

# How to Most Effectively Start Working Out When You Haven't Exercised in Years

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Your gym membership expired (three years ago), you misplaced your running shoes (or did you give them away to charity?), and you haven't fit into your favorite sweat suit since college.

In other words, when it comes to exercise, it's been awhile.

But by no means does that mean you can't start up again. In fact, you are never too old to benefit from exercise.

Consider one study published in the Journal of Aging and Health. It divided 64 people, ranging in age from 66 to 96 (with an average age of 84) into three groups; one group exercised by walking, the second did resistance training, and the third did no exercise.

When compared with the no-exercise group, after exercising just twice a week for 16 weeks the participants in both exercise groups experienced:

- Lower systolic blood pressure
- Improved upper and lower body strength
- Improved hip and shoulder flexibility
- Improvements in tests of agility, balance and coordination

Chances are, though, that you already know the benefits of exercise, but because of time issues, lack of motivation or not knowing exactly how to start up again, you've been resisting it.

With the tips below, you can begin to exercise again, at any age, and with [even the busiest schedule](#).

## Get Ready to Exercise!

### 1. Decide Why You Want to Exercise

We often focus on reasons why we can't, or won't, exercise. Yet, the most important thing is why you do want to. Are you trying to lose weight? Build strength? Improve your heart health?

These are the things to focus on when you feel your motivation waning.

### 2. Start Slowly

You must begin your workouts gradually, or you risk burnout or injury. Begin by walking a mile or two, then gradually increase your pace and distance. After you



Most Americans do not exercise regularly, but you don't have to be one of them.

feel your body beginning to shape up, you can start with other forms of higher intensity exercise.

### 3. Be Realistic

Getting back into shape takes time, so don't expect to run a marathon after your first week. Be realistic about what to expect, and you'll begin to feel changes in your body and endurance within a few weeks. You also need to be realistic about how often you can exercise. It's probably not wise to go from zero exercise to a six-day per week exercise schedule. Try starting out with two or three days a week instead, and be sure to give your body time to recover between your workouts.

### 4. Schedule it In

One of the most common reasons why people fall off the exercise wagon is "there's not enough time." But, if you schedule exercise into your routine -- just as you would a dentist's appointment or your child's soccer match -- you'll have no excuse. Write it down on your calendar and when it's time to exercise, exercise!

### 5. Variety

There's a reason why they say "variety is the spice of life." Exercise does not have to be boring or tedious. In fact, it can be enjoyable if you simply vary your workouts. One day try a beginner's kickboxing class at your gym. The next, go for a long, brisk walk with a friend. Then try a [yoga class](#) or [weight lifting](#). Varying your workouts also ensures that you're working all of your muscle groups and getting all the benefits that exercise has to offer.



Even people in their 90s can benefit from exercising, so what are you waiting for?

### 6. Don't Overdo It

Once you start exercising again, you may find it to be highly addictive. This is a good thing, as long as you listen to your body to avoid injury or burnout. If you're overly sore or short of breath, back off on the intensity. If you don't feel well one day, remember that it's OK to take a day off.

### 7. Get a Workout Partner

It's often more fun to workout with a friend, and your workout buddy can encourage you to keep going if you're losing motivation (and vice versa). For best results, try to find a buddy who's at the same fitness level as you are.

If you don't have a buddy in-person, you can get many of the same benefits by trying out a personal trainer, or visiting an exercise forum online. There are many that offer support and encouragement for people trying to stick to their exercise program.

### 8. Make Your Goals Easy, and Measurable

If you set exercise goals that are too intense (such as "I will go to the gym for 1.5 hours every day), you will be overwhelmed and likely give up after a few days.

Instead, set goals that you can achieve, such as "This week I'll walk for 20 minutes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday," or "I will attend yoga class on Tuesday and go to aerobics on Saturday." These goals are easy, and you can measure them to make sure you stayed on track.

## **9. Reward Yourself**

Reward yourself not based on how many inches or pounds you've lost, but for simply sticking to your workout goals.

Good luck!

## **Recommended Reading**

[What to do AFTER a Workout to Get Maximum Benefit From Your Exercise](#)

[Interval Training: Why it May be the Best Workout for You, Too](#)

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## **Sources**

[Journal of Aging and Health February 2006; 18: 91-105](#)

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