

How to Do It Better

The simple act of putting one foot in front of the other for a period of time almost every day brought a whole new dimension to my life more than 40 years ago. It has also allowed me to eat more, feel better, be stronger, have added self-confidence and get some recognition, but none of those are reasons why I do it. I run because it is my joy and my passion. I just love to run!

I know. It's not for everybody. Maybe it's not for you. But there is some physical activity out there capable of turning you on, of making you go out and do it in any kind of weather, when you are tired, maybe a little sick, or when life is throwing punches at you. You may not want to go every time, but you'll never be sorry you went.

Because running is my thing, the following suggestions for building physical activity into your life may suffer from my perspective as a runner, but I'd like to think that they apply to different kinds of physical activity as well. Some people love the gym, others are happiest on the skinny seat of a bike or in the solitude provided by hikes in the woods. Others love to swim, row a boat, run around a soccer field. It may take some experimenting, but there's a passion out there waiting for you.

1. Keep it simple. Find something you can do easily, close to home and that doesn't require expensive equipment.
2. Plug an exercise time into every day, even if it means getting up an hour early.
3. Get out the clothes you'll wear the night before.
4. Set a date and time to exercise with a friend who likes to do what you do. Consider joining a group or club in your sport.
5. Never let an "annoyance barrier" stop you. It could be the weather, a comment from a friend or spouse, or the fact that you're too tired or busy or stressed. Go anyway.
6. Don't worry about progress. You may see big changes in weight and strength initially, then they may drop off. Don't obsess about weighing yourself. Bag the scale for a while. This is a lifelong change you are making. Think long-term.
7. If your activity is an outdoors one, don't forget to look around, enjoy the scenery and changing seasons. Greet the people you encounter, even if they have wires dangling from their ears and can't hear you.
8. Forget about what other people are doing. You are the one who knows best what pleases you, how far and fast you need to go, and when you need to stop. Pushing yourself can be good, pushing to exhaustion can result in injuries.

9. If you are a parent, don't overlook the legacy you provide to your children by doing a physical activity you love regularly. They will grow up knowing that physical exercise is part of their family culture.
10. Know that in any sport, injuries are part of the game. Try to avoid them, treat them sensibly and make it your goal to get back to whatever it is you love to do.

If you decide to compete in a sport, great! Just remember that races are the frosting on the cake, not the cake itself—the important thing is your every day workouts, where you get in touch with yourself and remember why you are out there.

No one said it would always feel good. Often, it hurts. Other times you'll have an overwhelming sense of elation. And to repeat what I said: You'll never be sorry you went.