

Every Little Bit Helps

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Classic recommendations for physical activity have typically entailed moving approximately 20-60 minutes per day at a moderate to vigorous pace. Exercising for 20-60 consecutive minutes can be a real challenge for many who have multiple time demands. We work long hours and have many personal and family demands. The good news is that 'intermittent exercise' has been shown to be just as effective as consecutive exercise.

To demonstrate, if your goal is to exercise for 30 minutes a day, and you can't fit in 30 consecutive minutes, you might be able to schedule three, 10-minute bouts of activity into 3 different times of the day. Here are some helpful strategies that you can use when your days are too full to fit in a longer bout of exercise.

On Demand & DVD Exercise - There are many exercise shows on television. Follow the leader in the comfort of your home. You can select workouts based on a particular body part you would like to engage, a specific timeframe (i.e. 10 minutes of abdominal and low back strengthening), or a level of intensity (i.e. beginner, intermediate, or advanced). In addition to the TV variety, you could also rent DVD's for free from your local library or stream online programming from the Internet. Lastly, many of us still have old VHS tapes lying around and assuming you have a functional VCR, these can be another fun option.

Walking - Physical activity doesn't need to be complicated. It doesn't have to require a gym membership or meeting with an expensive personal trainer. It simply needs to be something that engages your major muscle groups, elevates your heart rate for a given timeframe, and most importantly, something you enjoy doing regularly. Regular, brisk walking has a myriad of benefits, including the following: improves your mood via the release of dopamine and serotonin, enhances your balance and coordination, and allows you to spend time in nature and interact with the

environment. Instead of getting caught up in excessive screen time (Remember our October self-directed activity, The Digital Detox?), which unfortunately often involves unplanned isolation, consider 1-3 ten-minute walks over the course of a day to help maintain a healthy weight and reduce risk of chronic disease.

Bodyweight Circuit Training - Strength training remains the most underrated method to burn body fat. Too often, exercise enthusiasts flock to a cardio machine (i.e. treadmill, elliptical, etc...) to burn calories or improve energy levels. Strength Training is a terrific way to not only burn body fat, but to improve bone density, increase muscular strength and endurance, and build a really efficient exercise system.

A fundamental circuit-training workout could look as follows (each exercise is performed for 30 seconds followed by a 30 second rest before moving on to the next exercise; repeat the cycle 3 times for a total of twelve minutes, including rest periods). If you don't have time to do all exercises at once, break them up to best meet your unique time demands.

- **Hip Extensions ('Hip Lifts')** - laying on your back with knees bent; push off heels and drive hips upward while engaging the muscles in the back of the legs (Glutes and Hamstrings).
- **Push-ups** - traditional or modified; engage mid-section and Glutes while trying not to let your elbows excessively flare out to the side.
- **Squats** - drive hips back as you descend in the squat; push off heels to ascend while limiting the forward bend in your torso.
- **Planks** - lie face down and prop yourself up onto your elbows with only your forearms and toes in contact with the ground; maintain tension not only in the abdominals, but throughout your whole body [don't hold your breath].

My clients have been very successful following the intermittent exercise strategy. I encourage you to try it too! Have fun and enjoy the exercise because 'every little bit helps.'



Paul Connolly is certified through the National Strength and Conditioning Association as a personal trainer and possesses a degree in Exercise Science from UMASS-Boston, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude.