



Psych Yourself Up To Exercise

Can't get yourself to start that workout? Henry Lew, psychologist, offers some tried and tested ways to motivate you.

We all know about the benefits of exercise and the need to do it, one way or another. Exercise helps us to stay healthy, lose weight, relax, etc, etc. Yet we procrastinate and cook up excuses not to budge. However, those who have overcome this inertia will testify to the fact that when the motivation and benefits are really close to our hearts, the going is not so tough.

Think Benefits

One of my previous patients, Mr Ranjit*, once shared with me: "I had known all along why it is important to exercise. But it was only when I realised that I wanted to see my grandchildren enter school and watch them grow up did I seriously start to exercise to stay healthy."

Another patient, Mdm Siti*, commented: "I did not want to be seriously ill and be a burden to my loved ones... that's why I started to exercise." Love is a very strong motivator indeed!

Think Double Benefits

Perhaps another motivator for exercising could be that it may improve your dieting attempts! In research studies, participants were separated into two groups. Group A was encouraged to exercise while Group B just received general information about exercise. It turned out that Group A not only exercised more, lost more weight but they were also more motivated to watch their diet and make changes to their diet. Group A was less likely to eat when they were feeling sad, stress or bored. Group A was also more able to talk themselves out of giving in to temptations of eating! In my own encounters with patients, I have observed that many patients who began exercising also began restraining themselves when it came to eating unhealthily. They just did not want to let their efforts go to waste. They opted for sandwiches instead. The next time that you hesitate about exercising, think about the potential positive effect exercising will have on your diet as well!

Think and Start Small

We will have many reasons (real or made up) for not exercising or postponing it. And to be honest, the main and real reason is usually just because we feel tired, lazy, uncomfortable (i.e., sweating, panting, muscle soreness) about exercising. So, think and plan small, so that it seems more manageable and we are more likely to start on it. And when we start small, it will be at a level of intensity and frequency we are able to cope with. Don't sabotage yourselves with sores and aches so that you will not want to exercise for the next two weeks! Consult a doctor or medical professional before starting any exercise programme; they would be able to advise how small or slow to start and how to increase exercise over the weeks.

Think Fun

Any activity can only be sustained if it is fun and interesting. Choose an exercise you like or enjoy doing. How about revisiting an activity or sport you used to like? Peter, a patient in his 70s once told me: "I actually went swimming after so many years of laying off. I can't swim as fast or as long as I want to but I still derive a lot of pleasure from it."

Share the good times

Sometimes we may be only restricted to a few exercise because of many reasons and these few exercises may seem boring. During these times you may want to gather a group or do an exercise activity that others have invited you to join. You will be delighted to see what company can do to liven up a mundane activity. Mdm Habibah*, who started climbing the stairs with her colleagues, said: "We'd head to the nearby block of flats and starting walking up and down. Who would have thought that climbing the stairs could be so much fun?"

Exercise itself releases endorphins and make us feel good. No wonder why people tend to continue to exercise and like to exercise once they get started. You can start feeling good too. To enjoy these endorphins we need to start exercising first. Think benefits, think small, start small and think fun. Now, just what are you waiting for?

* Names have been changed