



Motivating Yourself to be Active

"I know I should be active, but I just don't feel motivated."

Sound familiar? Believing in the health benefits of physical activity is one thing; doing it is another!

Psychology experts have explored our minds to see how being physically active can be made easier. Their research is spiced with fancy words such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Take **intrinsic motivation**. This type of motivation occurs when performing a physical activity is its own reward. Simple involvement is sufficient to spark interest and provide enjoyment. When you enjoy the activity, you want to do it again and again.

Extrinsic motivation is motivation too, but it is short-lived. Things outside of you provide reasons for being physically active. Rewards, money and prizes are examples. They may be fine to get you started but, ultimately, the reward needs to come from within.

How do you create this motivation from within? First, see if you can identify things that make you feel as though you are not in control or against which you tend to rebel.

For example, you may find that after a while, external rewards stifle your motivation because you are no longer doing physical activity for its own sake but to get the reward. The reward is controlling you. Or perhaps you find yourself controlled by others. A team mate may get upset at your performance and make you feel nervous. The pressure could also come from yourself. You may focus too much on performing well, and when you fall short of your expectations, you end up browbeating yourself and feeling miserable.

To counteract this, move from feeling pressured to observing what's going on. Here are some do's and don'ts to help you achieve this:

- **Do** focus on enjoying the experience--the movement, the feelings inside your body, the surroundings, the company.
- **Do** monitor your physical responses in a relaxed manner. Study the strategies for a game, practice the skills.

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- **Don't** push yourself too hard. You may rob yourself of the feeling of enjoyment you get and need to be regularly active.
- **Don't** let others push you too hard. If you don't feel comfortable with a trainer, find another who can provide the positive feedback and encouragement you need.
- **Don't** "should" on yourself! Instead of saying "I should exercise," say *"I would feel better if I went for a walk today because I could take in some fresh air."*
- **Do** engage in physical activity to reward yourself. Enjoy physical activity because it improves your mood, reduces your anxiety, helps you to relax and energizes you.

Long-lasting motivation must be "intrinsic" or come from within. Using the pointers above will help you build this inner motivation. Steering clear of pressure puts you in charge, while meeting comfortable challenges makes you feel competent and gives you incentive to do more. So pick a challenge — not too hard, not too easy — and build that motivation within.

Working with you for lasting change, Lynda Pedley

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