Physical activity – setting yourself goals
Summary

- Break down your ultimate health and fitness goal into small, specific and achievable mini-goals.
- Keep a training diary to monitor your progress.
- Always see your doctor for a medical check-up before starting any new fitness program, particularly if you are over 40 years, overweight, haven’t exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.

Making any lifestyle change can be challenging. Many people find that having a goal in mind gives them something to work towards, motivates them to stay on track and provides a measure of how well they are doing.

If you’re trying to become more physically active, realistic, well-planned goals keep you focused and motivated.

Ensure you read through the pre-exercise self-screening tool before you embark on a physical activity or exercise program, particularly if you are over 40 years, overweight, haven’t exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.

Setting physical activity goals

Several key principles can be applied to help you set your physical activity goals. These include:

- Pinpoint your ultimate goal.
- Find out how to achieve your ultimate goal.
- Set small, specific mini-goals.
- Monitor your progress regularly.
- Adapt to changing circumstances.
- Don’t be too hard on yourself

Pinpoint your ultimate fitness goal

Suggestions include:

- **Be realistic** – Your ultimate fitness goal could be to be fit enough to participate in a competition on a set date or to do 10 laps of the pool. Whatever the case, make this goal realistic. Remember that most of us will never be world-famous athletes or supermodels. Think about what is achievable for you. Write down your goals.

- **Be specific** – Don’t make your ultimate goal a general statement like: ‘I want to lose weight’. Make it measurable. Exactly how many kilograms do you want to lose?

- **Choose a goal that is meaningful and important to you**, not to anybody else. For example, if your partner wants you to lose weight, but you’re happy as you are, you may find it difficult to commit to your exercise routine in the long term.

Find out how to achieve your ultimate fitness goal

Once you have decided on your health and fitness goal, you need to consider how you will reach that goal. Different fitness goals require different approaches. For example, weight loss requires you to regularly burn more kilojoules than you consume. An effective strategy may include:

- Choose aerobic activities such as walking.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
- Cut back on junk food.
- Eat smaller food portions.
- Increase the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy products and wholegrain foods in your daily diet.

Set small, specific fitness goals

You are more likely to reach your ultimate goal if you break it down into small, short-term mini-goals. Short-term goals are specific, daily actions or behaviours that lead you to your ultimate goal. Suggestions include:

- Know your starting point, so you can pick activities that are comfortable and realistic for you, and build slowly at a pace that feels right for you.
- Set a reasonable timeframe. For example, if you want to lose 20 kg, then a realistic weight loss of 1 kg of body fat every one to two weeks means that you need to allow yourself around 20 to 40 weeks.
- Consider your exercise routines as mini-goals. For example, one mini goal might be to exercise on all or most days of the week. The more mini goals you achieve, the more motivated you will become.

If you are unsure how to best achieve your particular fitness goals, ask an expert. For example, see your doctor, browse through the Better Health Channel fact sheets or consult an exercise physiologist, physiotherapist or appropriately qualified and certified personal trainer.

Monitor your physical activity regularly

Make your mini-goals measurable. Decide how you are going to monitor your progress and record every detail in a training diary. Suggestions include:

- Measure your progress in concrete ways. For example, if you are weight training, write down the weight and repetitions for each exercise. If you are exercising to lose weight, keep track of your weight loss.
- Choose appropriate ways to measure your progress. For example, bathroom scales don’t distinguish between muscle and fat. It may be better to take your measurements.
with a tape measure, or just notice how your clothes fit.

- Find as many different ways to monitor your progress as you can and write down your progress regularly, such as once a week. For example, if you are exercising to lose weight, you might like to record your exercise sessions, daily diet and weekly measurements. Include incidental achievements like feeling more energetic or fitting into a smaller pair of jeans. Give yourself plenty of ways that you can succeed.
- Celebrate your progress.

Adapt your physical activity to changing circumstances

Life can interrupt your training schedule. Suggestions for adapting to such changes include:

- Think about ways to cope with interruptions. For example, you may not be able to exercise in your usual way when on holidays, but you can always walk or use the hotel fitness facilities.
- If you get injured or become ill, don’t abandon your fitness goals. Instead, adjust your ultimate goal’s time frame. Come up with micro-goals to keep you on track while you recover. For example, you may be too ill to exercise, but you can improve your diet. Write down these micro-goals in your training diary to keep up your motivation.
- If your fitness goal seems beyond you, readjust your mini-goals and stay motivated.

Physical activity – don’t be too hard on yourself

Sometimes, you may find that your fitness goal is too ambitious. For example, maybe you are losing 0.5 kg a week instead of 1 kg, and sometimes you may not lose any weight (remember muscle weighs more than fat), so make sure you focus on how you feel. You know yourself much better than a set of scales does.

- The first few months of a new exercise program are always the most challenging. Adjust your short-term goals, persist and have faith that things will get easier with time.
- Celebrate your achievements, no matter how small. Making a commitment to a healthier lifestyle is a tremendous achievement, even if your fitness goal is a little harder to reach than you first thought. Flip back to the start of your training diary and appreciate how far you’ve come.
- Have a secondary fitness goal in mind. For example, if your ultimate goal is to lose 20kg, an ability to jog for 20 minutes may be your secondary goal. Achieving this secondary goal is still a great success.
- Don’t give up. You’re worth the effort.

Where to get help

- Your doctor.

Things to remember

- Break down your ultimate health and fitness goal into small, specific and achievable mini-goals.
- Keep a training diary to monitor your progress.
- Always see your doctor for a medical check-up before starting any new fitness program, particularly if you are over 40 years, overweight, haven’t exercised in a long time or suffer from a chronic medical condition.

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1. Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off the couch and enjoy getting fit by following these few simple steps.
2. **Embrace your inner child**

What types of activities did you enjoy when you were a kid? Did you participate in an organised team sport or do something less structured? Give them a try again. Take time out to discover what suits your physical, emotional and social needs.

3. **Find an exercise buddy**

Let’s face it, we’re more likely to stick to physical activity if we do it with friends or family. It’s a great way to catch up and a great motivator.
4. **Explore the local community**

Join a club or community group – it’s a great way to meet new people who may even become lifelong friends. You’ll be surprised how many opportunities are out there – from leisure centres and sports clubs to parks, trails, swimming pools and classes. Local councils and libraries can help you track them down.

5. **Be kind to yourself**

Make sure you have a medical check up before starting any form of physical activity, especially if you’re over 40, overweight, haven’t exercised for a long time or have a chronic illness. Fill out this pre-exercise self-screening tool for adults.
6. **Start small**

Increase your activity time and intensity gradually. Take extra care if you are new to exercise or haven’t exercised for a while. Start out gently and build your endurance little by little – this way you’ll avoid overdoing it or injuring yourself! It’s a good idea to start with 10 minutes each day at first and then eventually work your way up to 30 minutes or more.

7. **Mix it up**

Not only does a range of activities keep your interest up, they challenge different muscles. If you’re time and budget poor, be creative and look for other alternatives. Walk or cycle to work, take the stairs or leave the car at home when running errands. Buy some exercise equipment for home, such as online exercise videos or DVDs. A stationary bike is fun to ride while watching TV.

8. **Up for a challenge?**
Keep up your interest by trying new activities. You may like to join others and sign up to a local fitness event, such as a fun run that raises money for a good cause. You’ll not only be helping yourself, but others in the process.

9. Try a mantra

Replace ‘no pain no gain’ with ‘no fun no future’. If you are not enjoying yourself, you won’t be able to sustain it.

10. Be realistic

Set a mixture of short and long-term goals that are achievable and you can measure. When you first begin, mark dates and times in your diary for exercise sessions. Review your progress regularly and focus on what you have achieved.
Don’t beat yourself up

If you miss a session that’s okay, even elite athletes need downtime after participating in rigorous activities. If you’re not in the mood, it’s important to focus on how exercise makes you feel – it not only relieves stress but helps fight sadness and depression!

Keep a training diary or journal

Take time to recognise these little improvements to your daily quality of life – it can increase your motivation. Reflect on how you feel before, during and after exercise. It’s a great way to track your progress.
Reward yourself

Give yourself a reward each time you reach a fitness goal. It gives you the incentive to keep going. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, but make sure your rewards match your healthy lifestyle. As you make progress, you may find you end up rewarding yourself with something physical, such as a walk by the beach or river after a hard day’s work!

References

Keeping active basics

- Balancing energy in and energy out
  A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance.

- Body mass index (BMI)
  Body mass index or BMI is an approximate measure of your total body fat.

- Energy in food (kilojoules and calories)
  A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance.

- Exercise intensity
  If you can talk but not sing, you’re exercising at the right intensity.

- Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings – whether it’s running up...

- Exercise - the low-down on hydration
  You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise.

- Exercise with a friend
  Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan.

- Fitness centres – how to choose one
  Do some research before signing up at a fitness centre.

- How to make exercise fun
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

- Kids and energy needs
  It’s important for kids to eat a wide variety of foods for a healthy, well-balanced diet and to be physically active. Creating healthy habits during childhood helps to ensure lifelong healthy.

- Personal trainers – how to choose one
  Make sure your personal trainer is properly qualified before entering into any agreement.
Physical activity for men

Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

Physical activity for seniors

Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

Physical activity for women

If you can’t make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

Even if you’re busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active.

Physical activity - it’s important

Just 30 minutes of moderate activity each day can improve your health and reduce the risk of developing certain conditions or diseases.

Physical activity - setting yourself goals

When you’re trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals.

Physical activity - what’s your excuse?

There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

Secrets to healthy ageing

Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

Sports and physical activity

Around 62 per cent of Australians adults do not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines to gain the health benefits of increased fitness and reduced body fat.

Getting started

Exercise programs

If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

Exercise - the low-down on hydration

You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise.

Exercise with a friend

Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan.

Gardening for children

Children can learn new skills, have fun and develop self-confidence when they grow their own plants.

Gardening for health - starting out

Gardening is a healthy activity that can be enjoyed by everyone.

Gardening for older people

Garden spaces and equipment can be modified or adapted to help older people enjoy gardening.

Gardening safety

Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care.

Getting active - tucker talk tips

The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term.

How to make exercise fun

Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

Physical activity - choosing a provider

Choosing the right fitness centre or service provider requires some research.

Physical activity - choosing the one for you

You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

Physical activity for men

Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

Physical activity for seniors
Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

- Physical activity for women
  If you can’t make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

- Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy
  Even if you’re busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active.

- Physical activity - how to get started
  If you’ve been inactive and want to begin physical activity, see a doctor first.

- Physical activity - learn how to swim (video)
  Swimming is a great low-impact exercise for all ages and abilities. Australian marathon swimmer, Tammy Van Wisse shows ex-AFL (Australian Football League) player and coach, Tony Shaw some swimming.

- Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)
  Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses.

- Physical activity - overcoming the barriers
  If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

- Physical activity - setting yourself goals
  When you’re trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals.

Staying fit and motivated

- 10 tips to plan your exercise
  Physical activity won’t just happen. Most activities require planning – starting and maintaining a physical activity program does too. Here are some tips for getting ready to exercise. Make...

- 10 tips to stay active year round
  Pick an activity you enjoy. 10 tips to stay active year round.

- Exercise and mood
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise.

- Exercise - everyday activities
  There are lots of everyday activities that provide an opportunity to be active and provide health benefits...

- Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up.

- Exercise programs
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

- Exercise with a friend
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- How to make exercise fun
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off.

- Pets can make you healthy (video)
  Australians have one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world.

- Physical activity - choosing the one for you
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

- Physical activity for seniors
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- Physical activity for women
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Physical activity - learn how to swim (video)
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Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)
Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses...

Physical activity - overcoming the barriers
If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend...

Physical activity - staying active during summer (video)
Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer Sherri Bourne gives us some great tips for staying active over the summer months...

Physical activity - staying motivated
Pick an exercise or fitness activity that appeals to you and suits your lifestyle...

Physical activity - what's your excuse?
There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day...

Stretching exercise in winter (video)
When starting out an exercise program, it's really important to do a warm up and cool down before and after exercise...

Exercise safety and injury prevention

10 tips for safe stretching
Make stretching part of your life... 10 tips for safe stretching...

10 tips to exercise safely
Exercising regularly has wide-ranging physical, emotional and social health benefits. You need to exercise safely to remain healthy and injury-free. If it's safe and painless, you're more...

Aerobics - preventing injury
Aerobics injuries are usually caused by trauma and overuse, but can be prevented by using the right techniques and equipment...

Australian rules football - preventing injury
Australian rules football is a physical contact sport that often results in injuries from tackling, kicking, running and constant competition for the ball...

Basketball - health benefits
Basketball is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities...

Basketball - preventing injury
Basketball is a fast game with frequent and aggressive body contacts - injuries can and do occur...

Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits
Canoeing and kayaking can be done as a hobby, a competitive sport or as a fun activity on holidays...

Canoeing and kayaking - preventing injury
Careful preparation and the right equipment can help prevent canoeing and kayaking injuries...

Cricket - health benefits
To play cricket you need to be fit and strong and have good hand-eye coordination and ball-handling skills...

Cricket - preventing injury
Cricket is a very popular sport. Injuries are often caused by overuse, being struck by a cricket ball and falls...

Cycling - health benefits
Cycling can help to protect you from serious diseases...

Cycling - preventing injury
You are much more likely to hurt yourself by falling off your bike or hitting a stationary object than colliding with another vehicle...

Dance - health benefits
Dancing can be a fun way to stay fit for people of all ages and abilities...

Dancing - preventing injury
Dancing is fun and a great form of exercise, but make sure you avoid injuries...

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Dog walking - the health benefits

If you are planning to buy a dog, make sure you choose a breed that's appropriate to your lifestyle.

Exercise safety

Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries.

Fishing - preventing injury

Never go fishing alone? always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people.

Golf - health benefits

Golf provides a stimulating challenge, combined with a healthy walk in pleasant surroundings.

Golf - preventing injury

The average golfer playing an 18-hole game walks about seven kilometres.

Heat stress and exercise

Heat stress occurs when sweat can't evaporate fast enough to keep the body sufficiently cool during physical activity.

Healthy eating and exercise

Food for sport - tucker talk tips

Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes.

Secrets to healthy ageing

Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

Sporting performance and food

Good nutrition and a healthy diet are essential to improving your sports performance.

The amount of physical activity you need

It’s important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn’t have to be...

Keeping active throughout life

10 tips for active seniors

Stay independent for longer with regular exercise. 10 tips for active seniess.

Children - keeping them active

A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body.

Exercise and stretching in the office (video)

Sitting behind a desk all day doesn't mean you can't exercise.

Gardens for all - a health activity

Gardening has many health and therapeutic benefits, and is an activity that most people can enjoy.

Getting active - tucker talk tips

The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term.

Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips

Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older.

Healthy ageing - stay involved

Reach out to the world around you for fun, a sense of achievement, social contact and mental stimulation.

Healthy and active ageing

Being physically active, eating well, socialising and improving your health can help you live a healthy, happy and active life as you get older.

How to make exercise fun

Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

How to volunteer and boost your health

Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process.

Older people in hospital - Get well soon

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay...

- Parent's guide for active girls
  Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up...

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare...

- Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease...

- Physical activity for seniors – staying active during summer (video)
  Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer - Sherri Bourne shares a few easy and low-impact ways for seniors to stay healthy over the summer months...

- Physical activity for women
  If you can't make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family...

- Physical activity - what's your excuse?
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day...

- Postnatal exercise
  Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program...

- Pregnancy and exercise
  Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy...

- Secrets to healthy ageing
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- Sport and children
  Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together...

- The amount of physical activity you need
  It’s important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn’t have to be...

- Vision loss and sport
  Many sports can be adapted to suit people who are blind or have low vision...

- Walking for good health
  Walking will improve your fitness and reduce your risk of heart disease...

- Walking - the benefits for older people
  Walking is great exercise for older people. It has a range of health and social benefits, and most people can do it...

Health conditions and exercise

- Arthritis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce some of the symptoms of arthritis, and improve joint mobility and strength...

- Asthma and exercise
  Exercise-induced asthma can be prevented with medication and by preparing for exercise and physical activity...

- Breathing problems and exercise
  A little physical activity and some breathing exercises can help people with lung disease...

- Cancer - exercise to help you cope
  People with cancer should be as physically active as their abilities and condition allow...

- Dementia - reducing your risk
  Adopting a 'brain healthy' lifestyle may reduce your risk of dementia in later life...

- Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers
  Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school...

- Epilepsy and employment
  Many people living with epilepsy are successfully employed across a range of professional fields...

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Epilepsy and exercise

It is rare for a person with epilepsy to have a seizure during physical activity, but you should always take safety precautions when exercising.

Exercise and mood

Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise.

Exercise in your local surroundings (video)

Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...

HIV, hepatitis and sport

People with HIV or hepatitis B or C participate in a wide range of sports without restrictions, and the risk of transmission to another player is extremely small.

Menstruation - athletic amenorrhoea

Women who are athletes or who exercise a lot on a regular basis are at risk of developing athletic amenorrhoea, which is the absence of periods.

Osteoporosis and exercise

Exercise can reduce the risk of fractures resulting from osteoporosis by both slowing the rate of bone loss, and reducing the person’s risk of falling by building muscle strength and improving balance.

Sports injuries

A sports injury may be more severe than you think.

Type 2 diabetes - healthy eating and exercise (video)

People with type 2 diabetes talk about positive lifestyle changes that improve their quality of life.

Related Information

- **Physical activity - how to get started**
  If you've been inactive and want to begin physical activity, see a doctor first.

- **Physical activity - choosing one for you**
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

- **Physical activity - overcoming barriers**
  If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

- **Exercise programs**
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

- **Physical activity - staying motivated**
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- **Victoria Walks**

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