

Are These Excuses Helping You Pack on the Pounds?

Last week I wrote about two of the most common excuses I hear people give to explain why they don't exercise on a regular basis, despite knowing that consistent workouts provide a host of benefits.

The reasons I expounded on were categorized under the heading "Personality Blame," because they come from individuals who feel they are—perhaps on a biological level—inherently averse to exercise and are convinced that working out is something they will never feel motivated to stick with; therefore, it is a lost cause.

This week, I'll be addressing Personality Blame's opposite, but equally specious counterpart, "External Blame." This term refers to those who point at people and things outside of themselves and claim that they are responsible for their out-of-shape state.

External Blamers claim they *want* to exercise, but simply *can't* because of X, Y and Z.

Below is one of the two (the second will be the subject of my next article) External Blame excuses I hear along with what I hope will be helpful suggestions for how you can overcome them for good:

"I used to be in shape. Then I got married/had kids/got a full-time job/went back to school ..." I often hear people hearken back to their physical fitness "glory days," if you will. That was the time period months, perhaps decades in the past when they were young and free, more energetic and less tied down, and therefore easily able to maintain a consistent workout schedule.

But, then, life got busy.

Marriage, children, a new job, added responsibilities, and dozens more activities sadly sent “Exercise” to the bottom of their priority list. What people often fail to realize is that when exercise loses its prominent place in their schedule, it’s not just their outward appearance and wardrobe that takes the hit (consequences people usually learn to adjust to and accept); overall health begins a downward spiral as their risk factors for disease go up.

Here are a few of the potential effects of neglecting to exercise:

Muscle Atrophy: This means that your muscles waste away because you are not using them. When you lose lean muscle mass, your metabolism slows and weight is gained.

Osteoporosis: A lack of weight-bearing exercise plays a role in osteoporosis, or brittle bones. Your body responds to the demands you put on it, so if you don’t exercise, your muscles and bones weaken, slowly but surely, over time.

Increased Risk of Diabetes: Many people consume too many sugar-laden and processed junk foods *along with* sitting the majority of the day. Excess blood sugar from high-sugar foods can cause insulin resistance, which leads to Type 2 diabetes.

Circulatory Problems: When you don’t get regular exercise, the heart muscle weakens. Your lung capacity and efficiency also diminish when you don’t exercise, which means a walk up the stairs can start to feel like a trek up Everest.

Your blood pressure can also increase and blood vessels stiffen when exercise is infrequent or nonexistent in a person’s life. Consequently, plaque buildup is promoted and sets the stage for potential strokes and other health emergencies.

Mental Health Decline: Not exercising can affect your sense of wellbeing. This is often attributed to the fact that as muscle tone is lost and excess weight is gained, people often tend to feel self-conscious, lose confidence, and their self-esteem plummets. Non-exercisers also miss out on endorphins, which are the body's natural painkillers and mood-boosters released during high-intensity workouts.

The truth is, we're all busy. And while some inarguably have more on their plate than others (figuratively speaking), all of us are given the same 168 hours a week.

Laura Vanderkam, author of *168 Hours: You Have More Time Than You Think*, writes that "If you work 50 hours a week and sleep eight hours a night, that leaves 54 hours for other things."

Henry David Thoreau wrote, *"It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: what are we busy about?"*

All of us must *make* the time to exercise. According to the American Heart Association, 75 minutes of vigorous exercise is all you need each week if you want to improve your health or maintain your current level of wellness.

Look at your calendar today and find one pocket of time in which you can fit just fifteen minutes of vigorous exercise. A fifteen-minute heart-pounding workout can be just as, if not more, effective than an hour-long stroll through the neighborhood. Quality > Quantity.

Ask a friend to do a few running sprints with you before lunch. Sprint 100 meters, then rest for 30 seconds, and repeat ten times. That's it, hit the showers—you're done for the day!

Now plan a fifteen-minute weight-training or bodyweight-focused workout for tomorrow. For example, put fifteen minutes on the clock and repeat the following circuit as many times as you can within that time, resting as little as possible:

- 15 Barbell Back Squats (using a comfortable weight for you)
- 10 Walking Lunges (no weights)
- 5 Plyometric Box Jumps (no weights)

Again, a workout like the one above is it takes to challenge your muscles, elevate your heart rate and release those coveted endorphins!

Five 15-minute workouts a week will equal the 75 minutes the AHA recommends. It truly isn't difficult to achieve. The secret is scheduling it, sticking to it and showing up with a plan.

Should you feel guilty about taking even 15 minutes away from your family or other responsibilities to exercise, remember that the healthier you are, the better able you are to love and serve them, and the happier and more confident you'll feel in your role as mother, father, student, friend, boss, employee, etc. Not to mention, the longer you'll be around for them.

Also remind yourself that if you are a believer in Christ Jesus and have made him Lord of your life, then your body is a temple of His Holy Spirit; it is no longer your own, "therefore honor God with [it]" (1 Cor. 6:20, NIV). When you eat well and keep your body fit, you are respecting His dwelling place, setting a wonderful example of discipline and self-control for others to see, and glorifying your Maker (1 Cor. 10:31).

"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him." (Rom. 12:1), NLT

Stay fit, stay faithful.

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