REKINDLING THE DESIRE TO EXERCISE

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According to the Mayo Clinic, a national organization of esteemed doctors, regular exercise contributes to weight loss, an increase in overall energy, and a robust immune system. Exercise is, without a doubt, the best thing you can do for your body. However, this is, of course, not new information. Confucius encouraged physical activity in his ancient philosophical writings, describing how inactivity can lead to certain diseases. Think about what diseases are some of the most prevalent in today’s society: heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and metabolic syndrome. All of these diseases are directly related to obesity due to the inactive, sedentary lifestyles that plague Americans today. Our lives are dominated by wondrous technologies that exist to make our lives easier, yet how can our lives be easier if the general population of the United States is getting fatter and developing more diseases due to torpor from these technologies? Most individuals who know they are heavy desire to lose weight and change their lives, but are met with defeat when they attempt to implement these desires into their everyday routines. They decide to exercise more and eat right but end up reverting back to their unhealthy habits. Individuals become quickly discouraged from exercise for a variety of reasons that will be discussed later in this paper. They see working out and proper nutrition as things to avoid, but really these are things that should be embraced with open arms. How can people find complete enjoyment and fulfillment in exercise and fitness? What steps can be taken to ensure a person sticks with a plan that makes them feel great, look great, and keeps them motivated to improve every area of their lives to permanently alter their lives in a beneficial, healthy way?

**Introduction**
Words From the Past

The advantages of exercise on a broad spectrum were first observed by Soviet physiologists in the early 1950s, as stated by Dr. Viru in his report in the Journal of Applied Physiology. Soviet physiologist Dr. Meerson discovered how the metabolic effects of regular exercise leads to reduced levels of stress, allowing the brain to think clearly. The Soviets then implemented this information on a national level to increase the health of their entire population by broadcasting a series of morning exercise programs. During the Cold War, these exercises were meant to reduce stress and ensure quick responses and actions in case of nuclear war. The Soviet’s population eventually came to view fitness as “virtually a state religion”, as reported by Time magazine. These Soviet campaigns promoting fitness have been the strongest forward motions in history to encourage exercise among its citizens. Campaigns for exercise will have profound effects in modern America as well because it will push stout citizens towards a fitness-oriented lifestyle.

Exercise promotion in the modern United States also saw a surge in the 1950s and 1960s. “The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) was formed in 1954, and has proved to be one of the premier organizations in the promotion of health and fitness to American society and worldwide,” as stated by Dr. Kravitz from the University of New Mexico’s Exercise Science Program. Former President John F. Kennedy was an avid supporter of “fitness and its health-related benefits to the American people,” (Kravitz). Kennedy even wrote an article for Sports Illustrated where he stated “We are under-exercised as a nation; we look instead of play; we ride instead of walk.”

Kennedy’s words apply in this modern day more than ever. American society has almost entirely adopted a sedentary lifestyle where exercise is not recognized as a necessity. This is peculiar as the population of the United States in urbanized areas has more fitness resources available now more than ever. In San Luis Obispo alone, there are nine different public facilities with exercise equipment available. The fitness industry has been rapidly growing due to the increased obesity rate; last year the industry amassed an approximate total of fifteen billion dollars, as disclosed by Susan Yara of Forbes.com. The growth of the fitness industry has resulted in an increase in personal trainers and fitness experts, making the knowledge of proper exercise and nutrition more available than ever. In perspective, these resources make it relatively easy for people to lose weight; however, the main problem arises when individuals lose the motivation to exercise.

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- John F. Kennedy
It’s not that easy

The majority of the population these days are both aware and concerned with their health, wanting to look and feel better, but are daunted by the perceived challenges of starting and maintaining an exercise program. In today’s society, the majority of jobs, tasks, and errands require minimal physical movement, thus leaving it completely up to an individual to exercise and become active solely out of their own efforts. People today are faced with valid challenges that include: displeasure of working out, minimal leisure time, and being unfamiliar with workout equipment while facing severe physical and social discomfort. Despite the range of grievances, it’s time to change these perceptions of challenges and obstacles into solutions and certainty leaving us with the question, how do we get people to enjoy exercise and become motivated enough to incorporate it into their otherwise sedentary lives?

One of the biggest barriers deterring people from exercising is simply the lack of enjoyment. Some people find absolutely no appeal in working out. They may not consider or anticipate the reasons as to why they are exercising to be worth the inconvenience or anguish. It is not uncommon to feel discomfort and pain, believe that time moves far too slowly, and hate sweating during exercise or becoming turned off by the trouble of getting prepared. Each of these feelings contributes to the apathy an individual can gain towards exercise.

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- Paige Waehner
In addition to all these barriers, oftentimes looking at exercise for the long term (exercising on a daily basis) in order to obtain desired results can be extremely overwhelming and discouraging. While these conceptions are common among many and are difficult to conquer, it is imperative for individuals to reconsider and keep in mind that drastic changes don’t have to transpire overnight.

In order to be successful with any endeavor (short-term or long-term) there must be multiple, compelling motives for doing it in the first place. Starting your exercise plan can be intimidating; however, remember you’re the one making a good decision. Before beginning a workout routine, consider your desired results and set your mind right. Imagine yourself with the body you want, doing the fun things you want to do and feeling comfortable around people you want to be with. Evaluate what it is that you want to change or achieve. Once you feel comfortable with your target, ease into a new simple regime so you won’t feel overwhelmed and quit after a few weeks. When you are first just getting started on your own or with a program, keep in mind there is no reason to torture yourself and force anything too hard or unpleasant. For example, if you want to add more cardio exercises, start with adding something you know you can achieve. If you find yourself not able to meet your goals, change them so they’re easier. Once you are in better shape you will enjoy exploring what your capable of and pushing yourself. Paige Waehner, a certified personal trainer through American Council on Exercise as well as a freelance writer with more than 13 years of exercise experience, says it is crucial to first set small realistic goals. She claims, “If you don’t have a specific goal, a reasonable timeframe and a plan to reach that goal you’ll never know whether you’re actually making progress.” Finding enjoyment in exercise is possible and comes with commitment and time leading us to the next prevalent obstacle.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics American Time Use Survey, time allocated to key activities throughout an average work day for employed persons ages 25-54 with children under the age of 18 is spent 8.6 hours working/related activities, 7.6 hours sleeping, 1.1 hours doing household chores, 1.1 hours eating/drinking, 1.2 hours caring for others, 2.6 hours of leisure time, and 1.8 hours of other activities. After working these long hours, exercise is often a low priority and something most never get around to. However, in order to stay healthy, control weight, and meet personal goals, it is critical to commit to an exercise routine, think of it as another important task and make it a priority.

You may not have an extensive period of time to workout; however, you can still be physically active by getting creative and planning your day out. Throughout the week, experiment with your schedule and figure out different times when you are able to get exercise. For example, waking up earlier in the morning, exercising during a lunch break, or even after work while your watching T.V can make a big difference. Search for a workout
location near your workplace. Finding something close will make going to an offered class easier and convenient so you don’t have to dedicate large amounts of time for transportation. Researchers at the University of Bristol found that employees who enjoyed a workout before going to work - or exercised during lunch breaks - were more productive and were better equipped to handle stressful situations. This research is published in the International Journal of Workplace Health Management and proves that exercise during the work hours has mental, as well as physical benefits.

While time constraints are among some of the most frustrating and shared barriers, many people also face issues with how to work out, therefore experiencing feelings of social discomfort. Oftentimes, not knowing how to begin an exercise or how to use certain equipment can be enough to completely turn one away. Unfortunately, there are many who feel intimidated at the thought of even joining or getting involved with a gym. Entering a room filled with machines, weights, and other members who seem to be in great shape and appear to know exactly what they’re doing is far too threatening to encounter. Jackie Warner, celebrity trainer and Beverly Hills gym owner, says that a lack of familiarity with the gym equipment and “gym etiquette” can scare many people away from health clubs. These feelings of discomfort and embarrassment are not uncommon in an exercise setting; however, there are ways to overcome it and ease these concerns.

Throughout the day there are certain durations of time that are less crowded. Going at a time with fewer people is a good time to explore the gym, try different equipment and find exercises that provide consolation. If you don’t know how to operate a piece of equipment, ask the training staff or even consider investing in a personal trainer. It is also imperative to keep in mind and understand that the gym is a very self-absorbed environment, other individuals who are there are much more concerned with what they’re personally trying to accomplish and are not paying much attention to you or the way you look. Trent David, a personal trainer at Gold’s Gym in Hollywood, California, says he constantly reminds his clients that each member at the gym is focusing on his own goals and workout. “Everyone at the gym is in the same situation, and not everyone is a 20-year-old bodybuilder”. With that in mind, it is time to move past any discomfort and intimidation.
If exercise requires so much effort and determination, then why even bother? How does it benefit anybody except for that individual trying to get fit? The Center for Disease Control reports that one third of all U.S. adults are obese. This equates to approximately seventy-five million American citizens that would benefit greatly from discovering complete fulfillment with exercise. According to a statement by the American Heart Association, regular exercise at the national level contributes to fewer breakout epidemics due to strengthened immune systems. It also leads to reduced medical costs for health insurance because of fewer obesity-related illnesses and deaths. Exercise at the national level will correlate to a smaller number of hospitalizations due to heart attacks, clogged arteries, and high blood pressure. The fitness industry and its sub-markets will also be influenced. Less funding will be needed for advertising weight-loss products, work out supplements, and organic foods. Motivated individuals concerned with exercise will naturally think about proper nutrition and healthy improvements to their lifestyle. Exercise on a broad scale will heavily influence the food industry by changing the targeted market from overweight people to fitness-oriented individuals. Finding continued motivation in exercise will especially benefit the aging baby-boomer generation as they become the age where physical activity can be difficult to execute. If individuals can discover and hold on to the motivation required for exercise, the positive effects that will entail are simply staggering; they will be felt by every person in America.

“One third of U.S. Adults are obese.”

“Approximately 75 million American citizens that would benefit from exercise.”
The Solutions

Engaging in physical activities and scheduled movement are some of the most important elements contributing to a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally. Research studies continue to prove how exercise helps prevent diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, and improves an individual’s endurance, strength, and flexibility. However, a recent study by the National Center for Health Statistics found that only 19 percent of the population regularly engages in “high levels of physical activity” defined as three intense 20-minute workouts per week. This same study found that another 63 percent, about the same percentage of overweight Americans, believe that exercising would make them healthier, leaner, and less stressed, but still don’t do it for a number of reasons.

Right now, the rise in obesity in both adults and children is a severe public health crisis. As more and more become obese, diseases will surge, meaning an increase in the amount of sick people and an exponential growth in health care costs. Cynthia Ogden, PhD, a CDC epidemiologist published the results of a study on weight in the U.S: 31 percent of adults being obese and 15 percent of children and teenagers ages 6-19 are overweight. This proportion of obese individuals has been growing steadily for the last few decades and if individuals don’t begin to recognize this health problem there are going to be a number of irreversible consequences.

This leaves us with the question, how can we get individuals to find complete enjoyment and fulfillment in exercise in order to maintain a regular exercise routine? Understanding health benefits of exercise will lead to the intention of exercising; however, increasing a person’s belief in his or her ability to maintain an exercise program for achieving personal and physical goals will increase adherence. In order to see desired results and maintain a regular exercise regime, the role of motivation cannot be underestimated. For individuals who find exercising boring or painful, don’t have time or who lose track of goals and motivation, the solution is to find something you love to do. Think of something that you genuinely love doing. Now, finding a physical activity that gets you excited, and lifts your spirit in the same way will lead you on your way to long term success in not only enjoying physical results, but the process of personal transformation as well. There are an unlimited number of possibilities when it comes to physical activity; individuals need to try anything that they will enjoy regardless of the outcome.
So What Now?

Enjoyment of exercise is a mediator of how often an individual will participate in some sort of activity. For individuals to maintain a regular exercise routine and gain the health and physical results they desire, a fun, effective, and structured regime must be practiced. In order to implement all these factors an individual who is seeking help needs to get involved with small or large group fitness activities, classes, and personal training sessions. Small group exercise classes are designed to help you reach your own personal fitness goals in a fun and energizing environment. These classes are provided to ensure attention from trainers to every participant helping to keep you motivated and excited. One of the biggest problems with fitness programs is willpower. Personal trainers encourage and coach clients to achieve a desired level of fitness. They evaluate you as an individual and determine a structured fitness program that is specific to you. Both group classes and personal trainers reduce injuries, save time and maximize results with efficiency. Here in SLO, Cal Poly’s Recreational Center is located on campus providing an environment designed to support and promote a healthy lifestyle. The gym offers instructional classes from Body Pump to Yoga, to Spin and Dance classes as well as personal training programs. The training program offers personal trainers who are nationally certified, waiting to help you reach your fitness goals by creating a specific and effective fitness plan. Creating a healthy lifestyle doesn’t have to mean drastic changes. Making small changes, positive choices and staying committed to a healthy way of life will lead to big rewards. It’s time to get fit, see results and have fun.


Image and Video References

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