**Behavioural barriers to exercise (and how to beat them!)**

For most of us, it’s easier to plan the reasons we can’t fit exercise into our day than to plan our next workout. Even the most active people need some extra motivation every now and then to choose their trainers instead of the TV remote.

**The good news?** If you find yourself coming up with excuses to avoid that 30+ minutes of daily physical activity: you’re not alone. As humans, we are shaped by inherent behavioural biases that help us to make the decisions we do and to nudge us to act in certain ways. One of the most powerful biases in the health and wellness space is called *present bias*. Here, we tend to opt for more immediate gratification and focus more on the ‘now’ – often at the expense of a heathier future version of ourselves. It’s why watching your favourite Netflix show can be more tempting than a jog around the neighbourhood or gym session.

We’ve chatted to Vitality members from around the world and put together the top 3 excuses for avoiding exercise. If any sound familiar, follow our tips to re-programme your mind – and behaviour – to prioritise this all-important health booster.

1. ***“But, I’m too tired”***

We hear you. After a long day at work, exercise can start to feel like another errand on your to-do list. The perceived behavioural barrier here is that fatigue will prevent you for getting active. To overcome this, remind yourself that instead of draining your energy and strength, exercise instead increases your stamina, giving you a flush of feel-good hormones at the same time. Pre-empt this excuse by doing your activity session earlier in the day.

**Vitality tip**

How you fuel your body plays an important role in your energy levels. Vitality dietitian Terry Harris recommends incorporating a wide range of healthy food and actively limiting your intake of highly processed sugary drinks and foods high in added sugar (sweets, chocolates, cake, biscuits). “When you are feeling sluggish, reach for a glass of water. When you are peckish, reach for a glass of water and a fresh fruit (instead of a sugary drink). And match every cup of coffee with a glass of water. Not drinking enough water, having too much caffeine (more than 3-4 coffees a day) and having highly processed, refined foods can make us feel sluggish which makes it less likely we’ll feel like exercising. “And don’t forget to time your meals and snacks if you are exercising at the end of the day,” she adds. “It’s important to sustain your blood sugar levels but avoid feeling full and heavy before exercising. Have a meal 2-3 hours before and a light snack (such as a fresh fruit and a handful of nuts) 30-60 minutes before.”

1. ***“But, I’m too busy”***

Here, the perceived behavioural barrier is that you don’t have enough time to exercise. Our modern lives certainly are busier than ever before and we have multiple demands on our time and attention. Luckily, a 30-minute physical activity session can fit quite easily into a small part of your day.

**Vitality tip**

Jonathon Kibble, Physical Activity Specialist for Vitality UK helps us to see this time differently. “Think of what this really is in relation to the rest of our 24-hour day. It’s such a small fraction: 1/48th of our full day. And we know – unequivocally – that those minutes make all the difference to overall health.” You don’t need to dedicate your entire morning, afternoon or evening to exercise (unless you want to!). Schedule smaller, higher intensity activity sessions and add these to your diary so that you’ll stick to them. Setting 5-to-15-minute exercise ‘slots’ throughout your day is easily achievable – wherever you are.

1. ***“But, I can’t afford it”***

This is one of the most common perceived behavioural barriers to exercise: that it is too expensive to adopt a more active lifestyle. “There are a lot of misconceptions about exercise” says Dr Seranne Motilal, Senior Health Insurance Specialist at Vitality Group, “Mainly that it’s costly and isn’t accessible.” Her advice? Remind yourself that outdoors is free. “You don't need to purchase expensive equipment or a gym membership to become physically active. A brisk walk outdoors – walking a pet or with a friend – is all you need”.

**Vitality tip**

Thanks to your Vitality membership, cost is even less of a concern. Not only do you get discounts on health club and gym memberships – when you get active, we reward you with all types of cost-savers including travel, lifestyle, shopping and entertainment rewards. To help keep you motivated, explore the range of Vitality-funded fitness devices including our popular Vitality Apple Watch benefit.

The benefits of physical activity are well-known: exercise helps to prevent a host of diseases, strengthens your body and helps to boost your mood and protect your mental health. If any of the above excuses resonate with you, follow our Vitality tips to overcome these perceived barriers to exercise.