

The biggest mover contest

Creating Exercise Habits

The beginning of the year is often a time when many people commit to a New Year's resolution. Research indicates that approximately 45% of the population commits to at least one resolution, but of those that do, the vast majority have abandoned it by Valentine's Day!

Common New Year's resolutions are committing to weight loss and starting exercise. The fact that many people put on extra weight during the holidays can be an added motivation to create a new exercise habit. So what is it that makes these self-promises so hard to keep? All too often our initial enthusiasm and energy wanes. We get distracted by other things going on in our lives, or we do not think we are seeing results quickly enough, and we throw in the towel. Many people do manage to hang in there and make exercise a lifetime habit, and you can too!

A recent study by researcher Diane Klein, PhD, shed some light on the subject. Long-term exercisers (those working out for an average of 13 years) were asked to rank what motivated them to keep up with their regimes. Primarily the exercisers were not as concerned with specific physical goals, like being toned, or having bulging biceps, as they were with feeling good and being healthy.

Here's how the study participants ranked their motivators:

- 1 Fitness
- 2 Feelings of well-being
- 3 Pep and energy
- 4 Enjoyment of the exercise
- 5 Making exercise a priority
- 6 Sleeping better
- 7 Feeling alert
- 8 Being relaxed
- 9 Weight management
- 10 Appearance

How do we become one of the fitness faithful? Check out the following hit list to help create positive fitness habits.

Find something that you enjoy. People think that fitness has to be hard, uncomfortable, and even boring. Group Fitness has proven to be an enticing form of exercise. The music, the instructor, and the group setting can create a form of escape a positive and welcoming experience. Initially, many people gravitate toward exercise equipment because it is simple and accessible. But exercise adherence becomes harder to maintain because there is no emotional attachment to a machine. Why? It is because this form of exercise requires large amounts of intrinsic self-motivation to stay committed. With Group Fitness, a great portion of the motivation is driven by the external environment:

"The synchronization of music with exercise consistently demonstrates increased levels of work output among exercise participants."

*Music in Sport and Exercise: Theory and Practice,
Dr. C.I. Karageorghis, Ph.D*

Exercise in a group or with another person. Exercise retention is improved when exercising in a group and/or with another person. Group Fitness is a social atmosphere. A type of pack energy exists that draws you in, motivates you, and builds loyalty between you and your fellow exercisers. Plus, a positive exercise experience will keep you coming back for more - helping you keep your commitment.

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"While most new exercisers cite health and fitness gains as reasons for entering exercise programs, they usually cite social aspects as primary reasons for staying"

Enhancing Exercise Motivation, Dr. James Annesi

"A lack of supervision while exercising leads to twice as much dropout when compared to exercising in groups"

Enhancing Exercise Motivation, Dr. James Annesi

Make exercise a priority and schedule it in. Exercise has to be scheduled weekly or you will never get to it. One of the benefits of Group Fitness is that it is scheduled regularly by the club, so it is simply a matter of adding an appointment to your schedule. Finding two to three hours per week should not be too hard when you plan in advance. When scheduling, consider when your best time is. Don't force yourself to get up early in the morning if you are not a morning person. Find your best time and work with the flow of your life rather than against the current.

"The role of routine or habit is important when attempting to help clients maintain exercise behaviors"

Enhancing Exercise Motivation, Dr. James Annesi

Be aware of all the indicators of progress. We all love it when our clothes fit better, but this is not the only indicator of progress. Lifting heavier weights or being able to workout longer without getting exhausted are other indicators of progress that can help keep you on track. Many of the Group Fitness programs are designed with exercise progressions in mind.

Always remember how good you feel when you are done. If you can hook onto this feeling, it can be a great motivator when you are tired or do not feel like exercising.

Understand that exercise is not a luxury, it is a necessity! Everyone needs exercise. The conversation that you have with yourself has to change from "if I have the time" to "I must make the time," or from "if I can fit it in" to "when will I fit it in?" Again, you will have to rethink your personal schedule, allowing for two to three one hour appointments with exercise per week. In the grand scheme of things this is equal to one night in front of the television. What do you think is more important?

Make a positive choice today; it could completely change your life!