

How To Stick With Exercise

(Ron Jones, MS, ACSM Health/Fitness Instructor, Corporate Wellcoach)



"If the mind can conceive, the body can achieve."

-Jack La Lanne, Fitness Pioneer

According to the US Centers for Disease Control, "more than 60% of American adults do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits and more than 25% are not active at all in their leisure time." Part of the reason people don't exercise is because we have engineered activity out of our lifestyles. Technology has made it "easier" by eliminating physical tasks resulting in decreasing levels of fitness and health. Increasing levels of obesity and inactivity make it more difficult for a person to get back to a healthy and physically active lifestyle.

Here are some research-proven tips to help you stick with your exercise program. There are a lot of little things you can do to make exercise more accessible and more enjoyable. Check them out. See what works for you. **Lesson One:** Improving your "self-efficacy" will help to keep you exercising. *Self-efficacy is the confidence of one's ability to perform a task.* For example, if you are confident you can walk around the block, you have a high degree of self-efficacy for walking your neighborhood. Accordingly, if you feel better about doing an exercise, you'll probably stick with it. Look at the terms below; the terms will help you understand exercise psychology tips and strategies.

Self-Efficacy & Exercise Terms

Exercise Adherence: Exercise adherents are persons that exercise regularly for at least six months or more.

- A primary goal should be to keep exercising regularly for six months. When you reach six months of regular exercise, you reach the "maintenance" stage of behavior change. If you can get to the maintenance stage for a particular behavior, like regular exercise, you are more likely to make the new behavior "permanent" (or terminal). When you have a terminal behavior change there is no way you will ever go back to what you did before.
- For example, if a person quits smoking and knows without a doubt they would never smoke again—then they have made a permanent behavior change. The change of behavior is "terminal" and there is no going back. Hopefully, that's what will also happen with people and regular exercise. Exercise will become such a part of their regular "lifestyle" that they will never again stop exercising all together. Exercise will forever be part of their normal routine—or lifestyle.

Regular Physical Activity: 30 minutes or more of moderate-intensity (65% Heart Rate Range-
*See "Exercise Recommendations" Handout) activity on most, preferably all, days of the week.

Self-Efficacy of Exercise: A person's perception or confidence of ability to perform a given exercise task. *Self-efficacy is task or situation-specific.* Example: A successful walker with positive self-efficacy for walking might not have good self-efficacy for strength conditioning or exercising in a yoga class. Self-efficacy seems to be more enhanced with group settings; this shows the importance of social influence. Try little things that you can have confidence in then build on your success.

Major Strategies to Improve Self-Efficacy



1. **Performance Mastery:** This is the "hands on" training of learning through personal experience. Exercisers should be properly instructed then allowed to practice with guidance. Repeated successes=increased self-efficacy. ☺

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2. **Vicarious Experience**: This is “modeling” where exercisers observe others *successfully performing* an exercise. Modeling is extremely important for seniors or detrained people—they need to see others their age or ability level performing an exercise task properly and successfully without getting hurt.
3. **Verbal Persuasion**: Relates to compliments (for good form), congratulations (when they finish a difficult task), and encouragement (for accepting new challenges). All of these are forms of positive reinforcement that work best to boost self efficacy when it occurs immediately after the accomplishment praised and is very specific to the task just performed.
4. **Emotional Arousal**: At a basic level this is the education about all the benefits of exercise and the consequences and health risks of sedentary lifestyles. At a deeper level inner feelings are realized through dramatic public-education spots or even a personal tragedy like losing a loved one or finding out you have serious health problems.

Other Tips to Improve Self-Efficacy

- **Mirrors**: “Self-Presentational” exercise settings can demotivate people to exercise. Covering the mirrors for exercisers that have body image issues can reduce anxiety. Pool exercise is a great example of eliminating self-presentation.
- **Temperature**: Many people are heat sensitive—especially seniors. If it’s too hot or too cold—they just simply quit, so people should be as comfortable as “practical” when exercising.
- **Music/TV**: Technology can be used to make the environment more pleasant. Caution: This is very specific to culture, gender, and age. MTV’s “Babes at the Beach” probably won’t help to increase the self-efficacy of a detrained senior who just started exercising after 50 years of a sedentary lifestyle!
- **Group Exercise**: Groups seem to do more for increasing self-efficacy—especially with seniors who many times don’t exercise for “fitness” but exercise so they can socialize with friends and “have fun.”
- **Fitness Assessment**: Can provide positive opportunity to give feedback about form, performance, and improvements. “Improvements” might not be physiological for some people like those on low-intensity programs (such as someone that is frail). Improvements can also be motor skill developments like balance control, or improved vitality, confidence, and lifestyle—they don’t have to be “high performance” type improvements in fitness levels. *Note that certain assessments might actually “demotivate” or depress some people.* For this group it is best to focus on the factors like improved confidence or vitality over physical assessments like body fat, weight, BMI, and body circumference measurements.
- **Children & Exercise**: **MAKE IT FUN!** 😊 The more fun they have, the higher the probability for decision making in favor of physical activity—and we need kids to make decisions to regularly exercise! If they have fun and feel successful, then self-efficacy improves along with outcome expectations for additional exercise.

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