dinner? What professional tasks can you hand off so you can get out for a walk at lunch or stop by the gym on the way home? Don't think you're the only one who can do all of the things you're currently doing. Look, too, for things that could be done less often — or that might not need to get done at all.

7. Be motivated by money.

Putting some money on the line may provide you with the motivation you need to show up for activity. Sign up for a yoga workshop, book some sessions with a personal trainer, or plunk down some cash for a race or other athletic event you'll have to train for. Schedule a babysitter to watch the kids while you go for a run. Or take a few salsa lessons.

8. Think positive.

Psychologists suggest that actively editing your negative self-talk patterns is a powerful way to support healthier lifestyle choices. For example, anytime you catch yourself thinking, "I am too busy to work out," rephrase the thought in more positive, empowering terms, such as, "I choose to make myself a priority." Or, "I do have time to be healthy." Or, "I am willing to do something active today." Over time, those positive thought patterns will elbow out the negative ones, helping you to see your available choices more clearly.

9. Be a hot date.

Dinner and a movie is so cliché, says Shannon Hammer, motivational speaker and author of *[The Positive Portions Food & Fitness Journal](#)* (Fairview Press, 2010). What if, instead, you took your date/partner/love-interest to a cycling class or a ballroom dance lesson, went on a hike or a picnic, or kicked a soccer ball around the park? Bonus: Research shows that shared activity builds attraction.

10. Do brisk business.

Chances are, many of your coworkers are in the same boat as you: They want to exercise, but have trouble finding the time. So, what if you move the weekly progress update or brainstorm session to the sidewalk, or stand during meetings? Can your group hike to the coffee shop rather than order in? Can you woo a new client over a tennis match instead of dinner? The fresh air and endorphins will spark more creative ideas, Hammer says.

11. Socialize on the move.

Next time a friend suggests meeting for lunch, dinner or drinks, counter with an active invitation. How about joining you for a yoga class or a quick walk around the lake? Instead of spending time on the phone or emailing back and forth, suggest that you catch up on the latest news over a leisurely bike ride, or bond by trying an athletic pursuit, like indoor climbing, that neither of you has ever tried.

12. Work it in.

Diedre Pai, 35, is a mom to two girls under age 3. With an infant and toddler constantly in tow, she's had to get creative with her exercise routine. While picking up toys, towels and trash off the floor, she increases glute and leg strength by

doing squats instead of bending at the waist. "I do calf raises whenever I'm standing at the counter or stove, and when I'm going upstairs to change a diaper," she says. Whenever she picks up her baby, she does a few overhead lifts. "That always makes her giggle." Kids playing outside? "I get in there and run and climb at their speed, which gets my heart rate up," she says. Over the course of a single day, Pai estimates she gets about 60 minutes of exercise this way. "I consider parenting to be a full-contact sport," she says, "and being in shape makes me a better player."

13. Find a cheerleader.

What looks like lack of time is often lack of motivation, so consider recruiting emotional support. "I decided 35 years ago that I would be the court jester of health and get people excited about fitness," says legendary activity advocate Richard Simmons. "Because, when you're excited about something, you find time to do it." Nominate a friend, family member, life coach or personal trainer to be your cheerleader and encourage you (positive messages only; no nagging) on a daily basis. Or, join an online community like www.fitlink.com that emphasizes can-do camaraderie.

14. Be yourself.

Part of the reason you can't make time for exercise may be because you're not focusing on the right workout for your personality, says Marta Montenegro, MS, CSCS, CPT, celebrity trainer and exercise physiology professor at Florida International University. For example, don't assume you're a runner just because your best friend loves to run, she says. "Instead, analyze your lifestyle and personality to find a routine that suits you." Once you understand your fitness personality, you'll be able to identify activities you actually enjoy, and squeezing them into your schedule won't be nearly as hard. (For more, see "[Your Fitness Personality](#).")

15. Bring the family.

If family obligations prevent you from fitting in regularly scheduled workouts, rope your gang into other types of group activities. Schedule family hikes, soccer games, after-dinner walks, bike rides or family trips to the gym. Let the kids suggest family-activity options. And remember that exercise is something you're doing for your family, says Pai. "When the kids see that exercise is important to Mommy and Daddy, it will be important to them, too."

16. Take your show on the road.

As you're packing for a business trip or vacation, be sure to include your workout clothes, says tennis champ Chris Evert. Just packing them signals to your brain that you intend to make time for exercise. As for what to do? "Spend 15 to 20 minutes swimming laps, running stairs, or jogging on the hotel treadmill first thing in the morning," she says. No gym or pool? Ask the front desk if they offer guest passes to a neighborhood gym. "Or, when my schedule is tight," says Evert, "I do some yoga while catching the morning news on TV."

17. Hit "play."

"Exercise DVDs are cost-effective, private and flexible, and they allow you to stop and start your workouts based on real-life time constraints," says Hammer. (So, for example, you can do laundry while working out.) Hammer used this approach to shed more than 100 pounds while going to school full-time and working. Try Pilates workouts from Brooke Siler (Anchor Bay), fitness training with Erin O'Brien (Acacia) or yoga with Shiva Rea (Acacia).

18. Rise and shine.

For most people, the day only gets more demanding as it goes on, says celebrity trainer and fitness DVD star Sara Haley. "Exercising first thing in the morning will ensure you fit it in," she says. Lay out your workout clothes the night before, she suggests. "This way you won't waste any time and can't claim you forgot anything."

19. Ditch your ride.

Whenever feasible, hop on the bus, train or subway, or ride your bike to work or to run errands, says Haley. If you can't do it every day, try for once a week. People who take alternative transportation tend to get more exercise than daily car commuters.

20. Master the micro-workout.

Whether you're at work or home, never let yourself sit idle for more than a couple of hours, says Mark Lauren, certified military physical-training specialist, triathlete and author of *You Are Your Own Gym* (Light of New Orleans Publishing, 2010). Build in a loop around the block when you grab a cup of coffee, or plan 10-minute breaks at regular intervals to

stretch or do a brief circuit workout. "I like to throw in random sets of body-weight exercise throughout the day. One hard set of 12 or fewer reps won't make most people sweat if they're in an air-conditioned building, but it will be enough to make a difference if done several times throughout each day," says Lauren. It takes less than 30 seconds to do 15 pushups or sit-ups, he points out. So don't say you don't have time. Set an alarm on your computer to remind you. (For specific exercise ideas, see "[Workday Workouts](#).")

21. Hit it hard.

"When you're short on time, focus on higher-payoff workouts," says Timothy Ferriss, author of *The 4-Hour Body: An Uncommon Guide to Rapid Fat-Loss, Incredible Sex, and Becoming Superhuman* (Crown Archetype, 2010). "If you're focused, there's no reason you can't get results in less than 20 minutes a week." His favorite routines? Kettlebell swings (consider keeping a kettlebell by your desk) and slow-motion resistance training. "One female case study cut her body fat 3 percentage points in roughly four weeks with only five minutes of kettlebell swings three times a week," he says. The key is staying focused and maintaining a high intensity throughout the mini-workout session. For a fast and furious workout idea, check out weightlifting complexes in "[Simplicity Complex](#)" — or search on "HIIT" (short for high-intensity interval training).

22. Wear your pedometer.

"As we get older, we typically take fewer steps per day," says Wayne Andersen, MD, medical director of Take Shape For Life, a nationwide health and lifestyle coaching program based in Owings Mills, Md. "By age 60, most people are down to about 4,500 steps. Your goal should be to maintain 10,000." The best way to do that is to get a pedometer at your local sporting goods store, or download an app that converts your cell phone to a pedometer. Those wearing pedometers tend to walk more because they're more conscious of their steps. Looking for extra credit? "Climbing a flight of stairs is the equivalent of walking 100 steps," says Andersen.

23. Adopt a DIY mentality.

"Start doing things by hand instead of letting a machine do them for you," suggests Andersen. This might include snow shoveling, pushing a lawn mower, raking leaves or hanging laundry to dry. "Also, ditch remote controls and other automatic devices that undermine your body's energy use."

24. Work while you wait.

Katy Gaenicke, mother of two boys, found a creative solution to her "no time" dilemma. She spends a lot of time on the sidelines of football practices and games near their home in Boston. "I started bringing my bike with me and riding around near the fields while my son practices," she says. Evert has used this technique, too: "Instead of cramming in one more errand while your kids are at their activities, put on your sneakers and take a walk for the hour."

25. Phone it in.

Have a conference call you can't miss? Need to return a few phone calls to family and friends? Grab your cell phone (and, ideally, a headset) and get walking. Assuming your area has reliable reception, strive to walk whenever you're on the phone. A note of caution, though: Talking and listening will tend to distract you from the fact you're exercising. That can be a good thing, or a dangerous thing. So always take care to remain aware of your surroundings, traffic and so on. The goal is to squeeze exercise in wherever you can — safely.