

first steps to FITNESS



No more excuses! It's time to put exercise at the top of your to-do list, says **Martin Feaver**

ALL OF US SHOULD be taking aerobic exercise for at least 30 minutes a day, five days out of seven. However, most of us don't or won't. Why is this? What stops us getting off the couch and going for a brisk walk or heading off for a cycle ride?

For most of us, exercise is a chore and pretty low on our list of priorities. We know we should do something to keep us fitter and healthier, yet we are experts at building barriers that prevent us going for a swim or walking around the park. How can we start exercising and, more importantly, keep exercising?

COMMIT TO GET FIT

Like anything worthwhile, it demands effort – and not just the physical effort. It requires planning to include it in your daily routine. It can also make you feel incredibly self-conscious. You need self-esteem and self-belief to get out of that front door in your trainers or bare your body in public at the local swimming pool!

Deciding why you are going to exercise is important, too. Whether you want to look and feel good, be healthy or live longer, it's good to have a reason. You don't have to tell anyone else what it is, but if you remind yourself why you're exercising you're more likely to stick with it.

Boredom can also turn you off the idea. People who exercise with others are more likely to keep going than those who exercise alone. You're even more likely to keep exercising if the exercise has a social aspect to it – a cup of tea and a gossip with a friend afterwards is more fun.

WHERE TO START

The environment plays its part in us not exercising and there are parts of the country where it just doesn't feel pleasant or safe to exercise. It isn't easy, but you may need to make even more effort to get into an exercise routine.

There are huge numbers of initiatives around to help you start – try your local GP's surgery, search the internet at your library or try your local health promotions office in the phone book. Your local leisure or sports centre will have beginner's classes, too. If you are worried about cost, exercise doesn't have to cost a fortune either – large numbers of projects are subsidised.

Deciding to exercise has to come from you. You can be cajoled along to an exercise class by a friend or partner because 'it's good for you' or told by your GP to exercise until you are blue in the face – but the simple fact is, if you don't want to exercise, you won't.

Before you decide to write off exercise for good, give it a chance and see where it leads you. You never know, you may become hooked – and get fit for life! **HH**

GET UP AND GO

Sustrans for Walking and Cycling
www.sustrans.org.uk
 Information Line: 0845 113 0065

Walking the way to Health Initiative – England
www.whi.org.uk
 01242 533258

Paths to Health – Scotland
www.pathsforall.org.uk
 01259 218855

Countryside Council for Wales
 01248 370444

BRINGING DOWN THE BARRIERS

> I DON'T HAVE TIME

Turn off the TV for 30 mins and go for a walk

> EXERCISE IS BORING

Getting fit will give you a purpose and energy

> I FEEL STUPID

Don't feel self-conscious. Feel proud of yourself!

> IT ISN'T SAFE

Join a club or plan exercise with a friend

> I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

Your local leisure centre will help you learn

> I DON'T LIKE EXERCISE

The buzz of feeling fit is great. Give it a go!

> I'M TOO OLD TO START

You're never too old to start getting fit

> IT'S TOO EXPENSIVE

Walking or jogging in the park is free