A Blueprint for a More Active You

“I know what to do; I just can’t seem to do it.” Sound familiar? Most of us know that physical activity is important. Meeting the minimum exercise recommendations reduces your risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and stroke. It also helps to fight off depression, manage stress, and may increase energy and improve mood. Who doesn’t want some of that? Yet, according to the CDC, only 48 percent of adult Americans are meeting the minimum goal.

Ready to become a more active person? If so, take a few minutes and go through this activity. At the end, you’ll have a clear vision of the best version of you and a blueprint for how to make it happen!

1. What are you doing well now?
The saying goes, what you appreciate appreciates. So take a few minutes and appreciate:
- What you’re doing well now when it comes to physical activity.
- What are you most proud of? Maybe you’ve recently started walking with a partner, are taking stairs rather than the elevator, or are training for a 5K. Take some time, think about it, and write it down.

2. What was your best experience from the past?
Our past experiences are learning opportunities. In fact, past exercise attempts hold valuable information about what does and doesn’t work for you. Think about a time when you were doing better than you are today related to physical activity.

Write about it, describing in detail what was going on, how you felt, and what strengths you were using to accomplish it.

3. What is the best possible version of you?
If you could wake up tomorrow and be the best version of yourself, what would you be doing in relation to physical activity? For some people that might be walking to and from the mailbox without getting winded, while for others it might be competing in and winning triathlons.
- What does your best self look like?
- What activities are you doing? Name at least three.
- How do you feel?
Take as long as you need to really define what success looks and feels like for you.

Continued inside.
4. Why does it matter?
To fan the flame of desire, it’s important to be clear about why you want what you want. Since we’re talking about physical activity, explore why you want to be active. Complete this sentence as many times as you’d like:

- I want to be active to ____________________________,
  so that _________________________________.

Here are two examples to get your wheels turning:

- I want to be active to increase my energy so that I can walk my dogs every day.
- I want to be active to improve my mood, so that I enjoy my time with friends and family.

5. What’s getting in the way?
Now that you’ve spent some time thinking about it, you may be getting excited about being more active. Reflect on why it’s been hard to be active in the past:

- What makes this hard to get done?
- What do you need that you don’t have to reach your goal?
- What do you gain from not changing?

6. How can you overcome obstacles?
Some obstacles are real and can’t be worked around right now, some are real but with enough motivation you could find a way, and some are excuses. Ask yourself:

- How might you categorize your obstacle(s) (real, real but workable, excuse)?
- Imagine that your obstacle is gone. How does that change things?
- What resources do you need to conquer this obstacle? Where could you get them?

7. What first steps can you take?
Reaching the best version of you is a process of small steps taken over time. Think about where you are today in relation to your goal. What is the next step you can take to move in that direction? Maybe you need to research local gyms, or find a walking buddy or go to the library to check out an exercise DVD. List one or two steps you can take in the next two days. You now have an activity plan that is important to you! If it helps, write down your plan on this page, and place it in a location that you see frequently to remind yourself of your vision.

It’s always a good idea to talk with your doctor about physical activity. Share your goals to get their expert advice on how to achieve the best version of you.

Minimum Activity Recommendations

| Strength Building | Adults 18-64 years: 150 minutes of moderate intensity (such as brisk walking) each week  
| | Or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity (such as running, biking, aerobic dance) each week  
| | Adults 65 and older: 150 minutes of moderate intensity (such as brisk walking) each week  

Source: 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, CDC.gov.
The Power of a Partner

While some people prefer to exercise solo, research shows that for many individuals social support increases physical activity. Here are some of the benefits to partnering up:

**Limits negative self-talk.**
If you are meeting a friend to walk, you are less likely to make excuses and cancel or talk yourself out of exercising. Keep in mind that some of the struggles you are having, your friend may be facing too. Together you can both be a positive force for each other.

**Makes time pass quickly.**
Instead of focusing on each step, mile, or hill, you’ll be focusing on having a meaningful or fun conversation with your friend. Talking about upcoming events, family, or your goals can be a great way to pass the time.

**Builds strong friendships.**
Forming lasting relationships built on common interests is proven to be rewarding both physically and mentally. By working through your obstacles together, you are more likely to reach your goals. On days when one of you is struggling, the other can offer encouragement.

**Increases your motivation and confidence.**
Staying committed to your wellness vision and taking small steps is a great confidence builder. If you make a plan to meet up three times a week and you make that happen, you are more likely to stay motivated.

**Keeps your goals in mind.**
When it gets tough, you can remind each other why it’s important to carry on.

Finally, it’s always a good idea to have a back-up plan. What if your buddy gets sick or goes on vacation? Will you continue on your own, or ask a friend to fill in? Think about the reasons to continue to work toward your goals. The best version of you is just waiting to happen. Find a buddy, make a plan, and enjoy the journey!

Member Corner

**Determination and Small Steps Pay Off**

Sharon is no stranger to the benefits of exercise. You see, Sharon has diabetes and chronic knee pain. When she needed a double knee replacement, Sharon knew that exercise would be the key to her success. So she made time to go to her local gym and found exercises she was comfortable doing. Following her knee surgery, she never gave up. Sharon states that making exercise a daily part of her life put her in control.

“Exercise keeps me going and keeps me on track. I feel stronger and I stand taller after my workout. It’s important to know that you are in control of your health.”

Sharon admits that some days are tougher than others, but her hard work has paid off. Her diabetes has never been in better control, and she has cut her insulin dose in half. Her knee surgery was a success, and she is looking forward to her future. Sharon has even started taking a water aerobics class and is enjoying every minute. In fact, she wasn’t sure she could keep up with the class, but Sharon is stronger than ever and feeling the benefits.

“The encouragement I received from my Condition Support nurse let me know that I wasn’t in this alone,” Sharon remarked. All the small steps Sharon took to improve her health added up to some big improvements.

“I feel stronger and I stand taller after my workout. It’s important to know that you are in control of your health.”

– Sharon, program participant
Spinach, Lentil, and Jicama Salad with Cider Dressing

**Ingredients**

- 1 ½ cup French lentils
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 sprigs thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ cup apple juice
- 2 Tbsp. cider vinegar
- 2 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 shallots, minced
- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- ½ tsp. salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 cup diced, peeled jicama
- 8 cups baby spinach
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

**Directions**

1. Add the lentils, garlic, thyme, and bay leaf to a medium pot. Cover the ingredients by about two inches with water. Bring to a boil then reduce to a simmer. Cook until tender but not mushy – start checking at 15 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water. Discard the garlic, thyme, and bay leaf.

2. While the lentils are cooking, make the dressing: In a small bowl, whisk together the apple cider, vinegar, mustard, shallots, and olive oil.

3. Season dressing with salt and black pepper. Toss the jicama, lentils, and spinach with the dressing. Arrange on a platter and garnish with the walnuts.

**Serves: 8**

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving:**

- Calories: 230
- Total fat: 11 g
- Saturated fat: 1 g
- Trans fat: 0 g
- Cholesterol: 0 mg
- Sodium: 270 mg
- Total carbohydrate: 26 g
- Fiber: 7 g
- Protein: 10 g

Adapted from “Fast & Fresh Salads: Recipes from NutritionAction.com’s Healthy Cook, Kate Sherwood.”