

## Making exercise a part of your life

Making physical activity or exercise a habit can be a challenging task. There are a few critical issues you should consider to ensure long term adherence to your exercise program.

### What motivates you?

Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivators or desire to do something based on internally motivated reasons, rather than relying on or requiring external factors. These motivators tap into reasons for change that are personally meaningful to you, either through enjoyment inherent in the activity itself or through associated values and priorities that are important to you.

We all have unique reasons which compel us to make that initial 'health' change. However, it is essential to understand **why** you want to exercise as this is what will keep you motivated when life gets too hectic. These reasons can be very specific, like the examples below:

- Running a half marathon in under 1 hr 45 mins
- Fitting back into an old pair of jeans.

Or they may be simply things that have happened or that you have thought about recently:

- Having your first child.

- Alarming information gathered in your last health assessment, after speaking with health professionals eg. high blood pressure or elevated cholesterol.
- Death of someone very close to you by a lifestyle related disease e.g. heart attack.
- Seeing someone's quality of life reduced due to poor mobility e.g. fractured hip because of weak bones.

### How to be SMART when goal setting!

There are many different goals an individual can set in order to achieve a particular health outcome. General goals are goals that relate to the benefit you want to achieve and these are the ones we normally tend to set (eg: I want to lose weight). However, it is imperative to set a specific goal that involves the action or behaviour you are going to incorporate into your lifestyle to achieve your overall general goal (eg: I am going to walk home from the station every other day).

There are also other factors which have an impact on effective goal setting and they can be remembered using the SMART principle.

### SMART Principles

**Specific** – what you are going to do in order to achieve your general goal?

**Measurable** – how will you track your progress with your specific goal?

**Attractive** – ensure the activity is something that you will enjoy and fit in with your schedule.

**Realistic** – setting goals that are too big can be detrimental.

**Time-framed** – be sure to set a timeframe. If there's no end point, then there's no accountability.

An example of a SMART goal would be: "I am going to go for a 30 minute brisk walk in the evenings after work, 3 days a week and track progress starting Monday".

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### Minimising the barriers

The traditional approach is that you need to remain highly motivated to adhere to an exercise program. Unfortunately, we hit many “speed bumps” in our life, which are referred to as barriers. These barriers then lead to what is known as “motivational fatigue”. The classic example of this is joining a local gym and to begin with working out 4-5 times a week, but after a while you can’t remember the last time you went to the gym.

Listed below are a few common barriers most people face and effective strategies to overcome them.

- **Lack of time:** No two weeks are the same, but sit down on a Sunday and plan how you will fit in your activity. Keep your options open. For example, if you have a commitment that takes up one of your planned 30 minute sessions you could do an extra 15 minutes on 2 sessions the next week to make up for lost time.
- **Lack of energy:** Research has shown that exercise has been found to increase energy levels post exercise, releasing endorphins which make you feel better. As a bonus exercise has also been shown to improve sleep patterns!
- **Unfavourable weather:** Unfortunately we cannot control the weather, but we can control when we exercise. Getting out at lunch time can be a

great way to avoid the cold weather in winter whilst exercising in the evening is a great way to bypass the heat of summer. During those wet raining days, have a think about what you could do around the house to stay active (eg. step ups or strengthening exercises).

- **Lack of equipment:** Be creative! Think about what equipment you do have and what you can do with it. If you are thinking of adding resistance training to your program you may want to purchase free weights or join a local gym.
- **Boredom:** After a while any exercise program can get stale, therefore it may be important to change facets of your program. Recruiting peer support in the form of friends, family, i-pods and pets have all been found to be effective strategies to overcome this barrier.

### GROW with your exercise program!

The GROW principle can help you defeat many of the previously mentioned barriers and assist you in setting an agenda for fitting exercise into your lifestyle. The GROW principle can help you take your general goal (eg. losing weight) and help refine it into a specific goal with a detailed action plan.

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### GROW Principles:

**General goal:** What do you want to work on and achieve? At this point ask yourself deep down why you want to achieve this goal and figure out your intrinsic motivators to keep you on track.

**Reality:** What are you currently doing regarding the general goal? What have you done in the past? What were the barriers in the past and what has helped you overcome these barriers? What works for one person may not work for all. Thus, it is important to think about what will fit into your lifestyle and what you could do should barriers arise.

**Options:** What are all the potential ways you can achieve your general goal? Generate a list of options to tackle your general goal. It may be a good idea to brainstorm ideas and then assess what is feasible for you.

**Write it down:** This is where you assess all your options and generate an action plan for the upcoming weeks. Think about the steps needed to achieve the goal and cues or prompts to keep you on track. It is also important to have support from family and friends, which will come in handy in those tough times. Most importantly you also want a back up plan, in case things are not working or life just gets in the way. Remember to track your progress!