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## MOTIVATION TO EXERCISE AT HOME

*The article for this January is contributed by Carrie Sorenson, Family and Consumer Science Educator in Frederick County focusing on healthy living and financial management. Carrie has a Master's in Public Health from George Washington University and a Bachelor's degree in Sport and Exercise Psychology from West Virginia University.*

2020 was a very difficult year. If you're anything like me, you may have had resolutions, goals, or plans for 2020 that you had to abandon or significantly revise. For many people, life changes resulting from the pandemic have led to a few extra pounds. It probably isn't shocking to most people that in a very stressful year we might end up gaining some weight. However, even if we can understand the factors potentially causing weight gain, many of us still feel stressed or guilty when we see the numbers on the scale start to climb. But, the good news is that physical activity (or exercise) can help us address these feelings and get through as best we can.

I want to start out by clarifying a few things. There are many good reasons medical professionals pay attention to weight and use it as an indicator of overall health status. There are also many good reasons to be physically active. But, often physical activity or exercise is only mentioned in connection to weight loss. This gives the impression that exercise is only helpful if it results in weight loss. The truth is being active has many benefits outside of helping people lose weight. So, what I want to do is offer some motivation and tips for being active, even if it doesn't result in weight loss.

One of the ways to motivate yourself to get moving is to think about everything you might "gain" (pun intended) from being active. Research shows exercise can improve mood, promote better sleep, and help manage high blood pressure, anxiety, or Type 2 diabetes. So what does it look like to use that information to motivate yourself? Well, you could picture yourself sleeping better at night as you are exercising or deciding to exercise. Any way you can help your brain build the connection between physical activity and better quality of life will potentially help you feel more motivated!

Even if your motivation is high, you might still experience some barriers to being active right now. For example, some gyms have had to close or reduce the classes and services they offer. This can mean that some people are lacking the equipment and support they might have had in the past. For others, there were outside exercise options available over the summer and fall that are not available now that it is winter. So, keeping those things in mind, I am going to focus my

tips on being active at home.

My first tip is to take advantage of all the resources you do have available. Although you may have lost or have limited gym services, they may offer recorded or streamlined classes you can do from home. If you do not have access through a gym, you can access videos from YouTube. There are a wide variety of exercise classes available online - guided walking in place, stretching, yoga, Pilates, body weight exercises, interval training, and more! With all the options, there is likely something to fit your interests and activity level.

If you aren't a fan of exercise videos, think about anything simple you can do to increase your movement. For example, walk around your home, walk in place while watching TV, do jumping jacks, stretch while putting away laundry, dance while making dinner. The options are only limited by your imagination! Personally, I walk around my living room while watching TV. At first, my animals (and my husband) found it quite strange. But now, they are used to it and it is a regular habit for me. Whatever works for your life and gets you moving more is great!

Another tip is to make sure you are exercising safely. All exercise includes some risk of injury, so we want to do what we can to reduce that risk. First and foremost, if you are starting a new exercise program you should talk with your doctor. Especially if you have any chronic conditions or physical limitations you might need to take into consideration. Next, make sure your workout space is decluttered. Move anything that might cause you to trip (cords, dog toys, rugs, or furniture). Finally, have a phone nearby. Even if you are very careful, you could potentially injure yourself or fall and you want to be sure that you have a way to contact someone if you need help. Although there are risks, there are great benefits to exercise, as I mentioned previously. So, as long as you are taking proper precautions, exercise should be helpful in the long run!

Hopefully, you are feeling encouraged and motivated to exercise! But keep in mind that your motivation will be stronger if you feel exercise is beneficial to you personally. What I mean is that this isn't another task to add to the list of things people are telling you that you should do. Instead, think of physical activity and exercise as a tool you can put in your toolkit and use to fight stress and to take care of your body and mind. Use this tool in a way that fits into your life and improves your day to day wellbeing. And remember, you are doing your best, so cut yourself some slack when you struggle and get excited for yourself when you are successful!

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