



# The Secret to Staying Motivated

Forget simply losing weight! Here, five much better reasons to get moving.

By Faye Brennan

When it comes to managing a hectic schedule, daily to-dos that don't have tangible and immediate payoffs usually find themselves falling off your checklist. That includes exercise. "The reality is that physical activity constantly competes with everything else we do," says Michelle L. Segar, Ph.D., associate director of the Sport, Health, and Activity Research and Policy Center for Women and Girls at the University of Michigan. "For us to believe an activity is worth our time, it has to offer something very important to our daily life." In a 2011 study, Segar and her colleagues reported that women who tracked instant results after a workout—like feeling happier, more energetic, and less anxious—exercised 34 percent more over the course of a year than those who focused on weight-loss or appearance goals. It makes sense: Physical changes can take weeks and months, which can make working out feel like just another chore.

Instead, focus on these five instant rewards—they'll help reboot your motivation to break a sweat.

## INSTANT REWARD 1: Boost Productivity and Brainpower

Cramming for a big meeting? Have a stack of paperwork to sort through? Skipping your workout to clock extra hours behind the desk may seem like a smart move, but a quick trip to the gym can actually be more beneficial. According to a study published in *Clinical Neurophysiology*, 20 minutes of moderate exercise immediately increases attention and cognitive ability. "There's a shift in brain activity that enhances executive functioning, which plans, schedules, and coordinates thoughts and actions," says study author Charles H. Hillman, Ph.D., a professor in the department of

kinesiology and community health at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. That amplified focus can last up to an hour, so schedule a quick workout during a time of day when you tend to be most distracted, or before a time when you'll really need to be on point.

## INSTANT REWARD 2: Make Healthy Connections

Having strong social ties can pay off in significant health benefits (like lower blood pressure, fewer colds, and lower rates of mental illness, suicide, and alcoholism). You're most likely to create sustainable bonds with new people when you share a common interest, so don't

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## Get-Fit Tricks

keep to yourself at the gym. Sign up for a boot camp or cardio class and strike up convos with classmates. Just the fact that you're into fitness will improve people's view of you: A recent study found that those who work out are perceived by others to be more friendly, outgoing, personable, kind, and even more attractive than those who don't.

### INSTANT REWARD 3: Get Glowing Skin

A pricey facial is one way to score a better complexion; a single sweat session is another. "As your heart rate rises, the increase in blood flow circulates to the surface

of your skin, giving you that revitalizing flush of color," says Mitra Ray, Ph.D., coauthor of *Do You Have the Guts to Be Beautiful?* Turns out, sweating is good for your skin too: Some of the water evaporates to cool the body, and the rest is reabsorbed into the skin, giving it a nicely hydrated look post-workout.

### INSTANT REWARD 4: Have Hotter Sex

Yes, exercising can make sack sessions with your guy even sexier. A study published in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that women who completed a 20-minute treadmill run before watching an erotic film clocked a

150 percent increase in genital arousal. "Exercise activates the sympathetic nervous system, which helps blood enter the vaginal tissue more readily and creates more vaginal lubrication when in a sexual situation," says Cindy M. Meston, Ph.D., director of the Sexual Psychophysiology Lab at the University of Texas at Austin. To take advantage of this, you might want to exercise at home—Meston says the swell in arousal only lasts up to 30 minutes.

### INSTANT REWARD 5: Sleep Better

According to a 2011 study, those who engaged in

moderately intense exercise for a total of 150 minutes a week (that's 30 minutes a day, five days a week) were able to fall asleep faster and felt less tired during daylight hours. "Working out zaps stress and anxiety, plus it helps your body to regulate its own temperature, so you can hit the hay more peacefully," says study author Paul D. Loprinzi, Ph.D., an assistant professor of exercise science at Bellarmine University. And it doesn't matter what time of day you choose to fit in a sweat session, he says: Only limited research suggests that late-night physical activity hurts the quality of your sleep. ■

## EXCUSES, EXCUSES

We all make them—now beat them!  
Quick fixes for three popular cop-outs.

### "It's so boring."

Infuse some creativity into your fitness regimen. For one month, try as many new workouts as you can, like trail running or a boot camp in the park, says Michael R. Mantell, Ph.D., senior fitness consultant for the American Council on Exercise. Break out Wii Sports, sign up for Zumba, or try TRX training at the gym. Like dating, if you put yourself out there and try new things, you're bound to find something you love.

### "I don't have time."

Erase the image of the gym and redefine working out as any activity or movement, says Mantell. It doesn't even have to be all at once: Try doing 10-minute mini-sessions throughout the day.

### "I'm too tired."

Unless you're sick, you have enough energy to exercise—you just need to tap into it. "Waiting until you feel like doing something you don't want to do means you probably won't do it," says Mantell. Instead, commit to five minutes of exercise to shake off your sluggishness. You'll most likely feel energized and ready to go. If not, stop there and get back on track tomorrow.

