

Caregiver's Corner Column (June 2015)

There's no time to exercise- I'm too busy!

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Have you ever said, "I know I should exercise but I just don't have the energy", or "I don't have time to take care of myself because I'm too busy taking care of everyone else"? If you have, you are not alone. Most of us who are busy taking care of others put our own health at the bottom of the list. There isn't enough time in the day to do everything that needs to be done, let alone exercise, right? Not necessarily. I won't say it's easy, but it can be done, with some creativity and commitment.

While I am a licensed physical therapist and enjoy exercising, I am also a busy mother, wife, and business owner. I am also very involved in caring for two older family members whom I adore. I know what it means to be busy, but I strongly believe that to take good care of my family, I first need to take good care of myself. It's not always easy and some days I miss an exercise session, but I believe that it's important to keep trying.

Most of us have probably heard the flight attendant on an airplane instruct everyone to first put on their own oxygen mask before assisting someone else. Think of exercise like oxygen. With it, you have a much better chance of being able to take care of your loved ones. Without it, you may unexpectedly find yourself in need of someone else taking care of you.

The big question for most of us is, "How in the world can I find time to exercise?" There is not a "one size fits all" answer to this question. Please be wary of exercise programs or books that imply there's an easy solution to this problem. I can promise you there is no easy answer. The first step is to commit to an appropriate amount of exercise or activity every day, based on your current health. A physician or licensed physical therapist can help you determine what that is. For some people, putting a 30 or 60 minute exercise "appointment" on their calendar is the answer. If you find this works well for you, treat it like an appointment where you will be charged money for missing so you won't be tempted to cancel it. I would also strongly recommend that you have an exercise "buddy" (for example, a friend, family member, dog etc.), who will help you keep the appointment.

Doing the recommended 30 minutes of cardio exercise, 4 times per week is ideal, but this may not be realistic for everyone. Exercise and good health are not an "all or nothing" deal. A little regular exercise can go a long way towards good health. For some people who can't readily leave their home, it may be easier to identify a few exercises that can be incorporated into the daily routine. One example of this is doing 30 mini-squats while waiting for something to cook in the microwave, or standing on one leg for 30 seconds at a time while washing dishes. For TV watchers, doing light standing exercises during the commercials is very effective.

The most important component of sticking with an exercise routine is to find activities you enjoy. Most people will not continue doing something they don't like. Some people enjoy walking, while others enjoy group exercise classes. One is not better than the other, but please know that exercising is always better than not exercising. Each day is a new opportunity to make good choices.

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