Everyone knows that exercise helps lower your risk for disease, reduces stress, and helps make your life more enjoyable by keeping you healthy. With the internet we now have access to any information we desire regarding good nutrition and fitness.

However, knowing how and actually doing it are two different things. Trying to make exercise a habit takes time and much effort. You need to have a smart approach and the right mindset.

Here are some tips to help point you in the right direction and make exercise a part of your routine.

1. Be nice to yourself. Don’t beat yourself up about what your body looks like or compare your physique to your friends’.

According to a publication from Harvard Medical School, long-lasting change is most likely to occur when it’s self-motivated and includes positive thinking.

One of the most important things I have learned is that everyone is on their own path to health and wellness. If someone is fitter than you they are just farther on that path than you are.

With hard work and dedication you will be there too someday. Everyone had to start somewhere after all.

2. Choose activities that you enjoy and boost your confidence. Don’t force yourself to run every day if you’re hating every minute of it.

You’re not likely to stick to something that makes you feel clumsy or embarrassed. Find your special something(s) that you like to do and do it well.

3. Make small, clear, and specific goals. The more ambitious your goals are, the bigger the chance of you not reaching them, feeling bad, and quitting.

You don’t just climb up a mountain in one go. Of course you should have at least one long term goal that your small goals will build up to.

However, you should start small and build that momentum so you can gain confidence in your abilities and reach for those higher goals. This will also lessen the chance of injury from doing too much too soon.

4. Know your why. One of the most important things that will help you break through those mental barriers is knowing the true reason behind your desire to exercise.

You need to know what your fuel is so you can use it to keep that fire in you burning.

When you hear someone’s story about how they lost a hundred pounds you know that they must have had a very powerful “why.”

How else would they have done it? Frail and vague reasons won’t be the things that will motivate you to get up early in the morning to go to the gym.

5. Make exercise social. This tip doesn’t work for everybody, but many people are more motivated when they are with someone they know who can push them.

Some of us are competitive by nature and working out with another person or even a group will have us pushing harder than we thought we could to keep up because there’s a challenge.

Sometimes having a friend to keep you accountable helps. You know you can’t back down when your friend is waiting for you at the gym.

That person can also talk you into exercise if you’re not feeling it some days.

6. Celebrate! It takes weeks and months to see real changes. Even a pound of fat lost or some muscle gained deserves an award.

Even a short term goal, once accomplished should at least be recognized. Buy some new shoes, go out with friends, or even eat a piece of cake.

It’s OK to stray away from healthy food once a week or every two weeks for a meal. That way you’ll remember your accomplishment and it’ll help give you the confidence and motivation to keep going, because if you reached one goal what’s stopping you from trying to get the next one?

7. Have physical cues. Make a list of goals and your achievements so far and post them on your wall where you can always see them.

Have healthy foods ready to go in the fridge so that when you look in there they are staring right at you.

Also, you can have workout clothes in an obvious spot in your closet, running shoes next to the door, or have exercise equipment next to the TV so at least during the commercials your eyes will wander over and you’ll be reminded to exercise.

Having any kind of cues that you see often will help remind you to make health and fitness a priority.

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