

Staying Motivated

by Chad Tackett

One way to stay motivated is to constantly remind yourself that a worth-while pay-off lies ahead; a new, healthy, strong you is emerging. Effective, consistent exercise will not only improve your overall health and fitness, but will also improve your appearance, energy level, and social interactions. Also, look forward to the many psychological benefits as well: confidence, self-esteem, and relief from depression, anxiety and stress.

If you are serious about your health and well-being, you will take action and begin an exercise program, and you will benefit in all these ways. Once you see the results, you will become even more motivated. Action creates motivation!

Set Goals

Goal-setting is another great way of staying motivated. Goals focus your workout program and clarify what you are trying to achieve. As you attain each goal, you gain encouragement and further motivation. Here is how to achieve the goals you set and obtain the results you deserve.

1. Make sure your goals are measurable: A vague goal, such as "I want to be fit," gives you nothing to shoot for. Decide when and what you are going to achieve, such as "I want to lose 2 percent of my body fat by August 1st."

2. Be realistic: Make sure your goals are attainable. If you set your expectations too high, you will get frustrated and will be more likely to quit. Make sure, however, that your goals are not too easy; they should be challenging. When you achieve a challenging goal, your pride and satisfaction will create more motivation.

3. Set short-term goals as stepping stones to your "ultimate" (long-term) goals: If your long-term goal is to bench press 200 pounds in one year, then set short-term weekly or monthly goals of the weight you will need to bench press to achieve your long term goal--develop a plan. It is a lot easier to accomplish a goal one day or week at a time, such as increasing 2.5 or 5 pounds a week, than it is to think that you need to increase your bench press by 50 pounds.

Make It Fun

Another way of assuring that you stay motivated is to make exercise fun. If you perceive your workout as a chore, you more than likely will not stick with it. Here are some techniques for making your workout something to look forward to.

1. Add Variety: If your weightlifting is getting tedious and boring, change one of these factors:

- Vary how often you do an exercise and the number of sets and reps you do.
- Find an alternate exercise; for example, if you always do the bench press using a barbell, try doing it with dumbbells or on a machine.

- Change the order of the exercises you do for each muscle group and the muscle groups themselves.

2. Include Friends and Family: Training with a workout partner not only makes your training session more fun, safe, and intense, but will also increase the likelihood of your showing up at the gym. Make sure you pick a partner whose goals and interests are similar to yours and who is willing to spot you correctly and motivate you to do your best.

3. Fight Discouragement: If once in a long while you blow off a workout because you choose to go out with friends, just accept and enjoy your choice--do not feel guilty. Otherwise, the sense of failure can make it harder to get yourself back on track. Focus on how much progress you have made so far, not on how far you have to go.

4. Expect and Prepare for Plateaus: If you feel you have reached a plateau and/or are bored, do not give up--this is a natural part of working out. Make sure to vary the exercises, sets, repetitions and order of your workout--continually search for new ways of making your routine fun and exciting.

5. Schedule your Workout: If you always exercise on the same days at the same time, your routine will become a fixture in your life, not a whim. Not going to the gym will feel unnatural.

Including exercise into your busy schedule will be an adjustment, and staying motivated will be equally challenging. Change is difficult for many people. However, if you have the willingness to work through the initial emotional discomfort as you move step by step through a safe and effective program, you will find the confidence, commitment and determination that will ease the way.

When you begin achieving great results, the excitement and fun you experience will make the change well worth the effort. Action creates motivation! Good luck: I hope you enjoy all the wonderful benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle.