

## STARTING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM AND STICKING TO IT

By: Dr. John A. Papa, DC



The Christmas season is upon us and this means that New Years resolutions are not far behind. My safe guess is that starting an exercise program will be on many people's resolution lists, and for good reason. Regular exercise has long been identified as an essential component to good health. Modern science has repeatedly demonstrated that regular exercise improves digestion, maintains healthy body weight and composition, increases endurance and energy levels, and lowers harmful cholesterol levels. Exercise has also been shown to reduce stress and anxiety, elevate mood, increase feelings of well-being, and reduce depression. This is only a partial list of the many documented positive health benefits of exercise. So if exercise is so great, why is it that so many of us fail miserably at initiating or sticking to an exercise program? The purpose of this article is to identify some of the common barriers individuals face when attempting to start or initiate an exercise program and some simple solutions in overcoming these barriers.



It must first be understood that human bodies of all ages and shapes were meant to move. God gave us joints that bend, hands that grab, arms that swing, legs that run, feet that kick and muscles that stretch, contract, push and pull. Exercise should be viewed as guided and coordinated movements which strengthen our bodies to withstand occupational, recreational, and everyday stresses. This enables us to interact with our environment in a more efficient manner. It is important to note that exercise should be safe for the individual performing the exercise. An exercise that may be considered safe for one individual may not be safe for another due to age, physical limitations, and other general health concerns. Exercise activities should be appropriately geared toward the physical capabilities of the individual. Individuals who are intimidated about the thought of exercise, or are not sure where to start should consult with an experienced and knowledgeable individual such as a personal trainer or health care provider who can assist in choosing activities that are appropriate for them. Some people fear the thought of exercise because they associate physical activity with pain. Although there may be some initial discomfort when beginning an exercise program, this may be your body's normal response when starting a

new activity and should not last more than 1-2 weeks. If discomfort or pain persists beyond this point, consult with an experienced individual to make sure the exercise you are performing is appropriate and being done correctly. Individuals should also be aware of signs of doing too much or “overtraining”. These include symptoms of accentuated fatigue after exercising, lightheadedness, insomnia, and susceptibility to cold’s, flu’s or injuries. Listen to your body. If exercise worsens symptoms, modify your program or stop. As your energy and health improve, you will be able to resume easing back into exercise.

One of the most common barriers identified by individuals attempting to initiate and maintain a regular exercise program is the common phrase, “I don’t have any time”. Yes, time is money as the saying goes but poor health also costs money. This will become even more apparent over the next several decades as shrinking federal and provincial health care dollars will mean that individuals will have more of their health care costs transferred to them. Exercise should be viewed as an investment into one’s health that pays off immediately and for years down the road. Regular exercise must be prioritized. For some this will require routinely scheduling exercise into their everyday lives. For others this may mean making regular exercise as convenient as possible so they are more apt to stick with it. Current scientific research indicates that regular bouts of exercise for as little as 30 minutes a day can have a positive impact on health. As humans, we tend to have an easier time identifying barriers than we do at problem solving and being proactive. Although incorporating regular exercise into a busy life necessitates some planning and sacrifice, the payoff can be enormous.



Exercise is an activity that needs to be fun. There are many individuals who find exercise to be tedious and boring. There are several solutions to combat this. Exercise can encompass a wide range of activities. Individuals should choose activities that they enjoy. Performing these activities with a workout buddy, friend, or family member also results in the exercise being more enjoyable. Those individuals who choose fitness and recreational activities they enjoy are more likely to be consistent with those activities. Having another individual to share this with will also increase the likelihood that you will stay with the exercise activity.

Individuals beginning an exercise program need to have realistic expectations about the amount of time they can invest, the activities they will enjoy engaging

in, and the physical and psychological benefits they expect to experience. Exercise leads to tremendous health benefits that can be initiated by individuals of any age or shape. Hopefully we have inspired you to invest in the health of your future. From all of us at the New Hamburg Wellness Centre, good luck and Seasons Greetings!

*This article is a basic summary for educational purposes only. It is not intended, and should not be considered, as a replacement for consultation, diagnosis or treatment by a duly licensed health practitioner.*