

Even though regular physical activity has been shown to decrease the risk of developing many of the common ailments including coronary artery disease, diabetes, hypertension, depression and certain cancers, there is still a reluctance among mere mortals to start on an exercise regime.

In a way, it is reflected by the results of the National Health Survey 2010 which revealed that the proportion of people participating in a regular exercise programme declined by 19% since 2004, the last time the survey was conducted. The case is even stronger for those with underlying medical problems. This in spite of the fact that exercise may improve the control of such problems and, thus, reduce the need for medication.

Knowledge and logic aside, as a clinician, it is still difficult at times to motivate patients to start exercising. Perhaps the trick to motivating ourselves to start exercising is not just a matter of knowing how it can help us but also understanding what it takes to get started and changing the perception of exercise.

For instance, it helps to know how much exercise we need to do. In other words, we need an exercise plan or prescription, rather than a general idea to “go out and do exercise”. This can come down to a detailed prescription of how many times a week, how long the session, how hard I need to exercise and also what type of exercise, particularly if one has health issues. Using this exercise “prescription” method sets the targets firmly in mind so that we can act on it each day.

It is also important that the plan is tailored for you. After all, you would not take someone else’s prescription as your own. Doing that for an exercise prescription may backfire in a few ways. For instance, the exercise may be unsuitable for your health condition and injury. Or it may be too easy or difficult for your level of fitness, either of which can be discouraging. Beyond the physical considerations, the exercise should also be convenient to do, as time is a premium in a busy lifestyle.

Exercise need not be boring. Exercise does not mean running miles on a treadmill (unless that is what you enjoy). A host of activities is available



While much has been written about the benefits of exercise, Dr. [Name] is a Sports Physician and Head, Sports Medicine at [Institution].

in Singapore for loners and social beings, from brisk walks to mountain biking - all kinds to train different aspects of your fitness. You can “mix and match” different exercises for variety.

Exercise need not be painful. While the adage “no pain, no gain” may be true to some extent, especially for those of us trying to push the boundaries of genetic endowment, for those starting from zero, the pain is not as great as imagined. In fact, “some is better than none” is

All In The Mind

Getting Started on Exercise



benefits of exercise, starting on exercise is very much an uphill task. Dr Jason Chia, Consultant, Medicine and Surgery Clinic, Tan Tock Seng Hospital, shows you how to get started.

more accurate. The intensity and amount of exercise that a couch potato needs to start with in order to enjoy health benefits is relatively low. Furthermore, the benefits can be accrued by accumulating short bouts of exercise of ten minutes or more.

Big hairy audacious goals (BHAG): these are good to have as a long term goal in exercise for something to aim to. But when starting off, perhaps being an “underachiever” may not be

such a bad idea. By that I mean that the goal is set deliberately low so that it can be easily achieved. There is nothing wrong with encouraging yourself in this way as long as we build upon the initial success towards this BHAG.

Above all, the exercise should be fun to you. Running and spinning are both types of exercise but some may enjoy running alone while others gravitate to a class environment. Nothing is harder to start and keep up than a chore.