



Exercise: Are you just going through the motions?

From www.fudiet.com by Dr. Sherry Pagoto

This article will help you realize the most benefit out of the time and effort you spend on exercise, and the strategies can also help if you have trouble sticking with an exercise routine.

For many people trying to lose weight, exercise is a slog. You have the routine. You drag yourself through it. You feel pretty good once it's over, but then have to build up the drive to get back to it the next day. You pick an activity that you don't completely hate... be it walking, the gym, biking, or a class, and then stick with that routine with very little variation. You slog your way through the monotony because you feel like you *have* to. If you didn't have to do it you would quit tomorrow. If this describes you, your exercise regimen may be one of *going through the motions*. Going through the motions is an autopilot setting we put ourselves on when we are just trying to get through something that brings us very little joy. We all do it at some point in life, but sheesh... it's a pretty lousy way to spend time.


As with anything in life, just going through the motions rarely leads to great accomplishments. And, nobody has ever fallen in love by going through the motions either. Going through the motions prevents you from feeling engaged, empowered, or feeling anything at all. It is absent of goals. It is absent of heart. It is absent of meaning.

I dare you to take your relationship with your *physical self* much further by turning your exercise regimen into a meaningful journey. A love affair with your body. The biggest project you ever launched. Here's how.

1. Don't Exercise. TRAIN. One way to snap out of going through the motions is to give your exercise meaning and purpose. Convert your exercise to "training." Training is a goal-oriented way of exercising. Your workouts are laid out before you on a schedule of increasing duration and intensity, typically with a future event of some kind in mind. If you are just starting off, consider a Couch to 5K plan (see http://www.coolrunning.com/engine/2/2_3/181.shtml). If you have already accomplished that, try a 10K plan (access this 10K plan mobile app at <http://www.felttip.com/run10k/>). You can Google training plans for any activity, including walking, running, biking, or swimming. If you are new to it, look for beginner plans. Even if you don't have an event planned, training schedules are a great way to structure your exercise and achieve increased endurance, conditioning and strength. Training also has built in milestones that once accomplished will give your workouts purpose and a sense of accomplishment.

2. Challenge yourself: Regularly. Every year I challenge you to plan a physical accomplishment you think you aren't capable of doing. To really discover your physical capabilities, give yourself the opportunity to wow yourself. I guarantee you can do far more than you can imagine right now. You might consider hiking a mountain trail. A race event. A long bike ride. Anything. If you haven't selected anything yet this year, consider selecting an activity for this summer. This gives you 2-3 months to get working on it. *The feeling of accomplishing something you didn't think possible is one of the greatest highs in life.*

3. Cross train. We have a tendency to get comfortable with our go-to exercise but any single exercise only allows us to condition some muscles and will neglect others. Cross-training is important to get a more comprehensive workout and also break up the monotony of your routine. I recently had an injury that forced me to take up biking, an exercise I have never much embraced. I was shocked that by being forced to do it for 6 weeks, I built up a liking for it. I



even plan to keep biking in my post-injury routine. If you told me before I was going to look forward to biking, I would never have believed you! Just by doing something over and over again can cause you to like it more, so don't worry if you don't like a new activity now. A new activity will allow you to work new muscles and also burn more calories. Our bodies get used to the same old workout and over time burn fewer and fewer calories doing it over and over again. Work in at least 2 different types of exercises each week (e.g., at least 1 day of a second exercise) to properly cross train.

4. Set goals. Constantly. Goals are a great way to have a purpose. Why are you exercising? What are you striving for? I realize most people have a weight loss goal but I find very few people have an exercise goal. Consider your current exercise regimen and each month set a new goal for yourself in terms of mileage, duration, and/or frequency. Beware of the "one goal wonder," which is the act of setting a single goal and none other. I had a patient who had a lofty goal in mind to run a race with his daughter. He had set the goal in spring and the race was to be in autumn. With no goal following the race, guess what happened? He stopped exercising. The week you accomplish your goal, set a new one. Avoid ever having a time when you do NOT have an exercise goal in mind (even if you are in weight maintenance). Your goals don't have to be huge, just a little more than what you are doing now. *By always improving yourself, stagnation is impossible.*

5. Measure. If you are constantly growing your exercise regimen, you will find great pleasure in measuring the results and seeing just how awesome you are becoming. Possible things to measure include percent body fat, percent lean body mass, as well as the circumference of your waist, hips, thighs, and biceps. Check out this link at (http://exercise.about.com/od/weightloss/a/weightlosstrack_2.htm) for instructions on measuring different body parts and ways to keep track over time.

6. Get a coach/trainer. If some of these ideas intimidate or overwhelm you, consider hiring a coach or a trainer. If you are hesitant to spend much money, you can get quite a bit out of even 2-3 sessions. The coach or trainer can help you set goals and devise a training plan. If you have a medical condition and can get exercise physiology or physical therapy visits covered by your health insurance, I highly recommend asking your physical therapist or exercise physiologist for help with a training plan.

You will know when you have truly achieved a healthy lifestyle when the pieces of it (healthy eating AND exercise), are things that you just can't imagine living without. If you are slogging your way through exercise, it is time to get engaged and give it purpose, direction, and meaning. As with anything in life, never settle for going through the motions when you have the ability to make it so much more.