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## How to fall in love with exercise

We all know exercise is good for us, boosting self-esteem, mood and energy, as well as reducing our chances of heart disease, cancer and depression. It's not always as easy as lacing up your trainers and hitting the treadmill, though. If you're starting from scratch, working out can seem intimidating, so how can we fall in love with exercise?

### How to start exercising

Until around four years ago, I was pretty much a fitness-phobe. As someone who was a little overweight, smoked like a chimney and struggled with [anxiety](#), the gym seemed like somewhere that just wasn't for me. Jogging was a no-no, considering I could barely run for a bus.

In 2015, seeing the joy exercise brought family and friends, I decided enough was enough and attempted my first run to see if I couldn't fall in love with exercise too.

I found some old trainers in the wardrobe and pelted it down the road, before limping back home five minutes later. It was, frankly, awful – I felt embarrassed and ached for days.

### Perseverance is key

Despite my rocky start, I tried the run again the next morning, and forced myself to go every day for the next few weeks. I began to notice small changes, like I could run a whole kilometre without stopping and gasping like a fish out of water.

Spurred on, I started exercising with a friend who was training to be a [fitness](#) instructor. I joined a gym and started trying different classes, with friends and colleagues in tow. Two years later, I crossed the finish line at the Brighton Half Marathon, limping, bleeding and swearing, but having raised hundreds for Women's Aid. I even do dance classes now, which I'm terrible at, but love.

## Discover the benefits of exercise

There have been ups and downs - quite literally, when I fell on a pavement and injured my knee - but the benefits outweigh any challenges. I've lost some weight, and although it was never my main goal, this has boosted my confidence. Most importantly, I feel much more in control of my [anxiety](#). It's still there, but on a bad day, I go outside for a quick jog or just a walk, and life feels more manageable.

## Finding the right exercise for you is crucial

Starting to exercise is about trial and error. I'm not really one for team sports, as I've found out, but I enjoy running and classes. Finding something you like is crucial, because you're more likely to quit if you aren't doing something you enjoy.

"Finding the right exercise for you is just like dating," says Lucy Arnold, a personal trainer and owner of fitness wear brand [Locket Loves](#). "It's all about getting yourself out there and trying new things until you find your dream exercise. The general go-to I think for people starting to exercise is usually jogging and swimming, so they would be a good place to start."

### Exercise in a group

"I have noticed that people tend to enjoy and do more [exercise](#) if they do it with the support of a community behind them. So go out and find a friend or a group of people to get involved with for encouragement and you'll quickly find your feet with it," says Lucy.

Keith McNiven, founder of the personal training company [Right Path Fitness](#), says there are lots of different types of exercise - so you're certain to find one that suits you.

"If you like being outdoors, look for running groups or circuit training classes in the park. If you like the idea of being indoors but not the busyness of a gym, then look for a quieter gym or studio space, or ask about peak gym times and plan your visits when things are quieter," he says.

### **Exercises for flexibility**

"Also think about what you want to achieve from the exercise – for increased flexibility try something like swimming, yoga or Pilates. Exercise can also be hobby-based, so if you like to dance make it into a form of exercise with Zumba."

### **Exercise classes**

If you don't want to join a gym and pay for a membership, look for local fitness groups where you can pay per session. Libraries and town halls often advertise exercise classes such as Zumba or yoga, or you can try finding activities on social media too. You can also search for local fitness activities on the [NHS website](#).

## **Make sure you exercise for your ability level**

Likewise, [exercising](#) regularly doesn't always mean running marathons or sweating through a spin class.

"One of the best exercises that everyone can do is walking. It's free, it's low-impact and it's low-intensity," McNiven says. "As your fitness improves, you can pick up your walking pace and maybe even add in some hand weights to get your arms working too," he says.

### **Weight lifting**

Although lifting weights can seem intimidating, particularly in a gym, they can be really beneficial.

"Most people can benefit from exercising with weights through increased fat burning (as muscle burns calories more effectively than fat), increased strength and improved bone mineral density," McNiven explains.

"If you haven't exercised with weights before, get some advice from a PT or fitness instructor who can show you the correct form and technique."

### **Aerobic exercise**

Arnold adds that aerobic exercise can suit anyone.

"They are great for your heart, lungs and muscles and anyone can participate in line with their abilities and current level of fitness," she says. "A few examples are swimming, cycling, team sports, brisk walking and athletics."

## **Exercise safely**

It's easy to set off on your exercise journey and give it your all, but it's wise to tread carefully, too.

"When you start on a fitness plan, your motivation levels are sky high and it's tempting to overdo things, exercising every day or signing up for advanced fitness classes," McNiven says. "The risk here is that you will quickly run out of steam, and potentially pick up a few injuries to boot."

"Everyone has to start somewhere and it's best to take the slow and steady approach with two to three one-hour (or less in the initial stages) exercise sessions per week depending on your personal circumstances and health," he adds.

### **Make sure you have rest days**

Rest days, when your body recuperates from exercise, are also essential. "If you're attempting a fitness class, check the level and perhaps mention to the instructor if you're very new to exercise," McNiven advises. "Similarly, if you join a new gym or book some PT sessions, they'll be able to suggest a good starting programme for you, to help you to meet your [fitness](#) goals safely."

### **Make sure you know how to use the gym equipment properly**

If you're at a gym, make sure you know the correct and safe way to use a piece of equipment, Arnold adds. It's also important to make sure you've stretched and warmed up. "Stay hydrated and make sure your diet is complementary - eg, enough protein and vitamins - to recovery," she says.

"A good rule of thumb is to listen to your body; it's going to tell you before anything else if you're doing something wrong," she explains. "Take your time and feel out exercises – start small and build up with what you are comfortable with."

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