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This Month’s Focus: Let’s Get Moving

"I'm bored with my workout."
"Joining a gym is too expensive."
"I'm too busy to exercise."

Do any of these sound familiar? We may know how exercise can improve our lives. Yet only 20 percent of American adults are meeting the federal government's aerobic and muscle strengthening guidelines.

This month's *Member Matters* can help you tackle some common barriers to exercise. Let's get moving!
Fitness: tips for staying motivated
Fitness doesn't have to be drudgery. These tips can help you add focus and fun to your routine.

Have you ever started a fitness program and then quit? If you answered yes, you're not alone. Many people start fitness programs but stop when they get bored or results come too slowly. Here are seven tips to help you stay motivated.

1. SET GOALS
Start with simple goals and then progress to longer range goals. Remember to make your goals realistic and achievable. It's easy to get frustrated and give up if your goals are too ambitious.

For example, if you haven't exercised in a while, a short-term goal might be to walk 10 minutes a day three days a week. An intermediate goal might be to walk 30 minutes five days a week. A long-term goal might be to complete a 5K walk.

2. MAKE IT FUN
Find sports or activities that you enjoy, then vary the routine to keep you on your toes. If you're not enjoying your workouts, try something different. Join a volleyball or softball league. Take a ballroom dancing class. Check out a health club or martial arts center. Discover your hidden athletic talent. Remember, exercise doesn't have to be drudgery — and you're more likely to stick with a fitness program if you're having fun.

3. MAKE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY PART OF YOUR DAILY ROUTINE
If it's hard to find time for exercise, don't fall back on excuses. Schedule workouts as you would any other important activity. You can also slip in physical activity throughout the day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator. Walk up and down sidelines while watching the kids play sports. Pedal a stationary bike or do strength training exercises while you watch TV at night.

4. PUT IT ON PAPER
Are you hoping to lose weight? Boost your energy? Sleep better? Manage a chronic condition? Write it down. Seeing the benefits of regular exercise on paper may help you stay motivated.

You may also find it helps to keep an exercise diary. Record what you did during each exercise session, how long you exercised and how you felt afterward. Recording your efforts can help you work toward your goals — and remind you that you're making progress.

5. JOIN FORCES WITH FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS OR OTHERS
You're not in this alone. Invite friends or co-workers to join you when you exercise. Work out with your partner or other loved ones. Play soccer with your kids. Organize a group of neighbors to take fitness classes at a local health club.

6. REWARD YOURSELF
After each exercise session, take a few minutes to savor the good feelings that exercise gives you. This type of internal reward can help you make a long-term commitment to regular exercise. External rewards can help, too. When you reach a longer range goal, treat yourself to a new pair of walking shoes or new tunes to enjoy while you exercise.
7. BE FLEXIBLE

If you're too busy to work out or simply don't feel up to it, take a day or two off. Be gentle with yourself if you need a break. The important thing is to get back on track as soon as you can.

Now that you've regained your enthusiasm, get moving! Set your goals, make it fun and pat yourself on the back from time to time. Remember, physical activity is for life. Review these tips whenever you feel your motivation slipping.
Fitness for less: low-cost ways to shape up

Want to work out but think you can't afford it? Think again. Consider these low-cost alternatives to a pricey gym membership.

If the only thing keeping you from starting a fitness program is the cost of a gym membership, here's good news. You don't need to join a gym to take physical activity seriously. Plenty of low-cost alternatives can help you get fit without breaking your budget. These tips can help you get started.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EVERYDAY OPPORTUNITIES

You don't need a gym or special equipment for an aerobic workout. With a little foresight, activities you may take for granted can become part of your fitness routine.

- **Step it up.** Take a brisk walk every day, whether it's in your neighborhood or a local mall. Take the stairs instead of the elevator or make a full workout of climbing the stairs. Sneak in extra steps whenever you can by parking farther away from your destination.

- **Make housework a workout.** Mow the lawn, weed the garden, rake the leaves or shovel the snow. Even indoor activities such as vacuuming and scrubbing count as a workout if you increase your heart rate.

- **Play with your kids.** If you have children, don't just watch them play. Join them for a game of tag or kickball. Walk them to the park. Dance. Take a family bike ride. Go to a community pool. Even if you don't swim, you can enjoy time in the water or walk in the shallow end. Do your kids play video games? If so, plug in with them and swing a virtual tennis racket or do a little boxing.

IMPROVISE WITH HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

If you'd rather not spend a penny on exercise equipment, use ordinary household items for various upper and lower body exercises:

- **Canned goods.** Many canned goods can serve double duty as hand weights.

- **Chair or step stool.** Use a chair for support when doing exercises such as leg curls. A low, sturdy step stool can become exercise equipment if you use it for step training — an aerobic exercise resembling stair climbing.

CONSIDER A MODEST INVESTMENT

If you're able to spend a little, you can find inexpensive products to add variety to your fitness routine:

- **Dumbbells.** Use these small, hand-held weights to strengthen your upper body. They're available in many sizes.

- **Exercise DVDs and apps.** Create the feel of a health club aerobics class in your own living room — or choose a program that'll help you improve your strength and flexibility.

- **Fitness ball.** A fitness ball looks like a large beach ball. You can do many core exercises, including abdominal crunches, with a fitness ball. You can also use a fitness ball to improve your flexibility and balance.

- **Jump-ropes.** Skipping rope can be a great cardiovascular workout.
- **Resistance tubing.** These stretchy tubes offer weight-like resistance when you pull on them. Use the tubes to build strength in your arms and other muscles. Choose from varying degrees of resistance, depending on your fitness level.

**BE A SAVVY SHOPPER**

If you're interested in a specific exercise class or piece of equipment, shop around to find the best deal.

- **Check out your local recreation department.** Many recreation departments offer discounted fitness classes to local residents. If you live near a high school or college with a fitness center, ask if the facility is available to community members.

- **Buy used equipment.** Some sporting goods stores specialize in used equipment — or you can check out listings for exercise equipment in the local newspaper. You may also find great deals on used exercise equipment online. Just make sure the cost of shipping won't put the item out of your budget.

- **Share costs with a friend.** Trade exercise videos or DVDs with a friend so that neither of you gets bored doing the same workout over and over again. Find a personal trainer who'll let you share the cost of a session with a friend or two.

Remember, getting in shape doesn't need to be expensive. Don't get caught up in memberships or purchases you can't afford. Instead, concentrate on your fitness goals — and how to achieve them without breaking your budget.
Workplace Exercises: How to burn calories at work

You may spend your workdays at a desk, but you don't need to take it sitting down. Make workplace exercises — from fitness breaks to walking meetings — part of your routine.

If you're doing your best to set aside time for physical activity either before work or after work, good for you — but finding time to exercise can be a challenge for anyone who has a busy schedule. Why not work out while you're at work? Consider 10 ways to make workplace exercises part of your routine.

**NO. 1: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR COMMUTE**

Walk or bike to work. If you ride the bus or the subway, get off a few blocks early or at an earlier stop than usual and walk the rest of the way. If you drive to work, park at the far end of the parking lot — or park in the lot for a nearby building. In your building, take the stairs rather than the elevator.

**NO. 2: LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO STAND**

You'll burn more calories standing than sitting. Stand while talking on the phone. Better yet, try a standing desk — or improvise with a high table or counter. Eat lunch standing up. Trade instant messaging and phone calls for walks to other desks or offices.

**NO. 3: TAKE FITNESS BREAKS**

Rather than hanging out in the lounge with coffee or a snack, take a brisk walk or do some gentle stretching. For example, face straight ahead, then lower your chin to your chest. Or, while standing, grab one of your ankles — or your pant leg — and bring it up toward your buttock. Hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

**NO. 4: TRADE YOUR OFFICE CHAIR FOR A FITNESS BALL**

Consider trading your desk chair for a firmly inflated fitness or stability ball, as long as you're able to safely balance on the ball. You'll improve your balance and tone your core muscles while sitting at your desk. You can even use the fitness ball for wall squats or other workplace exercises during the day.

**NO. 5: KEEP FITNESS EQUIPMENT IN YOUR WORK AREA**

Store resistance bands — stretchy cords or tubes that offer weight-like resistance when you pull on them — or small hand weights in a desk drawer or cabinet. Do arm curls between meetings or tasks.

**NO. 6: GET SOCIAL**

Organize a lunchtime walking group. You might be surrounded by people who are ready to lace up their walking shoes — and hold each other accountable for regular exercise. Enjoy the camaraderie, and offer encouragement to one another when the going gets tough.

**NO. 7: CONDUCT MEETINGS ON THE GO**

When it's practical, schedule walking meetings or walking brainstorming sessions. Do laps inside your building or, if the weather cooperates, take your walking meetings outdoors.

**NO. 8: PICK UP THE PACE**

If your job involves walking, do it faster. The more you walk and the quicker your pace, the greater the benefits.
NO. 9: IF YOU TRAVEL FOR WORK, PLAN AHEAD

If you're stuck in an airport waiting for a plane, grab your bags and take a brisk walk. Choose a hotel that has fitness facilities — such as treadmills, weight machines or a pool — or bring your equipment with you. Jump-ropes and resistance bands are easy to sneak into a suitcase. Of course, you can do jumping jacks, crunches and other simple exercises without any equipment at all.

NO. 10: TRY A TREADMILL DESK

If you're ready to take workplace exercise to the next level, consider a more focused walk-and-work approach. If you can safely and comfortably position your work surface above a treadmill — with a computer screen on a stand, a keyboard on a table or a specialized treadmill-ready vertical desk — you might be able to walk while you work. In fact, Mayo Clinic researchers estimate that overweight office workers who replace sitting computer time with walking computer time by two to three hours a day could lose 44 to 66 pounds (20 to 30 kilograms) in a year. The pace doesn't need to be brisk, nor do you need to break a sweat. The faster you walk, however, the more calories you'll burn.

Want more ideas for workplace exercises? Schedule a walking meeting to brainstorm ideas with your supervisors or co-workers. Remember, any physical activity counts!
Fitness training: Elements of a well-rounded routine

Fitness training balances five elements of good health. Make sure your routine includes aerobic fitness, muscular fitness, stretching, core exercise and balance training.

Whether you’re a novice taking the first steps toward fitness or an exercise fanatic hoping to optimize your results, a well-rounded fitness training program is essential. Include these five elements to create a balanced routine.

AEROBIC FITNESS

Aerobic exercise, also known as cardio or endurance activity, is the cornerstone of most fitness training programs. Aerobic exercise causes you to breathe faster and more deeply, which maximizes the amount of oxygen in your blood. The better your aerobic fitness, the more efficiently your heart, lungs and blood vessels transport oxygen throughout your body — and the easier it is to complete routine physical tasks and rise to unexpected challenges, such as running to your car in the pouring rain.

Aerobic exercise includes any physical activity that uses large muscle groups and increases your heart rate. Try walking, jogging, biking, swimming, dancing, water aerobics — even leaf raking, snow shoveling and vacuuming. Aim for at least two hours and 30 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity or one hour and 15 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity — preferably spread throughout the week.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Muscular fitness is another key component of a fitness training program. Strength training at least twice a week can help you increase bone strength and muscular fitness. It can also help you maintain muscle mass during a weight-loss program.

Most fitness centers offer various resistance machines, free weights and other tools for strength training. But you don't need to invest in a gym membership or expensive equipment to reap the benefits of strength training. Hand-held weights or homemade weights — such as plastic soft drink bottles filled with water or sand — may work just as well. Resistance bands are another inexpensive option. Your own body weight counts, too. Try push-ups, abdominal crunches and leg squats.

CORE EXERCISES

The muscles in your abdomen, lower back and pelvis — known as your core muscles — help protect your back and connect upper and lower body movements. Core strength is a key element of a well-rounded fitness training program.

Core exercises help train your muscles to brace the spine and enable you to use your upper and lower body muscles more effectively. So what counts as a core exercise? Any exercise that uses the trunk of your body without support, including abdominal crunches. You can also try various core exercises with a fitness ball.

BALANCE TRAINING

Older adults in particular should include in their routine exercises to maintain or improve balance. This is important because balance tends to deteriorate with age, which can lead to falls and fractures. Try standing on one leg for increasing periods of time to improve your overall stability. Activities such as tai chi can promote balance, too.

FLEXIBILITY AND STRETCHING
Flexibility is an important part of physical fitness. Some types of physical activity, such as dancing, require more flexibility than others. Stretching exercises are effective in increasing flexibility, and thereby can allow people to more easily do activities that require greater flexibility. Stretching also improves the range of motion of your joints and promotes better posture. Regular stretching can even help relieve stress. For this reason, stretching and flexibility activities are an appropriate part of a physical activity program.

Before you stretch, warm up by walking or doing a favorite exercise at low intensity for five to 10 minutes. Better yet, stretch after you exercise — when your muscles are warm and receptive to stretching. Ideally, you'll stretch whenever you exercise. If you don't exercise regularly, you might want to stretch at least three times a week after warming up to maintain flexibility. Activities such as yoga promote flexibility, too.

COVER ALL THE BASES

Whether you create your own fitness training program or enlist the help of a personal trainer, aerobic fitness, strength training and core exercises, balance training, and stretching and flexibility should be part of your overall exercise plan. It isn't necessary to fit each of these elements into every fitness session, but factoring them into your regular routine can help you promote fitness for life.

Getting Started is Easy!

Call your EAP for more information