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How to get over your fear of exercise

The benefits of [physical activity](#) are well known. In the short term, doing some exercise can improve your mood and help you sleep better, as well as giving you a sense of accomplishment. Over the longer term, it can lower your risk of many chronic diseases, help keep your weight under control and strengthen your muscles and bones.

That said, knowing the facts isn't always enough. Around a [quarter](#) of adults in the UK are totally sedentary, managing less than half an hour of moderate activity a week. Last year, a [report](#) by [Public Health England](#) found that 6 million middle-aged adults fail to take so much as a brisk walk once a month.

Of course, exercise is a very personal issue, and everyone's circumstances are different. However, there are some frequently occurring obstacles that may stand in the way of getting fit. Whether these are practical hurdles (like finding time) or mental blocks (like feeling self-conscious), it's common to find that physical activity falls down your priority list.

"There are many reasons why you may feel apprehensive about starting an exercise routine," says [Laura Williams](#), a personal trainer. "You may already be pushed for time, suffer with flagging energy levels or find it difficult to imagine how exercise could ever be enjoyable. Combine this with a lack of exercise know-how and previous bad experiences, and you have the perfect recipe for abandoning all fitness plans!"

Pressures and priorities

These issues may feel particularly salient at this time of year, as New Year's resolutions start to fall by the wayside. According to Kate Dale, who heads up the [This Girl Can](#) campaign at [Sport England](#), the pressure to transform your life in January can actually prove counterproductive.

"At New Year, people have all these goals around weight loss and fitness, and we're keen to take some of the pressure off," she says. "You don't need to commit to 100 press-ups a day or five-mile runs every morning - it's just about finding something you enjoy doing, and being more active than you currently are."

This Girl Can, which aims to improve women's participation in exercise, was started in response to [research](#) around the gender gap in sport. Far fewer women than men regularly exercise (two million of them in the 14-40 age bracket alone). However, three quarters of those surveyed would like to be more active, implying that something is stopping them.

"Women told us lots of different things that got in the way," says Kate Dale. "It might be down to their experiences of PE at school, which weren't particularly positive. They might have worries over what people think or what they look like, and there might also be issues around priorities - for instance, whether they should spend their time doing this when they've got young families."

She adds that these issues aren't exclusive to women. Many men also grew up feeling as though physical activity wasn't for them, particularly if they weren't part of the 'sporty' clique at school. Whatever your background, it can be daunting to launch into a fitness regime from scratch.

Find an activity you like

So if you're keen to up your activity levels this year, but are feeling less than confident, what might be a good way to begin?

"The trick is not to let your fears and apprehensions overwhelm you to the point where you do nothing," says Laura Williams. "Start by separating fact from fiction: are your fears founded? The great thing about exercise is that whatever the barrier you face, the chances are there's always a way around it."

For instance, if you don't like the thought of going to the gym (or lack the money to do so), you might prefer to try an online workout. There are many apps that can help, providing routines you can do from your living room. This Girl Can has an [activity finder](#) on its website, offering suggestions from archery to orienteering. And if you're interested in running, you may want to try the NHS's [C25K](#) plan, as well attending your local [Parkrun](#) for non-competitive support.

The important thing is to shop around until you find something you like. Every person is wired differently, and what works for your Crossfit-loving friend may not be what works for you.

"There are so many things to do, there'll be something you enjoy. It can be as simple as dancing round your living room energetically to whichever tunes you grew up with," says Kate Dale.

If time is an issue, it's important to remember that even very short bursts of activity can make a difference. Last year, Public Health England launched its [Active10](#) app, which allows you to set your own goals, starting with one 10-minute brisk walk a day. [Research](#) has shown that even this level of exercise can bring health benefits, cutting your risk of an early death by as much as 15%.

Show your body who's boss

For those who struggle with self-consciousness, it's worth remembering the old adage that nobody will ever judge you as harshly as you are judging yourself. Many people find that exercise helps with body image, by shifting the focus from what they look like to what they can do.

"Once you get to the point where you don't care about the judgement of others, it becomes much easier to address the practical barriers you may have as well," says Kate Dale. "It's about getting your mental state to the point where you want to get out and do it."

She adds that This Girl Can provides a powerful sense of community for women who want to become more active. Currently, there are 800,000 women on its [social media channels](#), who encourage and motivate each other, helping dispel the myth that exercise is just for an elite.

"You don't want to miss out on the self-esteem boosting effects of exercise because you're listening to that repetitive internal dialogue," adds Laura Williams. "Show your body who's boss by lacing up your trainers, heading out the door and getting your sweat on."

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