

7 Tips for Making Exercise Part of Your Daily Routine

By Bailey Miller

The fact that getting regular exercise can boost your physical health is hardly news, but did you know that it can also help improve your mental health? Studies suggest that engaging in physical activity can be of benefit to people living with anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues.

Unfortunately, having this knowledge doesn't make it any easier to slip on your running shoes and get off the couch. In fact, it can often feel like a chore to put that idea into action. Life gets in the way—from busy schedules to overwhelming responsibilities, physical activity is often relegated to the back burner as we navigate the other aspects of our lives.

In a recent [Twill webinar](#), nutrition and exercise physiology expert Stella Volpe, Ph.D., shared suggestions for easy and seamless ways to integrate exercise into your daily routine. Here are seven of her best get-moving tips.

1. Keep It Short and Sweet

"Often, people think that when they start exercising, they have to exercise all at once," Volpe says. If you've ever gone all out on a resolution to get in shape, only to go so hard in those first few workouts that you ended up too sore to keep up the regimen, you know what she's talking about. "Research has shown us that multiple shorter bouts of exercise throughout the day equally help us," she says.

If you don't have time in your busy schedule for an hourlong workout every day, finding small ways to incorporate physical activity into your routine is a great way to start. Making physical activity an active part of your day can have many unforeseen benefits, too, Volpe explains. "For some, this could work better for their schedule," she says. And as Volpe points out, for those living with mental health issues, sprinkling movement and exercise throughout the day rather than undertaking one long workout may help them more evenly lift their mood.

2. Mix It Up

If you're struggling to make exercise part of your life, it can help to get creative. Volpe says that changing activities can result in more than just greater enjoyment of time spent exercising; varying your routine can motivate you to keep at it, whereas doing the same thing over and over may cause enthusiasm to wane.

For some, mixing things up could mean incorporating bed or chair exercises into their day. For others, it could mean sitting on balance balls while working from home, or taking a lap around the living room during commercial breaks.

Volpe suggests using whatever you have around your house as workout equipment. "If you have an old purse or bag, you can put soup cans in there, and there you have it! A cheap, easy way to do weight training in your home," she says.

3. Start Slow

You don't have to jump into a high-intensity, fast-paced workout routine right away. It's better to start slow and encourage your body to work up to the level you want it to be, not force it to get there.

"I tell people, if you only have five minutes in a day that you can give to exercise, start there," Volpe says. "Typically, people will do more than that, but if you could start with five minutes, you're doing five minutes more than you did the day before."

She also advises staying away from obsessive step counting or unrealistic milestones. "Don't get caught up in 10,000 steps a day," she says. "If you're averaging 3,000 steps a day, and you increase that a little bit every day, research has shown that's still better than remaining sedentary." Remember: Slow and steady progress is still progress.

4. Give Yourself Room to Grow

If you're prone to compare your stamina to your marathon-loving friend, or your flexibility to that of your sister the yoga instructor, stop. Exercise is a skill that needs to be developed; comparing yourself to the skill levels of others won't help you get to where you want to be.

“If you're learning something that has a skill in it, be very aware of giving yourself time to learn,” Volpe says. It’s not about how much or how well you exercise compared to others, she encourages. “It’s about internally how we feel and what we’re accomplishing.”

5. Set a Schedule

Taking the time to schedule exercise into your day, especially when just starting to incorporate it into your daily life, can make all the difference in your motivation and willingness to do it, notes Volpe. “If you’ve written it in your calendar—say, ‘Okay, I’m exercising from 5:30 to 6:30 tonight’—then that might happen more than if you don’t write it in,” she says.

6. Exercise with Others

Sometimes you just can't beat the motivation that working out with a friend or in a group can bring. “Exercising with others really does help people stick with their activity,” Volpe says.

Think about exercising weekly with a friend, or simply check in on each other’s progress from time to time. Having someone else to hold you accountable for your exercise, or simply encourage you to keep going, can be extremely beneficial.

7. Exercise in the Morning

Even though it may be difficult to pull yourself out of bed to fit in a workout, it really can help you prioritize it in your life. Starting off your day with exercise can help you make sure you don’t let other responsibilities get in the way. “Exercising in the morning is not a physiological need, but the reason I encourage people to do so is that then life doesn’t get in your way,” Volpe says.

When you make physical activity a priority, you'll quickly start to reap the benefits. And once you’ve set your mind to it, making physical activity a normal part of your day can be easy—and it can make all the difference in improving your physical *and* mental health.

“All it takes is some discipline to incorporate physical activity into our lives,” Volpe says. “Just try to move every day, no matter how intense or how long you do the activity.”