



WARNING: EXERCISE CAN BE HABIT FORMING

Exercising regularly can be a difficult habit to maintain, despite all the facts you hear on the merits of exercise and activity. You already know that physical activity has been shown to be the single most important factor in successful weight maintenance. And you know that without exercise, weight loss progress may be agonizingly slow. You are also aware that passing your annual fitness test is taxing at best without participation in regular aerobic exercise. Finally, you know that exercise helps lessen your stress level and reduce your risk for many health problems such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. So, why is making exercise a priority so difficult? One of the most commonly cited reasons for lack of physical activity is our inability to find the time and motivation due to our busy lifestyles.

Among adults in the United States in 1997, 40 % were found to be sedentary. But surely the military does a better job of keeping fit! It may come as a surprise to learn the rates of inactivity in the military mirror that of the civilians. A recent study found that among Air Force members, 50 % exercised less than three times a week. In fact, according to the same study, the Air Force exercised less than any of the other military services. One possible reason for this inactivity could lie in the large number of military members in clerical or administrative positions.

But starting and maintaining a fitness routine is not impossible! There are many strategies to incorporate exercise into a part of your day. Here are some tips for making your exercise program 'stick':

- Find a work out partner, someone at a similar fitness level who shares your goals, or has similar goals

- Write down your goal and keep it somewhere where you will see it frequently—in your day planner, on your computer or desk top
- Bribe yourself! Set up your goal for a set amount of time—for example, a month—then establish how you will reward yourself once you reach that goal. You may decide to buy a new pair of workout shoes, or treat yourself to a body massage, a movie or a new exercise outfit. If you are trying to lose weight, your reward should probably not be food related, but otherwise only your budget and imagination are the limits!
- Focus on the benefits of exercise—how it makes you feel, how your body is changing. By having a reward established, that is one more positive to focus on!
- Don't get bogged down if your weight loss or other hoped-for benefits are slow in coming. Try to stay focused on the long term, and again, if you have a reward system you can look forward to that reward in the short term.
- If you find it difficult to make exercise fit into your day, block it out in your calendar as if it were an important meeting that you must attend, then don't let anything interfere with that 'appointment'
- Start slowly. Don't risk getting yourself injured. An injury will certainly slow your progress toward your goals, and it may be very discouraging
- Talk to your doctor if you have any medical concerns, or are taking any medications that might impact your heart rate or ability to exercise.

Trying a few of these tips may help you make exercise a regular part of your life. Once you make exercise a habit, it's hard to break! And that's a good thing.

Contact your Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Fitness Center at your base to get more information on starting and maintaining an exercise program to reap the many benefits.

Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!™