

Shape Up Your Attitude and Your Body Will Follow

By Carol Krucoff, RYT



The First Step to Fitness is Changing Your Mind

If you're like most people, you know you should exercise but can't seem to find the time to "just do it." In our push-button, drive-through, remote control world, less than half of adults meet the basic recommendation for good health: to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity, most days of the week. Sadly, more than one in four is completely sedentary, spending the vast majority of their days on their increasingly vast bottoms.

That's why I've dropped the "E-word" from my fitness coaching vocabulary. Too many people view "exercise" as hard, painful work—something "good for you" that they should force themselves to endure like tasteless tofu or nasty medicine. Or, they associate exercise with negative experiences from their past, such as suffering through the "Gym Teacher from Hell" or enduring the humiliation of getting picked last for a team.

This "exercise anxiety" is exacerbated by our competitive culture, which leads people to feel that if they don't excel at a sport, they don't deserve to play. For some, discomfort at their perceived exercise inadequacy spirals out of control, so they think they're too out-of-shape to even set foot in a gym—which is like thinking your house is too messy to hire a maid.

So, the first step to fitness is changing your mind: Get rid of these negative and false ideas about exercise. In fact, I advise people to stop using the negatively charged word exercise entirely. Instead, substitute the words "movement" or "physical activity."

If you think this is just a question of semantics, think again. Actually, it's a total attitude adjustment that has three parts:

Restore Recess. Remember that feeling as a child when the school bell rang and released you onto the playground to skip, jump, swing, and do whatever your little heart and body desired? Recovering this "joy of motion" is crucial to shaping up. As Freud noted in his famous "pleasure principle," people tend to do things that give them pleasure and avoid things that bring pain. So, stop viewing exercise as a "workout," and start thinking of it as a play break – a welcomed opportunity to free your body from the confines of its chair. Find enjoyable ways to move – walk, dance, bike, swim and schedule this recess regularly into each day.

Bottoms Up. Something is VERY wrong with a society where people fight for the closest parking space at the

gym, where they go to walk on a treadmill. Yet we've evolved to this unhealthy "labor saving" mentality that prompts us to stay seated and use as little energy as possible—picking banks and fast-food joints with drive-through windows and clicking the remote control from the depths of the La-Z-Boy. If you want good health, you must drop this outmoded "push-button" mentality in favor of a "bottoms-up" approach to life. Find ways to get out of your chair and move as much as possible throughout your day, and you'll have taken one of the best, most practical steps to enhancing your health.

Something is Better Than Nothing. Too many people take an "all or nothing" approach to movement and think that anything less than 30 minutes of physical activity is a waste of time. Not true! If you don't have a 30-minute "chunk" of time to move, three 10-minute bouts or six 5-minute bouts offer similar benefits. Walk the stairs instead of riding the elevator, park in the farthest space, get off the subway a stop early, or toss the ball with your kids. Every step you take adds to better health.

It's important to realize, too, that moving your body is about much more than appearance—getting regular physical activity is a matter of life and death. Physical inactivity causes 2 million deaths worldwide annually, according to the World Health Organization, which notes that sedentary lifestyles increase the risk of numerous chronic diseases including breast cancer, colon cancer, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. [Visit the WHO web site, <http://www.who.int/moveforhealth/introduction/en/index.html>]

So the next time you're tempted to push a button rather than use your muscles, make the active choice – and set aside some time every day to do some form of movement you enjoy. When physical activity is fun, it will get done.

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A woman with long blonde hair is performing a backbend, arching her body backwards. She is wearing a white long-sleeved top with a yellow waistband, grey cargo pants, black socks, and white sneakers with blue accents. Her right hand is on the floor, and her left arm is raised above her head. The background is a simple, dark studio setting.

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