



# A Beginner's Exercise Plan That Works: 7 Steps to Success

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How You Can Create a Lifelong Habit of Fitness  
You Actually Enjoy

# A Brief History of Exercise

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**Way back in caveperson days, exercise was not optional.** If you wanted enough mammoth jerky and dried gooseberries to get you through a long, cold Ice Age winter, you were going to have to spend hours and days of grueling physical labor to get them. Today's hunting and gathering techniques are, to say the least, simpler.

In many ways, this is wonderful news. A huge majority of the global population can now count on abundant nutrition without struggle or famine.

On the downside, our motivation to exercise has diminished severely. You've no doubt experienced this yourself.

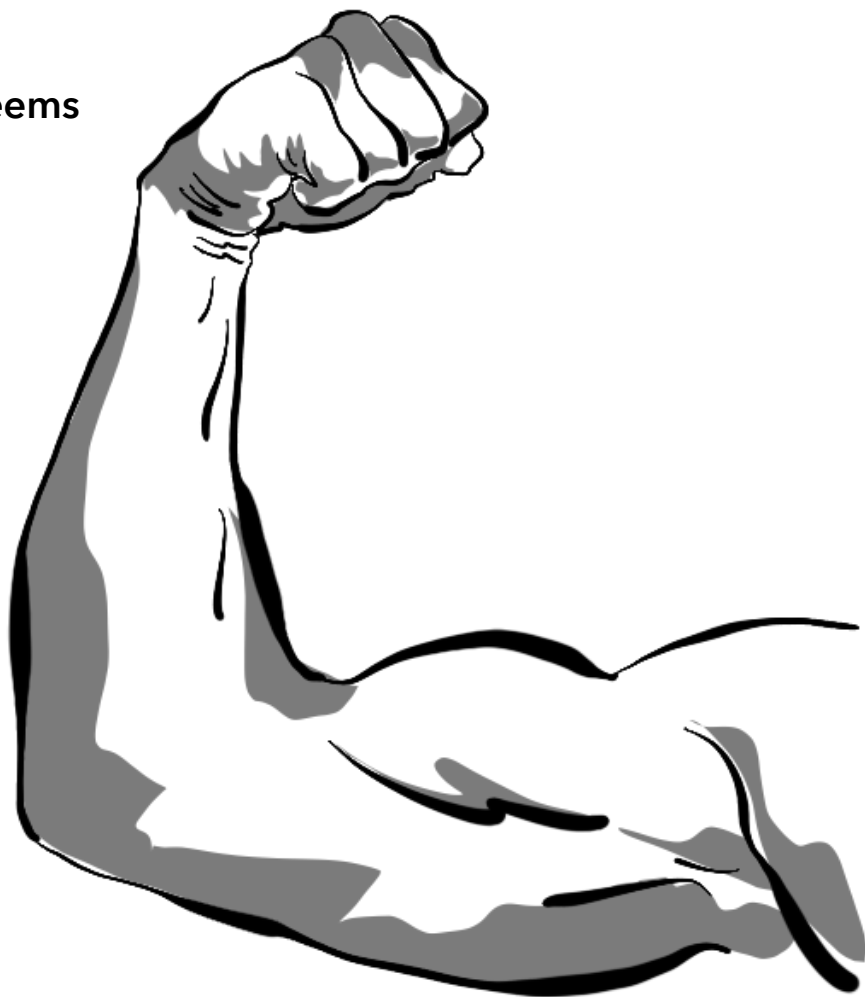
Who wants to go to the gym or head out on a jog when long to-do lists, seemingly endless hours at the office, family obligations, and Netflix all clamor for attention?

**The simple truth is, exercise often seems insurmountably difficult, so it loses out to other life priorities.**

The solution?

**To create a beginner's exercise plan** that is so easy and accessible you can't help but get into it.

Once you've been exercising regularly for months or even years, you can up the intensity. For now, however, it's time to change your approach so you can finally make exercise work for you.



# How This Guide Will Help You

Those who exercise regularly would never choose to live without it.

Moving your body boosts endorphins, regulates your metabolism, reduces cravings, and helps you sleep. It makes you happier and healthier overall and creates its own motivation.

## The trick is getting there. This guide will help you:

- Create short, satisfying workout routines that meet your needs
- Match your exercise to your lifestyle
- Overcome the myths associated with exercise
- Get rid of the all-or-nothing thinking that derails so many beginner exercisers
- Maintain enthusiasm even when you want to give up

**Sound pretty good?** Awesome.

**Now:** forget everything you've learned about working out and get ready to create a program that works for you.

*Here's what this guide will not do:*

*It's not going to be overly prescriptive, it's not going to give you specific HIIT or weight workouts, and it's not going to treat you the way the fitness industry has always treated you. You are a person with unique needs and a unique personality, so it's time to build the right exercise program for you.*



# Say Goodbye to All or Nothing

Have you ever thought to yourself, “If I can’t get to the gym today, I guess I can’t work out”? If so, you are a part of a huge majority of the human race that falls prey to routine absolutism.

***Absolutism is an approach to life that only recognizes extremes.***

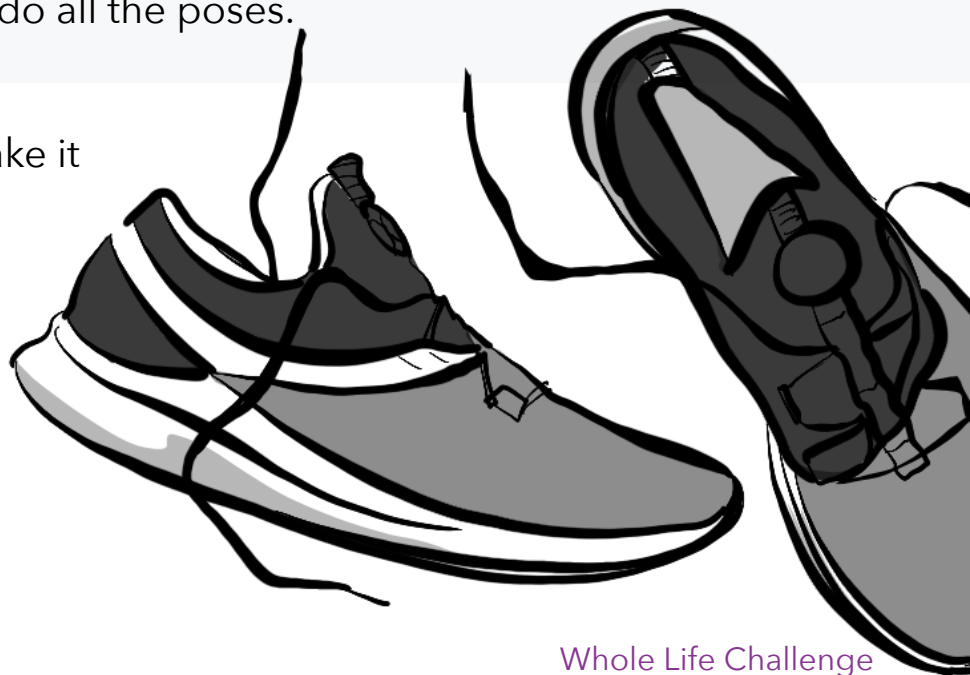
For instance, many people spend months without prioritizing any form of movement whatsoever. Then, one day, they decide it’s time to exercise and sign up for a marathon. Now they have five months to “get in shape or bust,” and they believe this will be the motivation they need to finally succeed.

Guess what? “Or bust” ends up being their result more often than not.

***If you want to create an exercise plan that sticks, avoid dreaming big. Instead of focusing on grandiose achievements, focus on simply getting moving more often.***

- Maybe that means driving to the gym, even if you don’t commit to any particular routine once you get there.
- Perhaps for you it means lacing up those running shoes and heading outside without a mileage goal in mind.
- Or possibly it just means putting on a yoga video and committing to finishing it, even if you can’t do all the poses.

You’ve heard the expression “fake it until you make it,” right? Time to fake it, friend. This simply means acting as if you are an active person until you become one. If you act “as if,” you’ll become that mover and shaker sooner than you ever thought possible.



# Align with Your Values

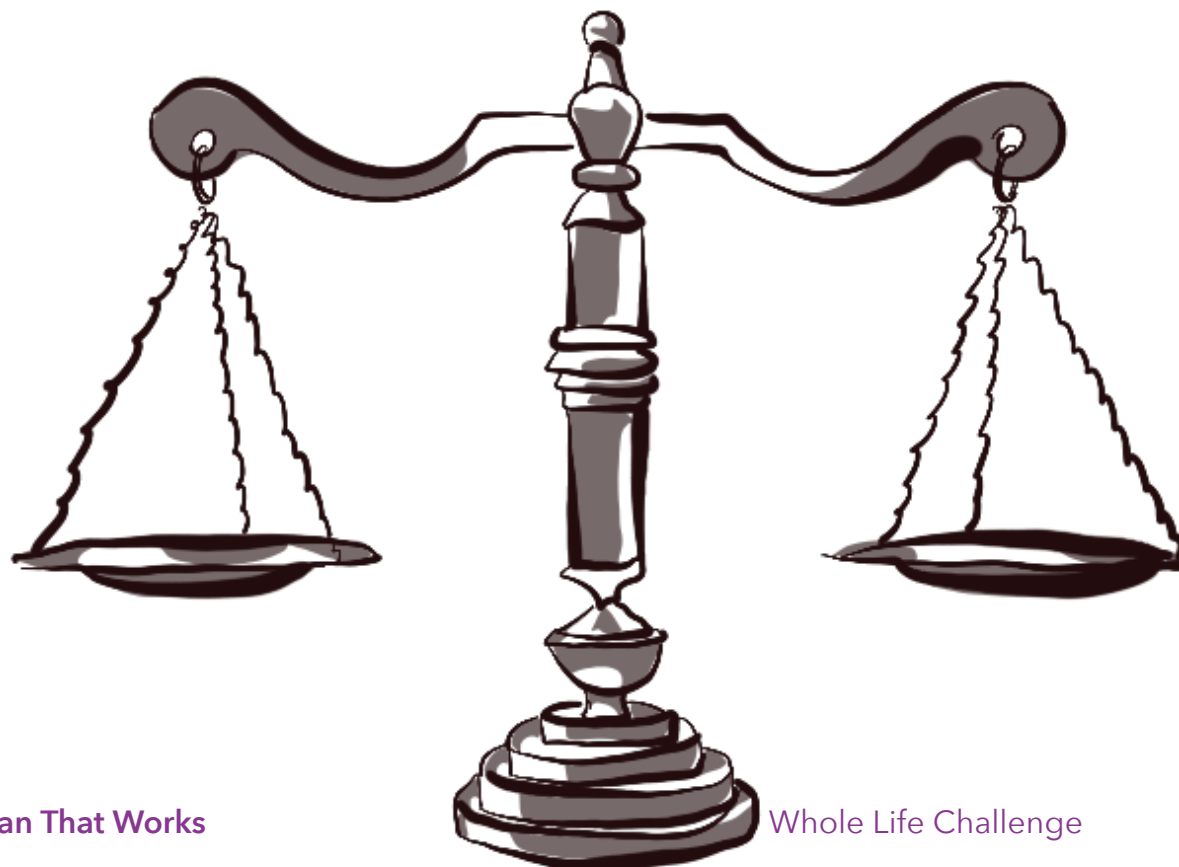
We tell ourselves we want to be “healthy,” but what does that really mean? And more importantly, how much does that value affect our lives?

“Not much,” is the answer. Because, as humans, we’re not going to start an uncomfortable new habit based on a vague intangible.

*Before you start exercising, take a little time to think about why you’re doing this.*

- Are you getting in shape to avoid another medical scare?
- Are you trying to become a better role model for your young child and know that being a fit parent is the best way to do that?
- Do you have dreams of getting to know your great-grandchildren or participating in the company 10K next spring?

Such aims are much closer to our hearts than some abstract notion of health or wellness. Write down your real goals and let the values inherent in them guide you.



# Choose Exercise that Works with Your Life

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If you have signed up for five gym memberships to date and used none of them, this isn't the time to do it again.

*Instead, ask yourself what you really enjoy and wish you had more of in life. Perhaps you:*

- Want to spend more time in nature
- Like a few quiet minutes to reflect each day
- Enjoy sweating, but not in front of people

With that in mind, you might find that hiking in the woods satisfies both your need for fresh air and your daily cardio. You may try yoga and find it's the perfect combo of stretching, mindfulness, and bodyweight strength training.

**What's most important is that you not let anyone else (or the fitness industry) define a "right" way to exercise**—and instead experiment to find the modality that's a best fit for you.

**Choose a type of exercise that doesn't immediately turn you off.** You can refine or course correct later. For now, though, simply avoid types of movement or venues you already know you dislike.



# Try New Things (and Let Go of Myths)

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Many myths haunt the beginning exerciser. And, thanks to modern technology, we now we have the entire Internet to create additional fear, dread, and misinformation related to health and fitness. Technology for the win! (Sarcasm.)

**Luckily, many health and fitness myths (and our related fears) are unfounded.**

For instance, you have probably heard that if you try to begin a running program, you're going to injure yourself. And it's true that if you simply head out into the world and start hauling butt up a hill, you will. However, if you use a carefully formulated walk/run program that enables your system to build the necessary strength over time, your chances of injury plummet.

Similarly, many people fear that to get fit they will have to showcase their currently less-than-fit bodies at a very public gym. That's simply not true, though. You can get iron-hard in your basement or in a nearby park. Telling yourself that it's "gym membership or nothing" is just another form of absolutism (and a way our inner voice convinces us it's easier not to succeed).

**Many of us self-sabotage by claiming that while we want to get in shape there's nothing we can do about it today.**

Not so. You can always take steps in the direction of greater movement. You don't have to join a gym, get the right exercise gear, start a canned workout program, or put the pedal to the metal in order to prioritize your health and start exercising. Simply take one step toward your goals by letting go of all those myths and moving a little bit more today than you did yesterday.





# **A Beginner's Exercise Plan That Works:** 7 Steps to Success

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We've discussed some of the main overarching principles of a good exercise plan. Now it's time to break these down into seven manageable steps that will help you concoct a super-sticky plan for the long-term.



1.

# Let Go of Huge Expectations

We already talked about how you shouldn't sign up for marathons. The truth is, most beginning exercisers face a huge amount of inertia when they initially contemplate creating their workout plan.

Inertia is the concept that an object at rest tends to stay at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. (Thanks, science!)

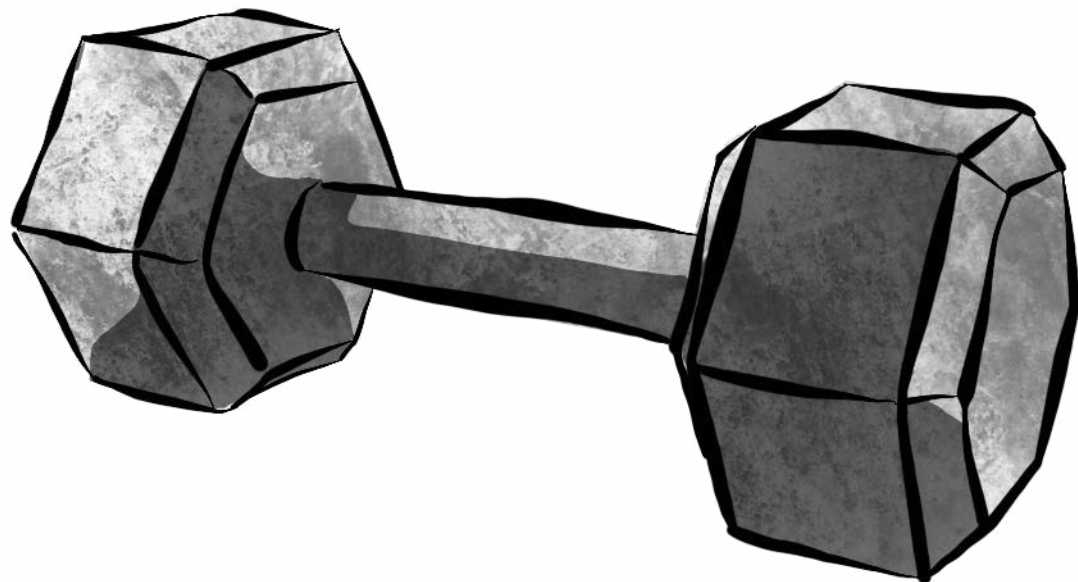
In this case, the "object" is your body and the "outside force" is your mind.

**As with any object at rest, it is hardest to move it right at the beginning.** Think getting a bicycle going—those first few pumps are always the most difficult. Your mind will face the biggest struggle during the early days of your new fitness plan.

**So, for the time being, don't think marathon.**

Recognize that, for now, simply committing to getting outdoors or onto your yoga mat is as challenging as any race.

**Let that be good enough.**



# Prioritize Your “Self” in Your Life

**Chances are you have a full life.** You’re probably not looking for another thirty-to sixty-minute obligation in your day. In fact, the thought of finding that much time probably kind of scares you.

**The solution is to create the space you need:**

- Sometimes that means asking something of yourself, like getting up earlier.
- Sometimes it means getting rid of a commitment, like resigning as treasurer of your club or group.
- And sometimes it means relying on someone in your life to do something for you, like asking your spouse or partner to help in the kitchen.

The common thread in all these things is putting the priority on you.

**For you to create a lifelong habit of health and fitness, you need to prioritize yourself.**

Whatever it is you need to do to create the space: do it.

**You’re worth it.**



## Make Your Workouts So Small You Can't Avoid Them

Sometimes you simply don't have time to get to the gym or even to lace up your shoes and head out into the neighborhood. When that's the case, try to integrate some movement into your day anyway.

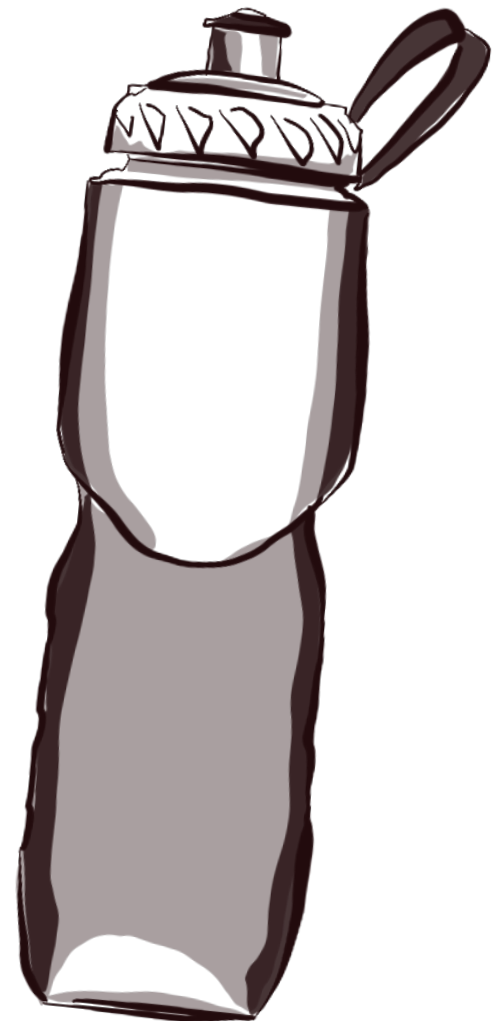
- Put your headphones on and walk up and down the stairs for ten minutes on your lunch break.
- Walk to the coffee shop ten blocks away instead of driving.
- Stand up while you do your paperwork at home.

**More generally, making small strides (see what we did there?) toward exercise is a much better idea than going full throttle.**

If you're starting a swimming program, for instance, try simply getting yourself to the pool and into the water. Swim around a bit. After you have routinely hit the pool for several weeks—say, three times a week for three weeks—you can add a “real” workout.

Even if it seems silly to start so small, do it anyway.

**Then, do it again tomorrow.**



## Create Markers

When you're in the thick of it, it can be hard to recognize the success you're creating. When you're first starting an exercise routine, losing five pounds probably sounds pretty amazing. However, once you've lost those five pounds, you are much likelier to focus on the twenty that remain rather than on the five you've already lost. Thus, you lose out on celebrating and sap your own future motivation.

The solution is to create success markers ahead of time.

When you create markers, you'll know what you're looking for. A marker signals to your brain, "Hey, I'm actually doing this!"

This gives you cause to stop and celebrate.

Don't underestimate the importance of creating a marker ahead of time so you don't lose sight of your success and track of your program overall.

Examples include:

- You run a certain distance
- You lift a certain amount at the gym
- You can do X sit-ups
- You lose five pounds
- You walk to the tenth floor without getting winded

Your markers will depend on you, your body, and the goals you set. What you choose doesn't matter; what matters is giving yourself cause to celebrate by signposting big destinations ahead of time.



## Get a Buddy...or Don't

Conventional wisdom when starting an exercise plan is to get up buddy. The thinking goes that if you have someone to experience the highs and lows with you, you're much likelier to stick with it. This is true, but only in some cases.

**Because believe it or not, research shows that announcing goals can actually make you less likely to achieve them.**

Let's walk this through:

You claim you are going to start exercising. In doing so, you create the start of a new identity for yourself. This "identity goal," even when you have not yet achieved it, is impressive to other people. By sharing your goal with someone else and hearing them ooh and aah, you give yourself an unintentional morale boost that makes you feel as though you have already accomplished part of that goal.

...and this makes you less likely to get started and work hard. You already received the reward!

**Therefore, it's incredibly important that you choose wisely when it comes to sharing your goal.** For instance, if you and Becky have been friends for years and have already experimented together with self-improvement, she is probably a good one with whom to share your goals—as long as she wants the same thing. Telling Becky your goals so you can set up weekly walk/run sessions is likely to contribute to your success.

However, if Becky is just a friend whose ear you have, it's best to keep your goals to yourself for a while. Telling her about your intention to get fit may backfire if she gives you the kind of nominal support that makes you feel good but does not measurably add to your chances of success. In other words, unless you and the other person intend to pursue the goal together, you might just keep quiet.

**Don't worry: once you've seen some success, you can tell the world.**

## Don't Get Bored

If you have tried exercising before, you probably noticed a point in your routine where you stopped seeing results.

That point can feel like a real bummer.

While it's easy to stay motivated when the pounds are dropping off or our measurements are shrinking, once the results go out the window, our internal motivation tends to go with them.

### **This is what we call "hitting a plateau."**

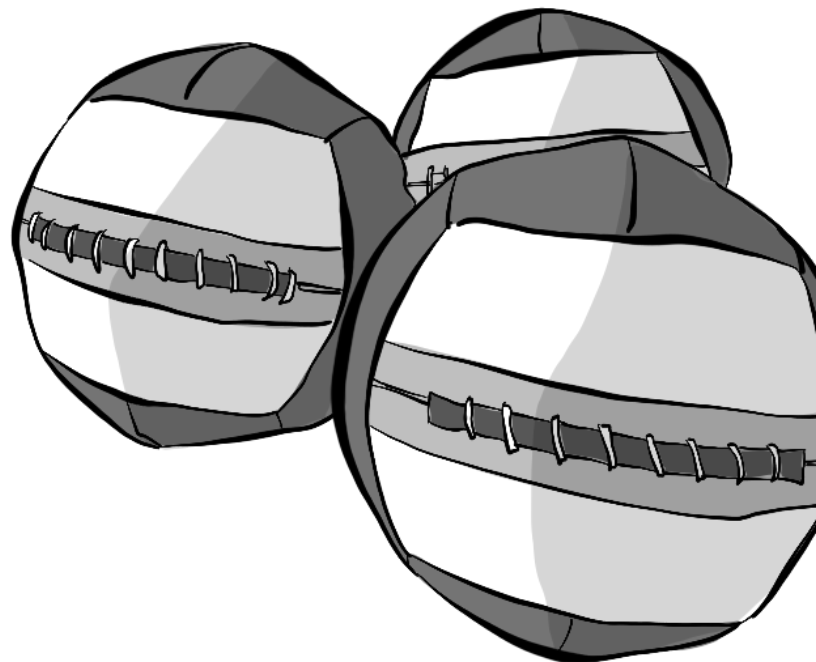
A plateau is simply a point in your regimen at which you start seeing diminishing returns or they seem to disappear altogether. This usually indicates that you need to switch up your workout routine.

Your body, which is adapted to your current approach, will otherwise have no reason to stretch and grow. (This happens to both our mind and our muscles, by the way.) **If you want to see continual results, you need to up the intensity and add new exercises over time.**

#### *Caution:*

*Don't use this as an excuse to become a program-hopper. Stick with what you're doing if it's still working.*

*That way you also avoid adding extra tasks to your plate and making your exercise plan too complicated to stick with.*



## Use Positive Self-Talk

Yoda once said, "Do or do not. There is no try."

You, much like young Skywalker, probably scoffed to yourself and thought, "What are you talking about? Trying matters a lot!"

And it does. But if all you do is try, you probably won't hit your goals.

**The word "try" tells your brain that as long as you are doing something, you're doing enough.** And during the first few weeks of any workout routine, this is true. However, as you begin to build up your strength, it's important to remove that "try" language and substitute in positive statements.

These are statements that phrase your goals as if they are facts. Maybe you use to say or think things like, "I will try to run three miles today." Now, you will say, "I will run three miles today."

It's that simple—but not necessarily easy (be mindful to the word "try" for a whole day to see what we mean).

**But, when you say statements to yourself in this positive way, you're much likelier to succeed.**



# Stay Motivated

So, now you've got your seven steps to follow. You just do it, right?

Well, just as a warning—staying motivated is a bugbear that many beginning exercisers face.

**After the initial enthusiasm of a new program fades, you're stuck with the sweaty, unglamorous job of plodding through workouts you might rather not do.**

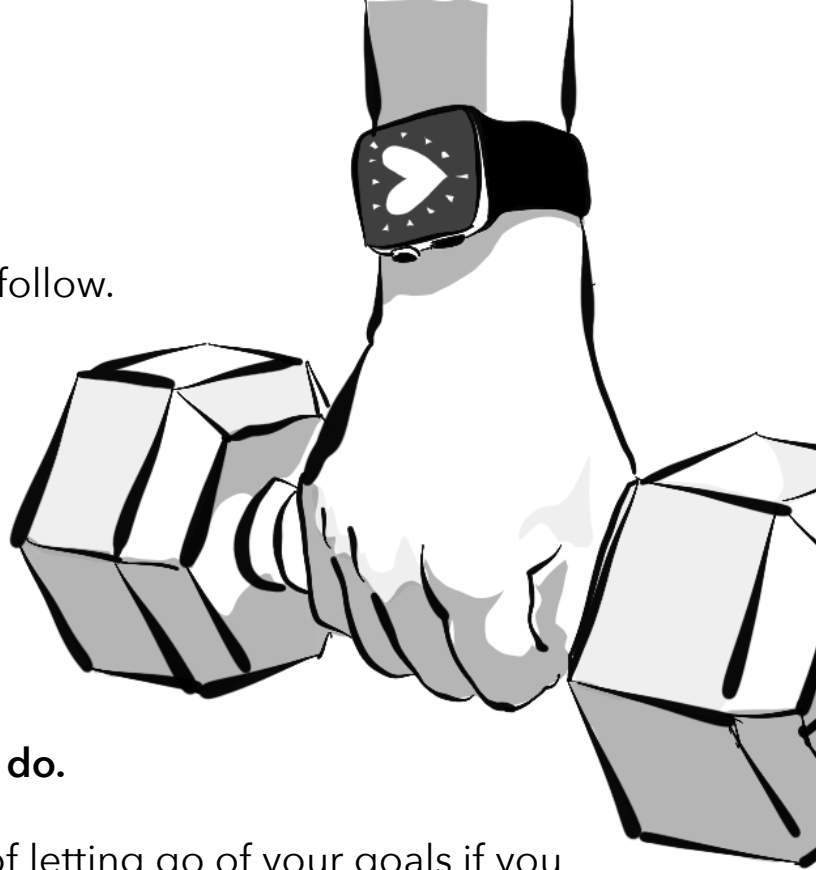
When this happens, you are in danger of letting go of your goals if you are not already prepared.

Therefore, you must set up motivational tools in those early days when you have an excess of enthusiasm.

**Consider tracking your progress on a calendar** using green dots for days that you complete your task and red dots for days you do not. Over time, as you get addicted to the green dots, you'll see them popping up more and more often. (There are apps that will do this easily, too.)

**Or you could create a list of your "whys"** to post on your bathroom mirror. This circles back to your values, such as wanting to be a role model for your child or hoping to get in good enough shape to participate in the company race in spring.

If you have a workout buddy, this is where they can come in, as well. Again, take caution with reaching out to people who are not going through what you're going through. They are more likely to tell you that you deserve a break, than they are to support and motivate you. That's a good reason to find a true buddy from the get-go.





# Celebrate Every. Little. Thing.

Wherever you are in your journey—but especially as a beginner—**it's important to celebrate your wins.**

If you don't, it's going to be hard to keep up the motivation over the lifetime of your exercise program (i.e. forever). After all, if your goal is to affect change for the positive, then you need proof of that positivity in your life.

Otherwise, exercise is all work with minor gains along the way. And while those minor gains will eventually become major ones, you need to commemorate intermediary achievement as well.

**That said, we caution you against making the mistake of celebrating your wins with counterproductive actions.**

If, for instance, you hit the five-kilometer mark on a run, avoid ordering a milkshake or taking the next week off exercise as your "reward." Instead, continue your regimen and fuel your body well, then choose a treat such as a trip to the movies, a massage, or a new piece of cookware.

These types of rewards add to your mental and physical health and increase the chances you will keep going.



# Last but Not Least

**You might not be a caveperson, but movement is just as important to your survival as it was to theirs.** Creating an exercise plan that sticks for the long haul is crucial.

In our media-saturated, quick-results world, it's easy to get sucked into the belief that if you don't see results right away, nothing is happening. But an exercise program is not like the Internet: you can't get an urge, order something, and expect it to be there two days later with no effort on your part.

**Instead of predicating your new exercise approach on your dreams of looking a certain way, build your foundation on those strong, real-life values** we discussed above. Celebrate the teeny wins, like adding a few pounds to the bar or placing your heels all the way on the floor during downward dog.

This is the type of thinking that will eventually help you reach your goals.

In the long run, you may even find that those goals diminish in importance as you discover that exercise is its own reward. The feelings of strength and vitality that come from daily movement will overshadow the rest if you keep it up.

**So, don't stop.**

Don't let absolutism or myths get you down.

And don't forget to celebrate.

**You got this.**



# Glossary of Common Exercise Terms

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- **Absolutism:**  
A belief that life is one way or another, that there is no middle option.
- **HIIT:**  
High Intensity Interval Training, in which you alternate shorter, more intense types of exercise with longer, milder stints.
- **Inertia:**  
The scientific principle that an object at rest stays at rest unless a change is exerted upon it.
- **Markers:**  
Tangible proof of goals achieved.
- **Movement:**  
Any form of exercise, even if it doesn't involve sweating or workout clothes.
- **Plateaus:**  
A point in the execution of your exercise plan where the results seem to stop.
- **Positive statements:**  
Statements that involve phrasing a goal as a fact, e.g. "I will run two miles now," as opposed to, "I'll try to run two miles."
- **Streak:**  
Consecutive achievements of smaller goals that add up to a larger objective.
- **Value:**  
The importance that one places on a principle, lifestyle, or action.
- **Walk/run program:**  
A workout regimen in which you alternate running and walking to reduce the chances of injury (and maybe even enjoy yourself).

# About

With just a nudge (and a little bit of effort), you can have the life you want – happy, healthy, active, energetic, and connected.

## ABOUT THE CHALLENGE

The Whole Life Challenge is a 6-week health and wellness game that focuses on The 7 Daily Habits.

## THE 7 DAILY HABITS

Throughout the Challenge, you'll practice the habits every day – Nutrition, Exercise, Mobility, Sleep, Hydration, Well-Being, and Reflection – with the ultimate goal of incorporating them into your life. They'll work together to help you become happier and healthier.

## WANT TO PLAY?

You can register to play the next Whole Life Challenge here:

<https://www.wholelifechallenge.com/join-the-challenge/>

## LET'S CONNECT

We use social media to share our popular blog posts, motivational quotes, and information on the upcoming Challenge!

Connect to get your daily dose of inspiration and motivation.



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