Overcoming Barriers to Becoming More Physically Active

Even though there is lots of evidence that being physically active is essential to being healthy, many people still don’t make regular physical activity a priority in their lives.

This is usually because there are real or perceived barriers to becoming physically active that we must first identify and then plan ways to overcome them to change our daily routines in order to improve and maintain health.

Here are some of the most common barriers you might be experiencing and some solutions to help you overcome them – do any of these sound like you?

“I don’t have time to be active”
Solution: Take a good look at how you really spend each day for a week – chances are you can find time for a 30-minute physical activity break once each day. Try waking up a half hour earlier to walk your dog, getting off a stop earlier when riding the bus or subway and walking the rest of the way, or climbing the stairs instead of the elevator. You don’t have to do the whole 30 minutes at once, try building physical activity into your daily routine in periods of at least 10 minutes each.

“I don’t have enough energy to be active”
Solution: Try scheduling your physical activities during the time of day when you have the most energy, whether that’s first thing in the morning, at lunchtime, or after dinner. A simple walk around the block is better than nothing; every little bit counts. Once you give movement a chance you’ll discover that being physically active actually gives you more energy – being inactive is what can make people feel tired all the time!

“Physical activity is boring”
Solution: Try a social activity you can do with a friend or family member to make physical activity an enjoyable social outing and keep each other motivated. Try something you enjoyed when you were younger or something you’ve always wanted to explore that looks interesting, like a new hobby involving physical activity such as gardening, yoga or T’ai Chi. For variety mix up different forms of physical activity such as hip-hop dancing, kayaking, synchronized swimming or inline skating to keep things more exciting. Think about what types of physical activity appeal to you so you’ll have fun doing them.

“I’m afraid I might get hurt”
Solution: Becoming more active is actually very safe for most people. The key is to start slowly and progress gradually – physical activity doesn’t have to be hard to improve your health! Just choose an activity that has minimal risk of injury (skydiving probably isn’t the best thing to try when you’re taking your first step to being more active!), Learn the proper ways of warming up and the precautions to take during physical activity. Depending on your age, current activity level, skill level and health status, your plan will vary. If you’re in doubt, please complete the Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q), available within this site. If you are unsure, check with your health professional or take a course for beginners to get you on your way safely.

“I’m not coordinated enough to do physical activity”
Solution: Try activities that you are already familiar with. Walking, jogging, climbing stairs or biking are probably activities you know how to do and enjoy. Do a little more, a little more often and you’ll be surprised how much better you feel!
“If I take time to be physical active, I’m ignoring my family”

Solution: You can find a compromise that lets you improve your health by being active while spending time with your family too. Try to be active with your family by playing games such as tag or taking the family on a nature hike. You can also use your lunch hour at work to be active or get up early before the kids wake up for a brisk walk or jog. You can even turn your commute to work into active time by walking, in-line skating or biking instead of taking the car.

“I’m too shy to be physically active out in public or with other people”

Solution: If you’re more comfortable staying at home to do your physical activity, that’s fine too. Walk around your house and yard as much as possible. Try keeping the cleaning supplies far from the area that is being cleaned so you need to move more to get the job done. Gardening or any other kind of yard work can be an effective way to become more active. Turn on the radio and dance around the room, toss a ball for your dog in the backyard or follow an exercise show on TV – there’s a lot you can do on your own to get more active each day.

“I’ve been inactive for so long that starting now won’t really help anything”

Solution: You’re never too old and it’s never too late to become physically active. Evidence shows that many people 90 years and older who have become frail from inactivity have successfully built their strength and independence through simple activities in a short time. Any physical activity you add to your life will help build health benefits. Every little bit counts no matter when you start!

“I’ve earned my retirement and it’s time for more rest, not more activity”

Solution: Your retirement provides you with opportunities to be more active, not less, so you can get the most out of life! If keeping up the pace is a problem, try going for walks with people who move at the same pace as you. You should use the time you have to make physical activity a part of your daily life to improve your health and give you more energy to enjoy your favourite pastimes. Physical activity boosts your quality of life and can even prolong your independence as you get older.

“I’m too old to be active”

Solution: You’re never too old to be active. Physical activity is one of the most important things you can do to maintain your physical and mental health and quality of life as you get older. Getting started is easier than you think. For example, do whatever activities you’re doing now, only more often. Walk whenever and wherever you can. Start slowly with easy stretching each day. Move around frequently. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

Find activities that you enjoy or try out a new class at your community centre. Take your grandchild for a walk – grandchildren have so much energy, it might inspire you. Take a dog for a walk or join your neighbour for a walk. Walk to the grocery store and carry home the groceries. Join a mall-walking program when the weather isn’t cooperating. Do you use a wheelchair? No problem, ‘wheeling’ can be just as beneficial as walking! Every little bit helps, but more is better. The more you do, the better you’ll feel. Increase your activities as your body adjusts to your new physically active lifestyle.

To learn more about how to get up, go out and be SummerActive, visit www.summeractive.ca – you could win great prizes!