

Q. I leave home early for work – and get home late in the evening. How can I fit exercise into my busy schedule?

A. Busy schedules are a challenge for many people. Here are some thoughts that might help:



1. Everyone has to set priorities. Taking good care of your health is a good priority that pays great dividends. People who don't exercise regularly are more subject to depression, diabetes, heart problems, cancer, and mental decline at an earlier age, and die earlier than those who do exercise. One study (of Harvard alumni) showed that people who exercise regularly lived 2 hours longer for every hour they exercised! You don't lose time with exercise. You actually gain time.
2. Aerobic exercise doesn't have to be done all at one time. Any time you have 10 or 15 minutes to walk, bike, or do other activity – use it! Aim for 30 minutes of exercise or activity daily. Three 10-minute sessions meet this goal. You might walk a little while waiting for the train, at noon at work, or take a 10-minute walking break in the afternoon. Another 10-15 minutes of activity (e.g., walking or riding a stationary bike) in the evening could give you your 30 minutes daily.
3. Doing aerobic activity for 10-15 minutes shouldn't interfere with sleep if you allow an hour of relaxation before bedtime. People who exercise daily actually get better sleep than sedentary people do. Moderate exercise helps relieve worries, concerns, and tensions. Exercise (especially if fun) helps relieve stress and improves relaxation.

4. Studies show that even 3 exercise sessions weekly (especially if the activity is more vigorous) has health benefits. Running 20 minutes 3 times a week has good health benefits, as much or more as walking 30 minutes 5 times a week. Running on a treadmill at home or in a nearby park is good activity for healthy people. Just remember to ease into running by walking, then by alternating walking and jogging. And be careful not to overdo it as your body grows stronger.

5. Use the weekends for longer activities: an hour-long walk in the park, biking, playing tennis, or playing 9-18 holes of golf. The weekends are an opportune time to participate in the longer activities.
6. Lifting weights and doing other strengthening activities in the evening should be fine. Again, try to leave an hour before bedtime for more relaxing activities.
7. Also look for opportunities to be more active at work, such as walking up the stairs instead of taking the elevator, walking more at work instead of always using emails, and standing when talking on the phone. Do a few stretching exercises at your desk. Hold short committee meetings while walking together. Some people have a treadmill in their office and use it while they talk on the phone or read their emails.

Be creative. If you have the will, you'll find a way to be more physically active. You will never be sorry that you took regular time for physical activity and your health.

