

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Getting Others Involved in Physical Activities

Admittedly, getting any group of people to commit to an activity can be a challenge! The key is finding the right motivation and choosing activities that appeal to everyone.

But as you well know, it’s worth the effort. Group physical activities offer a healthy way for families, friends or co-workers to unwind and spend time together. They reinforce your own fitness efforts, and most of all, physical activities can be a lot of fun.

Promote Fun

When suggesting a group activity, avoid the word exercise; that implies hard work! Instead, promote the idea of having fun being physically active. You might want to raise the topic when people are already having a good time—such as during a company picnic or a family outing.

Consider the "4 C's": Competence, Challenge, Choice, and Control

According to research this means considering people's differing skills, finding activities suitable to their abilities, offering a variety of activities and social settings, and providing some control over whether or not, when, and where one does the activity.

On the home front, if you’re getting together to discuss household chores, vacations, and other issues that affect the family as a whole; why not raise these issues as well? Conversations like these can provide a good opportunity to discuss shared activities, and to encourage family members to have their say.

Determine Goals

Once you’ve found a suitable time to raise these issues, you may be surprised how activity groups form quite naturally when people discover they have common goals and interests. A father and daughter wanting to get into shape might decide to set aside time for jogging. Two or more co-workers wanting to improve their tennis serve may decide to take advantage of a nearby court at lunchtime. Some activities are more suitable to specific health or fitness goals than others. Refer to the activities listed later in this piece or consult fitness professionals for detailed information.

Keep a Record as "Positive Reinforcement"

Once an activity is underway, encourage participants to use a journal or calendar to keep track of their goals and progress. Remember to post the results of group baseball games and other sports. Even if your team loses, you can still write something encouraging, such as "congratulations—everyone went the distance" or "we'll get 'em next time!"

Use Rewards, Prizes, and Other Incentives

These won't motivate the truly "unmotivated," but they do help people already involved to persist in meeting their personal goals. Make the rewards relevant: for example, a sports video for a son who realizes his goal of "swimming a kilometer."

Entering a walk-a-thon or swim-a-thon to raise money for charity is a time honored way of becoming

engaged in fitness activities. Check with the charities in your area to learn more
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Avoid Common Hassles

- **Timing.** Schedule activities to fit comfortably into participants' routines. With co-workers, that's usually at lunchtime or on weeknights.
- **Money.** If you're on a tight budget (at home or in the workplace), choose activities that don't require expensive equipment or facilities such as walking, hiking or volleyball. Find out what free or low cost facilities are available through your local or municipal recreation centre, and local "Y." Colleagues or friends may need to chip in for equipment and facility rental, but try to limit your individual expenditures to a maximum of $10 per session or game.
- **Conflicting social needs and obligations.** Even the most motivated participant may eventually drop out if the activity somehow interferes with other relationships. Consider letting co-workers' significant others in on fitness-related activities. If your peer-pressured teenager wants their friend included in a family outing, why not bring the friend along? It might strengthen your relationship, and at the very least you'll know where your teenager is!
- **Competition of the "discouraging" kind.** Naturally, you'll want to avoid pitting sibling against sibling. For example, "Look, your sister plays better than you do" or by poking fun at individual known weaknesses. On the other hand, a little friendly competition (a small wager or small prize, for example), can liven things up while encouraging competing teams and individuals to improve their skills.
- **Boredom.** Establishing a routine for your group activity is helpful, but don't let routine turn into a rut. With team sports, don't always have the same people on the same team. And after a game, have participants take turns deciding where the group will eat. During aerobics sessions, introduce new music (or videos) from time-to-time. When walking, hiking or bike riding, try different routes or locales.

Which Activities Suit Your Health Goals?

Disease Prevention Any regular activity or sport that requires sustained movement can reduce the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes. Some examples include:

- Walking
- Low-impact aerobics
- Bicycling
- Volleyball
- Cross-country skiing
- Tennis or badminton

Aerobic Fitness

Aerobic (or cardiovascular) fitness is the ability of the heart and lungs to supply the muscles with enough oxygen so you don't get easily tired or "winded" when running for a bus or climbing stairs. The following exercises, done at least three times a week, promote aerobic fitness:

- Brisk walking with arms swinging
- Low-impact aerobic dance
- Swimming
- Step aerobics (this involves stepping on and off a low bench while moving your arms, usually in time to music)
- Stair-stepping or cross-country skiing machines

Muscular Strength and Endurance

Strength training is popular among teenagers, but it is particularly important after age 30 or so, when people often begin to lose muscle. Some examples are:

- Weight lifting
- Push-ups
- Partial sit-ups
- Aerobic exercise that vigorously works legs

Weight Loss

Contrary to popular belief, strenuous exercise is not the best way for the average person to lose weight. That's because most people can sustain regular exercise much longer at a moderate pace—and thus burn many more calories overall. Building up to a program of workouts lasting at least 45 minutes to an hour, four to five times a week, is generally the most effective exercise strategy for slimming down. Suitable activities include:

- Bicycling
- Brisk walking
- Energetic dancing (not necessarily aerobic dancing)
- Stair-stepping
- Stationary-cycling and cross-country skiing machines set at a low resistance level

Would your energy levels and those the people around you benefit from having some physical activity? Do you tell people that you would like to embark on an exercise program, but have just been too busy or have too many excuses for why you can't get to this now?

You already know why you want to increase your activity. Professional help can help you to start on a personal program. If it is a question of how to organize co-workers or your family to participate, they can make suggestions for that too—no matter how stubborn a group, they may be.