

Coping & Wellness: Physical Activity



The Mecca of Black Wellness



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In the U.S., one of the most common New Year's Resolutions is to increase physical activity. Many people make grand proclamations to improve their fitness level and get in better shape at the start of the year. While achieving physical fitness is an excellent reason to increase physical activity, physical activity can also improve your mood as it increases the serotonin in your brain, which in turn helps to improve your mood and increase your energy level. People who exercise also tend to report improved sleep and a greater ability to cope with stress (Weir, 2011).

Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity are all common health problems in the Black community, and far too many of our brothers and sisters are dying prematurely from these preventable diseases. Healthy eating and increasing physical activity are two key factors in the prevention of these deadly diseases.

Increasing your physical activity does not mean that you have to train to run a marathon. The goal is to start small and do what is comfortable for you. Perhaps you can park your car further away at the grocery store or decide to take the stairs instead of the elevator. Or, take a dance class or go for a hike. The most important thing is to get up and get moving!

It is easy to make a laundry list of excuses for not exercising – not enough time, not enough money, or disliking gyms. Many Black women will complain of not wanting to “mess up” their hair. You could give in to these excuses or decide that your health is most important. Would you rather have cute hair or a healthy heart? Play video games or increase your blood circulation? Instead of complaining that you will not have time to catch up with your friends or spend time with your boo if you increase your physical activity, encourage them to join you. People are more likely to stick with new routines and exercise if they have someone to help them stay accountable and support them. Please review the additional tips below on how to get motivated and stay physically active!!!

5 Tips to Help you Stick to your Physical Activity Goals:

1. Identify your why – What is your motivation for increasing your physical activity? Is it to feel better, lose weight, or decrease stress? Identify your reasons for wanting to become more active and keep those in mind when you find it hard to start moving.
2. Be patient with yourself – Our bodies did not get in their current state overnight, and the change that you desire won't happen overnight either. Remember to take one day at a time. If you miss a day of exercise or only walk two days instead of five, don't get frustrated. Just set a new goal for the rest of the week.
3. Set a regular time to exercise and stick to it. Make sure you have a backup plan in case your initial plan does not work out (e.g. it rains and you planned to go for a walk).
4. Use a fitness app or activity tracker to help you set goals, track your progress, and give you a nudge to get moving. Set small realistic goals for each week.
5. Find an accountability partner or an exercise buddy to help encourage, support, and motivate you to keep moving!

(1) Weir, K. (2011). The exercise effect. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/12/exercise.aspx>

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Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has some great tips to help you get started on your physical activity journey. You can view the tips and resources at

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/physical_activity/getting_started.html

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute sponsored a We Can! Initiative that is designed to provide parents, caregivers, and communities with resources and information to help children aged 8 to 13 maintain a healthy weight. Information about the We Can! Initiative can be found at

<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/about-wecan/index.htm>

American Heart Association

For tips on healthy eating, increasing your physical activity, and staying motivated check out the tips and resources from the American Heart Association at

http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/HealthyLiving/PhysicalActivity/StayingMotivatedforFitness/Staying-Motivated-For-Fitness_UCM_462250_SubHomePage.jsp

Remember to consult with your doctor before starting any physical activity program!

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