

GET INSPIRED!

Keep your motivation up as temperatures go down

By: Marjie Gilliam

During the colder months, many people 'settle in' for the winter and give up their regular exercise routines. Shorter days, less sunshine and uncomfortable temperatures can combine to make it more difficult to stay on track. If you find yourself losing motivation to exercise, here are some tips to consider:

Exercise is as critical to your emotional health as it is to your physical health. It can relax you when you are feeling anxious, and energize you when you need a boost. When demands placed on your time and energy leave you feeling out of sorts, know that stress, anxiety, sadness, anger and fatigue can all be relieved with exercise. Studies have shown that individuals who are physically active feel better about themselves, are more motivated and generally much happier than those who are inactive. This is because exercise is a powerful anti-depressant, helping to normalize brain chemistry, restore mental and emotional balance, improve sleep quality and calm nerves.

Regular exercise and a healthier diet often go hand in hand. Rather than going on a diet as a way to lose weight or improve health, try working out as your first step. Typically, people who exercise find that they naturally pay closer attention to what they eat and drink. Making the association between the amount of food eaten and the amount of effort necessary to burn off those calories makes it less likely that they will sabotage progress by over-indulging.

There is also a clear link between our emotions and diet. Some people overeat when they experience unpleasant emotions, while others lose their appetites. Working out can reduce food cravings in people prone to overeating, and improve the appetites of people who don't feel like eating. We also often eat out of boredom, or while sitting at the computer or watching television. Exercise keeps you occupied, filling time that might otherwise be spent on mindless eating. The combination of extra calories burned and fewer calories eaten adds up to major weight loss over time. The Presidential Active Lifestyle Award can help you add physical activity to your life and improve your eating habits. This challenge is for anyone, from students to seniors, but it's geared toward people who want to set themselves on the road to a healthier life through positive changes to physical activity and eating behaviors.

See Web page at: <https://www.presidentschallenge.org/celebrate/active-lifestyle.shtml>

By some estimates, nearly one third of all Americans are sedentary during the winter months. To reduce the chances of this happening to you, seek out a fitness program that piques your curiosity and interests. You might decide to join a new gym, take up weight training for the first time or check out a Pilates or aerobics class in your area. If working out at home is your thing, there are hundreds of great instructional videos available to keep you active, from yoga to martial arts to salsa dancing to hula-hooping, whatever appeals to you. Recreational sports such as basketball, volleyball and racquetball are great ways to stay in shape when it is too cold to exercise outdoors, as is indoor swimming in a heated pool.

Adhering to a year-round plan of exercise, even if workouts are light in intensity, is significantly better for your health and well-being than starting and then stopping your normal routine. Staying with an established exercise program allows you to maintain your current level of fitness and continue enjoying the results that you've worked so hard for. This is a far better option than dropping out altogether and risking losing your desire to get fit.

Additionally, health professionals caution that heart problems, stress fractures and tendonitis are more common for those who try to pick up where they left off with their exercise routine after a winter of inactivity. Heart attacks are particularly common in sedentary men and women who engage in sudden activity such as shoveling snow. In the cold, arteries in the heart constrict and blood pressure rises, significantly increasing heart attack risk, especially in the elderly and those with cardiovascular disease. Reduced amounts of sunlight associated with winter can trigger depression in some people, which may also increase heart attack risk.

Be smart. When exercising in the cold, pace yourself, stay hydrated, and listen to your body. If you have pre-existing medical problems, ask your doctor for guidelines before beginning an exercise program. If you experience pain, excess sweating, shortness of breath, nausea and/or lightheadedness, stop immediately and seek medical attention.

An active lifestyle is one of the best gifts you can give to yourself. A few of the many rewards include: speedier metabolism, increased flexibility, reduced body fat, greater strength, a healthier heart, greater stamina and endurance, increased bone density, less risk of injury, better sleep quality, improved self-confidence and greater sense of well-being.

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