



Oregon State University Extension Service

Five Steps to Starting an Exercise Plan during a Pandemic

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The stress of the COVID-19 pandemic may have you feeling like you want to increase your physical activity. You may be wondering how to stay safe, physically distant, and active during a pandemic. Follow these five tips to start a successful exercise plan.

1. **Find your motivation.** Why is starting an exercise plan important to you? Being active can help you:

- Reduce blood pressure¹
- Maintain a healthy weight¹
- Manage stress¹
- Reduce risk for diseases like heart disease and diabetes²
- Improve sleep²
- Fight off infection^{3,4}

Choose a reason that resonates with you and write it down.

2. **Pick an activity.** Choose an activity you enjoy or have been curious about. Here are some ideas for exercising during the pandemic.

- Try to get active in your home or neighborhood³.
- Spend time outside biking, hiking, walking, or running. If exercising outdoors, maintain 6 feet away from others⁶.
- Walking is a simple and affordable way to stay active⁷. To keep yourself and others safe, walk only with members of your household⁸.

- Get active during family time. Follow a workout video together, enjoy a dance party, design an obstacle course, or play an active game^{6,8}.
 - Use heavy food cans and/or bottles of laundry detergent as weights⁸.
 - Try bodyweight exercises, like push-ups, squats, and lunges⁸.
3. **Set your activity goal.** Most adults should aim for 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise (like walking) 5 days per week¹. Resistance training 2 days per week improves strength and bone health¹. Shorter bouts of activity can also improve health, so focus on what is reasonable for you⁹. Start small and work up to the recommendations over time. Make sure your goal is SMART: Specific to the activity you want to increase, **M**easurable, **A**ction-oriented, **R**ealistic for your life, and **T**ime-bound. For example, instead of, “Walk more,” try, “For the next month, I will walk 3 days per week for 30 minutes.”
 4. **Identify barriers and create a plan to overcome them.** Brainstorm things that might make your goal difficult to achieve. For each challenge, think of 1-2 actions that would be helpful. For example, if you set a goal to ride your bike to work 3 days per week, a challenge might be rainy weather. To overcome that barrier, commit to a 30-minute workout video online instead of a bike ride on rainy days. Write down your SMART goal and the actions you will take to overcome barriers. Hang them where you will see them every day.
 5. **Stay accountable.** This is the last step to creating your activity routine. Stay focused on your goal by tracking progress in a journal or smartphone app⁵. Encourage a friend or family member to get active with you⁵. Physically distance with an exercise buddy by working out over video chat or talking on the phone while walking⁸.

Now that you have identified your motivation, picked an activity, set a goal, and created a plan to overcome barriers and stay accountable, you are ready to get moving!

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