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Step by Step

Suzanne Picetti

Outreach Coordinator

Too Overwhelmed and Busy to Exercise?

Are you on overwhelm about family obligations, work, financial stress and feel like you don’t have time for self-care including exercise? This cycle where everything else comes first causes secondary symptoms like depression, fear and anxiety, which negatively affects your relationships and your physical health. This vicious cycle needs an intervention!

One of the most effective ways to break the overwhelm cycle and take care of yourself is to exercise. It decreases stress hormones and releases endorphins in the brain that feel good. Neil Davis, RN and director at Walk/Bike Mendocino recently presented, “How to make Exercise a Habit” where he emphasized that it is better to exercise even 10 minutes per day than not at all. We don’t need an expensive gym membership we can start with simple things like: walking/riding to school or work, gardening, parking remotely when shopping or simply walking in your neighborhood.

Here is a step by step approach to making exercise a habit:

1. Be Intentional: get out of auto-pilot mode and know there is a different way to be. Set the intention clearly i.e.: walking 10-20 minutes per day in your neighborhood.
2. Make a list of Barriers and Benefits and be specific for you. For example, a barrier might be, “ I don’t have enough time” A Benefit would be: “ I can do it anytime.”
3. Compare the Barriers and Benefits to different approaches. There are many barriers and each one has to be overcome. Often they are just thoughts that are not true, so don’t believe everything you think! For example, if you feel pressured for time, communicate with your family that you are taking a walk at a particular time, and then you will be more available for them.
4. Write a “Behavior Chain” in other words an action plan, i.e.: decide when and where you will walk and what you will wear. Get down to the fine detail of how you will accomplish this.
5. Use prompts, which are reminders i.e.: put walking shoes by the door or a post it note on your bathroom mirror.
6. Commitment: Set a date you want to start and tell friends and family. This way you are accountable publically and privately.
7. Support: Team up with others if this helps your motivation or post on Facebook that you have committed to this habit and priority.

The important thing is to make exercise a priority and as important as anything else. We need to realize that self-care is not indulgent or selfish, its essential. When you make your own needs a priority there is a trickle-down effect that improves all your relationships and your overall physical and mental health. Intervene in the overwhelm cycle, take care of yourself. It’s a crucial part of living a healthy life!

Monthly Challenge: Put some kind of self-care on your to do list, and take at least 20 minutes a day just for you.