

Letter from the Editor

by Dixie L. Thompson, Ph.D., FACSM

Welcome to the summer 2011 edition of the ACSM Fit Society® Page, sponsored by Liberty Mutual. For many of us, starting and sticking with an exercise program is a challenge. We start with enthusiasm, but within a few weeks time constraints and other commitments get in the way of sticking with our plans. This issue is dedicated to helping you make exercise a lasting part of your life. Whether you're brand new to exercise or a long-time exerciser looking to spice up your routine, this issue is for you.

Please look over this information that ACSM experts have prepared for you, share it with friends and family, and enjoy the fitness opportunities afforded by making exercise a part of your routine.

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THEME: BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND EXERCISE ADHERENCE

Finding the Motivation for Exercise and Fitness Within

by Christina Geithner, Ph.D., FACSM, ACSM HFS



Having the motivation or intention to be fit is one thing; acting on the motivation is another. It takes intention (motivation) plus action to equal results. The more motivated you are, the easier it is to take action (exercise) to realize your fitness goals. Motivation is a cognitive process that connects a thought or a feeling with an action. Motivation may be intrinsic (an internal drive to do something out of interest or enjoyment in exercise itself, or valuing exercise as important or beneficial) or extrinsic (an external drive, such as rewards, competition or the threat of punishment).

Get to Know the Motivators for Exercise and Fitness

Public health researchers are particularly interested in psychological influences on exercise behavior (including intrinsic and extrinsic motivators) because they may be modifiable. One intrinsic motivator is knowledge. Understanding the benefits of exercise—including reduced risks of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, colon cancer and all-cause mortality as well as increased energy, improved fitness and better quality of life—can be a motivator. Intrinsic motivators can also include reduced depression and anxiety levels, enhanced mood, improved confidence and self-esteem, and heightened need to enjoy activity in retirement. Extrinsic motivators for exercise include weight loss, improved physical appearance and competition for awards. A recommendation from your health care provider, something ACSM advocates through the Exercise is Medicine® initiative, can serve as a strong external motivator for exercise. The key is to determine what are important or salient motivators for you.

How to Build and Maintain Motivation

Common recommendations for building and maintaining exercise motivation include the following:

- **Set a goal or vision.** Having a clear picture of your desired outcome (your destination) makes you much more likely to achieve it. Clearly specify how you will know when you've reached your goal. You might take a picture of yourself now and every four weeks, so you can see how you're progressing.
- **Strategize.**
 - Develop a realistic action plan.** Create a clear, logical and achievable action plan that includes frequency, intensity and duration of cardiovascular exercise, strength training and stretching. Include realistic short- and long-term goals. Start ➤

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small and progress gradually to help you feel successful and avoid injury or burnout.

- Use environmental cues.** Put your gym bag by the door, so you remember to take it to work. Or schedule your workouts into your calendar or planner and set electronic reminders on your cellphone or computer.
- Have fun.** Find an activity that you enjoy and will stick with, along with an environment that is supportive, safe and comfortable for you.
- Make it convenient.** Exercise at home to fitness DVDs if you don't have time to drive to the gym. Exercise at the time of day when you have time and you enjoy doing it.
- Record your progress.** Keep a written record of your exercise (weights, sets, reps; distance walked, run, or biked; flights of stairs climbed; etc.) to provide information

about progress that reinforces your exercise behavior.

- Build a social support network.** Find a buddy with whom you can work out regularly. You can help and encourage each other, rely on each other for moral support and accountability, and share in your accomplishments. If you need additional help and accountability, you can hire a personal trainer. Look for a trainer who is credentialed by a well-known organization, such as ACSM.
- Reward yourself.** Treat yourself to something that is compatible with your health and fitness goals (e.g., not a piece of chocolate cake, but something else you enjoy, like a movie, flowers or new exercise clothing).
- **Believe in yourself.** You can implement a strategy and achieve your vision. Self-

efficacy, or confidence in your ability to succeed, can be built by self-affirmations or positive self-talk and by small fitness gains. Don't expect perfection or compare yourself to others. Keep your focus on what makes exercise meaningful for you and what you ultimately want to gain from your exercise program.

- **Persist.** Making good exercise and nutrition choices day after day can be challenging. If you have momentary setbacks, accept them and get back on track.

Your exercise goals depend on your ability to understand your exercise personality and motivators. Having a clear goal or vision that excites you and pursuing it in an enjoyable way is a great start. It's all about knowing what makes you tick and pairing intention with action to achieve tremendous fitness results.

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Q&A

by Anthony Luke, M.D., FACSM

Q: There's a new online program that my employer is encouraging me to do. It involves lifestyle change and exercise monitored over the computer. Is this an effective method to increase my activity?

A: Just as in many other areas in life, computers, mobile devices and the Internet are now playing a role in physical activity. It's estimated that more than 1.4 billion people use the Internet on any given day. Since it is a commonly used tool, it makes sense that the Internet could be a useful method to affect behavior and encourage exercise. When we reviewed 15 studies from 2007, more than half of the controlled trials of website-delivered physical activity interventions reported positive behavioral habits. Web-based programs that interacted with the users more than five times had better results than those with more limited contact. Interventions showed better results when they followed people for a shorter period, like three months rather than six months or one year, which shows slow but steady decline in exercise adherence. This suggests that regular contacts and reminders can be helpful to encourage exercise, and this needs to continue long-term to keep interest levels high and have people maintain their improved activity levels. In the last five years, technology and the Web have grown significantly, and the future will likely bring more sophisticated and appealing Web programs. A more recent study for a worksite Internet-based physical activity and nutrition promotion program in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* suggested that women were more than twice as likely as men to use these programs. The use of the program didn't depend on the person's level of health, and more than half the people did use the program. Long-term effectiveness of Web-based promotion programs are still under review. However, though you can be reminded and use the Internet to document your activities, you still have to exercise. So, turn the computer off and get active.

Q: I like to run with loud music, which really pumps me up. Is this psychological? I really do feel stronger and faster.

A: There seems to be a real motivating effect of music while you exercise. In a few studies, individuals exercising with music did perform better than those exercising without music. In one study, the presence of music led an active group to report lower anxiety levels and exercise longer. Another study showed that young women 20-22 years old demonstrated better ability to bench press and could do more repetitions with weights with music than without. Interestingly, the louder the music, the better the individuals performed with their strength training. So it does seem that music can pump you up.

Starting an Exercise Program and Sticking with It

by Cheryl Hultquist, Ph.D.



Many people struggle with how to actually initiate an exercise program. While intentions are often sincere, an overwhelming amount of available information can make this healthy lifestyle adjustment a daunting task. While there are numerous strategies targeting behavior changes associated with physical activity increases, your reasons for starting an exercise program are unique to you. Considering the following points may help you begin and adhere to a program.

Understand that starting an exercise program will alter your daily routine, so a little thought and preparation will make for a smoother transition. Also, several factors influence long-term adherence, including how confident you are in your ability to continue exercising amid life's challenges and whether or not you think the exercise program will yield the desired physical and mental results. Therefore, when

considering an exercise program, choose something that is feasible, accessible, proven and enjoyable.

For feasibility, it is important to consider physical requirements, potential costs and time commitments. First, if you have known health concerns, or if you are unsure of your current health status, a physician's clearance is recommended to identify types of exercise to pursue and/or avoid. The physical requirements of a new activity definitely influence adherence. Even though skills will develop, starting with exercises that are too intense or too difficult can lead to excessive soreness or injuries, which can lead to dropping out before benefits are realized. Choosing activities that are beginner-friendly and low-impact – such as walking, light resistance training or beginner-level classes – provide the appropriate intensity for new exercisers. Regular exercise does not have to be a huge expense, but understanding one-time and ongoing costs will help you choose a program that matches your budget. Possible costs can include monthly facility fees, special equipment, appropriate attire or professional assistance. As with any informed purchase, new exercisers should shop around and ask for referrals. Another important consideration is time. Since lack of time is often cited as a major barrier to exercise, choosing activities that fit within your available timeframe will help make exercise a comfortable part of your daily life and not a burden. Identify a time each day when exercise will be the least disruptive. This could mean a morning workout some days and an evening workout other days. Don't forget to consider lunch hours and weekends, too.

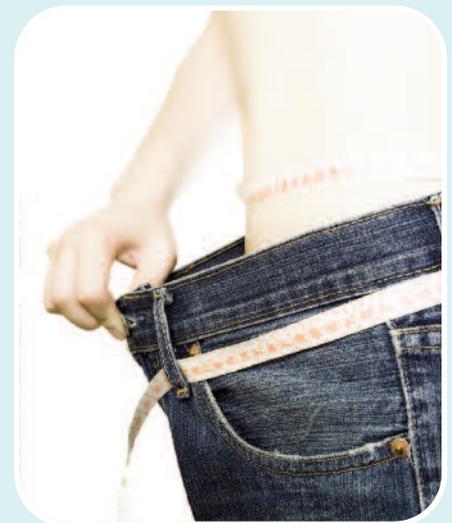
Exercise must also be accessible, and making it as convenient as possible will help a habit to develop. Identifying exercise options close to home and work, such as fitness facilities, parks and trails, will provide several options for tight schedules. When exercising during the week, consider packing a bag to carry when you first leave home for the day. This will eliminate extra trips, which can cause distractions and take up valuable time. Also keep a pair of athletic shoes at work for a quick lunchtime walk. You could also keep a mat, dumbbells and exercise DVDs at home for days when weather, time or other barriers prevent planned activities.

Setting a personal goal of beginning an exercise program is a great start, but

identifying specific desired results will help you stick with it. Whether results are related to overall health improvements or a physical transformation, it is important to get a baseline measure of all variables of interest, set short- and long-term goals, and match the exercise program to the goals that have been set. This will help identify the best type of physical activity, the intensity and duration, and how many days per week you need to meet those goals. Be sure to decide ahead of time when progress will be assessed and track daily and weekly activities on a calendar. By tracking physical activity and progress, it will be easier to make the appropriate adjustments to a program in order to achieve desired results and avoid burnout. If you find this daunting, consider turning to a fitness professional for help.

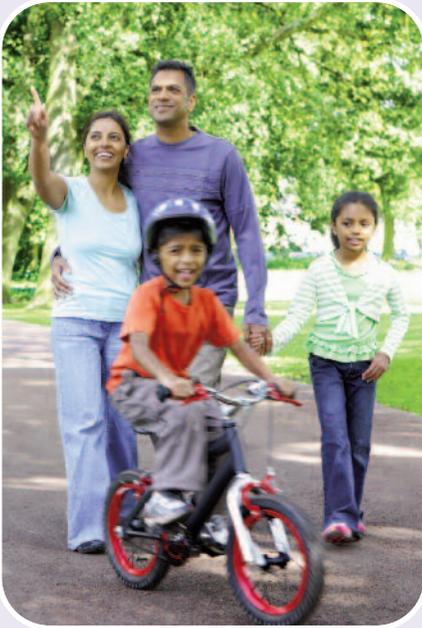
Finally, finding activities that are enjoyable will help transition to a healthy lifestyle. This includes determining if exercising alone, with a partner or with a group is more desirable. Some people will prefer the accountability of a partner or fitness professional while others enjoy the solitude of being alone during a workout. Also, there are endless options and combinations for exercise including cardiorespiratory, strength training and mind/body practices, and trying a variety of activities will lead to a well-rounded program with plenty of options.

Starting and sticking with an exercise program is a challenge for many individuals, but by planning ahead and giving consideration to personal needs and preferences, the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle will soon be evident.



Making Physical Activity a Family Affair

by Meghan Oefinger, B.S., ACSM HFS



Gone are the days when children and their parents were commonly seen outside playing badminton or capture the flag. These days, one has to look inside the house to catch a glimpse of the entire family, and often they are seen parked in front of the television or on the computer. What happened to the days of bike rides and nature walks? More important, what is the impact on families' health when they replace physical activity with physical inactivity?

Inactivity at any age results in the development of chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and a sedentary lifestyle can lead to premature death. For aging adults, inactivity can lead to loss of muscle mass, coordination and balance over and above the normal age-linked declines. These losses will limit their ability to do daily tasks and can compromise independence. Children who are inactive are robbed of an opportunity to develop important motor skills, are more likely to be obese, and are developing sedentary habits

that can last a lifetime. ACSM recommends that children spend less than two hours per day doing sedentary non-academic activities, such as watching television and playing video or computer games.

Physical activity is an important component of health, regardless of age, gender or weight, so everyone in the family can benefit. Social support from family has been shown to positively relate to the amount of physical activity done by both men and women. Therefore, the influence of family to encourage physical activity is powerful. The 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that children get 60 minutes or more of daily physical activity, including moderate-to-vigorous intensity exercise, muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening exercises. These Guidelines encourage adults to accumulate at least 150 minutes of exercise each week. So how does one ensure that their family is meeting the recommended guidelines?

There are many ways to make physical activity a fun family affair. If money is tight and you are searching for new ways to spend time together and be entertained, introducing a family fun hour of activity is just what the doctor—and the wallet—ordered.

Have Fun

Do activities that you and your family enjoy. Someone who is not having fun will be much less likely to join in next time. For example:

- If you and your family like the Harry Potter series, learn how to play the non-flying version of Quiddich!
- Go for nature walks or a scavenger hunt for local plants in your area.
- Push aside the couches and put in a Zumba video.
- Pick your family's favorite or dream vacation destination. Track how many miles it would take you to get there and chart the number of miles you walk each day.

Include Variety

Let each family member contribute their ideas of activities that the family would enjoy. For example:

- Visit different locations to exercise each week.
- Assign each day of the week with a particular sport.
- Try out a seasonal favorite, like swimming or canoeing in the summer, or skiing and snow shoeing in the winter.

Create a Schedule

Forming a routine for your family is vital to maintaining an active lifestyle.

- Pick the times that work for your family. This sounds obvious, but often we think that one time of day is better than another. The best time of day is the time you can commit to being active. Look for those blocks of time when the family is together, and think of ways to make that active time.
- Some activity is better than no activity, so even if you have just ten minutes in the morning and 20 minutes in the evening, use it for exercise.
- Write your schedule someplace where everyone in the family will see it.

Think Outside the Box

A gym membership is not necessary to make physical activity a part of your family's life. There are plenty of free and convenient ways to be active, including:

- Throw on that pair of sneakers and go for a family walk. Walking is a great time to catch up on the day's events and check in with your spouse and/or children.
- If you have cable television, turn on the fitness channel and find a program that your family really likes and will get you off the couch.
- Put on some music and stick with one exercise, such as jumping rope, for the duration of one song. Switch to another activity, such as jumping jacks, for the next song.



Remember that family can positively influence behavior and that being active is important for everyone regardless of age, gender and weight. So make being physically active a family affair and enjoy the rewards of better health!

Making Exercise Fun Again

by Thomas Altana, Ph.D.



Wash. Rinse. Repeat. The daily schedule of individuals who exercise regularly can read much like instructions on a shampoo bottle. Exercise can begin to feel mundane and static when performed exactly the same way each day as with any other aspect of life. Professionals in the fitness field never want to admit mental and physical staleness with exercise, yet anyone with the goal of exercise being a life-long pursuit will discover moments when, as B.B. King sang, “the thrill is gone.” Fitness professionals commonly help people break up the monotony and make exercise fun again. Our challenge is to have an arsenal of answers, options and suggestions that provide the keys to unlock the boredom and restore the fun. If you exercise regularly and want suggestions you can use now to regain the enjoyment of your fitness routine, this article is for you.

Change Your Routine

When a fitness program becomes routine, exercisers can begin to feel trapped in stagnancy and complacency. Changing our patterns is not an easy task, and many of us who exercise regularly rely on a predictable daily schedule. In most cases, your exercise

routine does not require a complete overhaul, but you may benefit from small changes that restore your enjoyment of exercise. A runner or cyclist can become a modern-day Lewis and Clark, discovering new scenery through different routes. If you train on roads and in neighborhoods, try trail running or single-track mountain biking. If you exercise at a local gym, a different time of day might provide new enjoyment and a different social experience. Any change to your daily routine might take some time to feel natural, so give these changes some time.

Exercise in a Group or Alone

Each Saturday morning, a marathon training group runs past my house. Though body sizes, shapes, ages and paces differ, these men and women share a common goal. Exercising with a group creates companionship and accountability. Accountability alone can be its own motivation. Group exercise like spinning and yoga classes, boot camps or a multi-sport group all are excellent ways to achieve fitness, accountability and social interaction. A group can make exercise fun again through competition and a shared experience. Many people who exercise enjoy the solitude with their iPod or the sounds of nature. If you have been exercising alone and lacking fun and motivation, joining a group may be a new challenge. Depending on the person, alternating group exercise sessions with solo exercise might be a good way to gain more enjoyment.

Get Back to the Basics

The exercise science field is filled with high-tech tools and smartphone applications. A GPS can accurately monitor mileage and pace. You can get instant feedback on exercise intensity with heart rate monitors and PowerTap meters. A few years ago, I purchased running shoes with a microchip that changed midsole cushion and support based on my running stride and terrain. Further, a plethora of training plans exist online and in popular media to guide training for 5K races to a full Ironman triathlon. Though these high-tech tools assist us in planning and tracking performance, they also can create confusion and frustration when the technology does not work. Sometimes getting back to the basics and restoring the fun of exercise means removing the digital readout on your cycle or stepping away from the training plan for a few days or weeks. This might mean temporarily replacing your training program with fun, active alternatives. Stepping away from hard-core training may refresh you mentally and remind you of your love for exercise.

Identify a New Challenge or Goal

I spent some time sorting through participant trends competing in marathons, half marathons, and various triathlon distances. Registrants and finishers have increased in the past two decades but average finishing times are much slower today compared with 10 and 20 years ago. Besides traditional running events (ranging from 5K to marathon) and triathlon events (ranging from sprint to Ironman), many alternatives exist. The Rock ‘n’ Roll Marathon series is an outstanding one, with bands throughout the courses and a festival atmosphere. Off-road, multi-sport events have gained popularity in recent years with X-Terra, different Adventure Race courses, and the Muddy-Buddy. The “Ski-to-Sea” in Bellingham, WA combines alpine and Nordic skiing, running, cycling, and paddle sports in a multi-person relay. Each of these challenges provides a new goal that can make you more intentional in your exercise with a focused goal for accomplishment. The fun of exercise will definitely be restored.

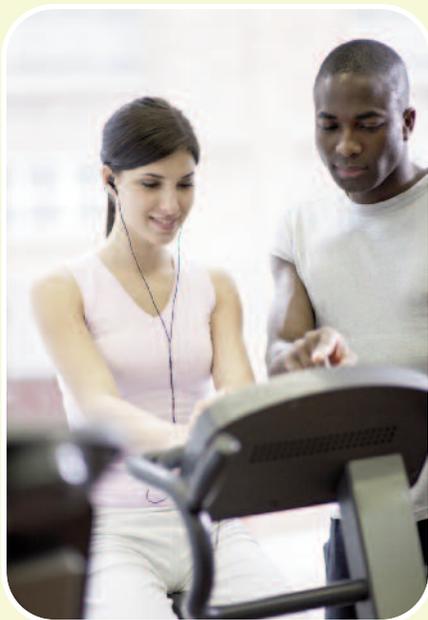


Exercise for a Greater Cause

Consider friends and family who have acquired a disease or have suffered a natural disaster, and use your exercise to raise both awareness and finances for nonprofit organizations and research foundations that help them. Personally, I train and race for [ALS Foundation for Research](#). Examples of causes that you can also train and race for include the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, Breast Cancer Awareness, groups that support of our soldiers in combat, or a local animal shelter. Find a cause that personally motivates you and make a difference in the lives of others. Turning our perspective from ourselves to a greater cause can provide new motivation and enjoyment.

Ten Ways to Start an Exercise Program

by Greg Chertok, M.Ed., CC-AASP



1. Get to Know Your Body

Every exerciser must have a basic understanding of the human body. This includes:

- proper identification of the major muscle groups;
- knowledge about the effects of activity vs. inactivity;
- distinction between stretching and strengthening a muscle; and
- distinction between “good pain” (muscle burn and fatigue) and “bad pain” (joint pain, lower back pain/impingement).

If you know nothing about the workings of the body, you may be putting yourself in a dangerous position. I once worked with an older man who, in response to experiencing soreness from exercise the day prior, decided to address the issue by doing more of what got him sore in the first place. Rather than stretching or resting the muscle, he assumed that working more would do the trick. He was forced to take even more time off to relieve the resulting soreness. This man, a senior vice president for a successful financial firm, was not uneducated. He was simply uninformed about his body and how to exercise correctly.

2. Understand Why You Are Exercising

Pose questions to yourself such as, “Why did I decide to start exercising?” It is suggested that exercisers who are intrinsically motivated experience more positive effects and better adherence than those who are extrinsically motivated. Intrinsically motivated exercisers do so for the satisfaction gained from engaging in the activity itself; in other words, they exercise for the challenge, to gain or learn skills, or to have fun. Extrinsically motivated exercisers do so as a means to an end; they exercise simply to improve their appearance or because of pressure from someone else. The proper reason behind exercising can act as powerful and long-lasting fuel.

3. Know Where You Are

In other words, know your current fitness level. You will need at least a general idea so you can accurately measure your progress. Assess your aerobic and muscular fitness, flexibility and body composition by recording:

- Your pulse rate before and after you walk one mile;
- How many push-ups you can do at one time;
- Your sit-and-reach (how far you can reach forward with your legs out in front of you); and
- Your waist circumference—the distance around your abdomen.

4. Know Where You Want To Be

To start, create a clear and vivid picture in your mind—what does this look and feel like? When you reach this ideal, what will you be able to do that you aren’t able to do now? The act of creating this picture alone can conjure positive and pleasant emotions, and reminding yourself of this image can motivate you.

5. Know How You Will Get There

In other words, identify the exercise program or activities that will take you to your ideal fitness level. As a rule, never choose an activity that doesn’t interest or excite you. Rather than fit into a generic exercise regimen, try to fit one to your needs. If you are looking for a social atmosphere, think about joining a class—there’s Zumba, Pilates, yoga, spinning, swim and dance, among others. If you are looking for something more private, inquire at your local gym about personal training.

6. Develop a Comfortable Routine

ACSM recommends that adults participate in at least 150 minutes per week of moderate-intensity physical activity. With this understanding, find a challenging yet realistic starting point upon which you can build over time. Don’t overwhelm your system by doing too much, but don’t underwhelm your system by doing too little. While devising your schedule—that is, minutes per day and days per week of exercise—also recognize any obstacles that may impede your progress. What excuses have you made in the past that have prevented you from exercising consistently? Start by altering your thinking. Mentally commit to the process so you’re in a good mindset to begin.

7. Write It All Down

Organize your daily goals, weekly goals, longer-term goals and exercise program/routine on paper. Studies find that those who write down their goals can accomplish up to 16 percent more than those who do not.

8. Gather Your Accessories

What special clothing, shoes, or gear does your fitness routine require? You might need to purchase a new pair of athletic shoes or activity-appropriate gear before initiating your program. Having the right exercise clothing and equipment can make the exercise easier and safer. You may find it more likely to continue with exercise when you know you have the right equipment. Some people like to exercise with music, so you might compile a soundtrack of your favorite music. Studies have shown that listening to music during exercise can improve results, as a motivator (people exercise longer and more vigorously to music) and as a distraction from fatigue.

9. Create Incentives

Develop a reward system ahead of time for the goals you accomplish along the way. Be proud of your accomplishments, and don’t be shy about celebrating your successes.

10. Get Started, and Trust the Process

You’ve done all the behind-the-scenes work; now it’s time to go out and reap the benefits of your preparation. A common deterrent to exercise adherence is impatience. Many first-time exercisers expect dramatic body-altering results after mere weeks, or even days, of increased movement. But don’t give up if you aren’t immediately seeing the desired physical results. Real change may take up to several months. Trust the process, and enjoy the journey.

When Food Has Too Much Power Over You

by Nancy Clark, M.S., R.D., C.S.S.D., FACSM



"I think about food all the time. I finish one meal and start thinking about the next."

"I don't keep cookies in the house; I end up eating them all."

"I'm afraid if I start eating, I won't be able to stop..."

If any of those thoughts sound familiar, you are among a large group of athletes who struggle with food. I routinely counsel food-obsessed exercisers and athletes who fear food as being the fattening enemy. They think about food all day, stay away from social events involving food, give themselves permission to eat only if they have exercised hard and white-knuckle themselves to one meager portion at dinner.

If you (or someone you know) struggles with food, keep reading. This article can help food-obsessed athletes take a step toward transforming their food fears into peaceful fueling patterns and better quality of life. Much of the information is from Glenn Waller's book *Beating Your Eating Disorder*, an excellent self-help book for adults at war with food and their bodies.

Food Is Not the Problem

Food is not the problem. Food is fuel. Food is health. Food is an inanimate object, just like a desk, rug or book. It has no inherent power over you. But if you feel as though a food (let's say, bread) has power over you, bread is the symptom, not the problem. That is, the urge to over-eat bread can stem from:

1. getting too hungry and, as a result, craving carbs. The solution is to prevent hunger, so you don't start craving carbs in the first place.
2. denying yourself permission to eat bread because it is a "bad" food. The solution is to learn to routinely enjoy bread and other carbs, which are the foundation of a quality sports diet.

Living by rigid, restrictive food rules can be a symptom that something has gone awry. Food rules serve a purpose; they can be a coping strategy to block out emotions and distract you from feeling your feelings. That is, if you are spending 99 percent of your waking hours debating whether or not to eat bread, you are not thinking about how angry you are with your boyfriend, how scared you are to go away to college, or how sad and lonely you've been since your dog died.

Being able to abide by strict food rules also gives you an unhealthy sense of superiority that you can say "no, thank you" to pizza, sandwiches and even birthday cake with your friends. You can then take pride in being able to sustain yourself on lettuce leaves and Diet Coke. Why would you want to change this menu when you are so in control, have such a perfect diet and are exercising seemingly well? Why? Because your quality of life stinks, and you are losing your friends.

Some of my clients can revise their restrictive eating patterns with simple nutrition education. I teach them how much is okay to eat, how to fit bread (or whatever) into their sports diet and how to enjoy food as one of life's pleasures. For example, one client believed eating an English muffin plus an egg and a yogurt at breakfast sounded "piggy." After one English muffin, she would stop eating because she thought she should, but then would succumb to the hungry horrors by 9:30 a.m. When she added the egg and the yogurt into her breakfast, she felt satisfied all morning, with no nagging food thoughts until she was appropriately hungry at lunchtime.

In comparison, another client refused to eat more breakfast. She was convinced that eating an additional packet of oatmeal would result in immediate weight gain. She said, "I couldn't eat more breakfast. I'd get fat!" She believed her body was different from everyone else's and would instantly blow up.

I reminded her that hunger is simply the body's request for fuel. The body is saying, "I have burned off what you fed me. May I please have some more food?" Her response was "NO! Food is fattening." She lived her days feeling hungry all the time, lagging energy, enduring cold hands and feet,

obsessing about food, feeling anxious she'd succumb to sweets and avoiding social situations that involved food. Her food rules undermined her quality of life.

Time for a change?

How can you break away from your restrictive food rules and start anew? One strategy is to understand that a few minutes of control (such as eating only one English muffin) can turn into a lifetime of misery. But a few minutes of anxiety (eating the English Muffin plus egg and a yogurt) can contribute to a peaceful future of enjoyable meals. You have to learn to sit through the anxiety and see that nothing bad happens when you eat an appropriate amount of food.

While you may believe that eating more breakfast will make you instantly fat, try this experiment:

- Weigh yourself (first thing in the morning) on day 1 of the experiment.
- Make one dietary change that you are sure will make you get fat (such as eating an egg and a yogurt along with the English muffin).
- Maintain this one change for 7 days (without making any other food or exercise changes), and then weigh yourself again.
- Repeat this experiment for another 7 days and average the weights. (Weight fluctuates due to shifts in water.)

Have you gotten fat? Doubtful. But take note: if the scale has gone up a tiny bit, the gain is likely due to replenishment of depleted muscle glycogen (carb) stores. For each one ounce of carbs stored in your muscles as glycogen, your muscles also store about three ounces of water. Hence, do not obsess about a number on the scale. Rather, observe how much better you feel during the day and also during your workout.

Easier said than done?

While food experiments sound like a good idea, the reality is they can be very anxiety-provoking and hard work. (If changing were simple, you would have been able to resolve your food issues ages ago, right?) Eating more calories is hard because you are giving up a coping mechanism without being sure you will feel better in the long run.

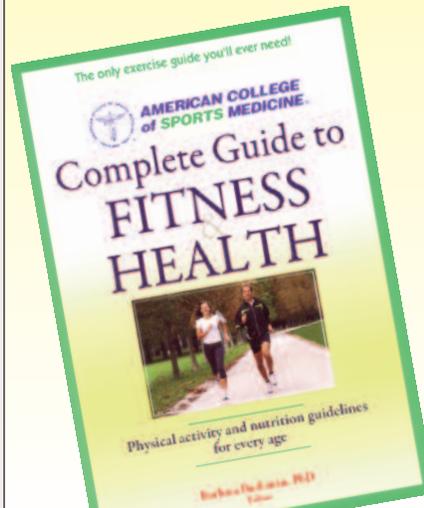
To get rid of your eating disorder, you need to learn how to cope differently. This will involve you dealing with your feelings, instead of starving them. A counselor might be able to help, as well as reading *Beating Your Eating Disorder* and other self-help books. Just imagine how nice life will be for you and your loved ones when you can wake up without food fears and rigid food rules?

Just be careful. If you are running with nearby traffic, be sure your music still lets you hear what's going on around you. Also, music at 85 decibels or more can lead to hearing loss. A normal conversation is around 60 decibels.

Q: How do you find the time to exercise?

A: Finding time to exercise needs to be a priority to be successful in achieving a regularly active program. With busy lifestyles already, exercise can get overlooked. To squeeze some extra time in an already hectic day, give some thought to when you want to schedule your exercise and set it in your calendar. Many workplaces have gyms close by. This makes exercise just before work, during lunch or right after work possible. Otherwise, some exercise equipment for use at home may be helpful. You can also incorporate more exercise during your daily routine. Walking more, using stairs and parking a bit further away can help get your heart rate up and burn extra calories. Keep track of your exercise using a calendar or log so that you can monitor your consistency and progress. This can be another good motivating factor and reminder to get your daily exercise.

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