

## Replace Negative Exercise Self-Talk with Powerful Thoughts

By Michelle May, M.D.

Most people know that physical activity is important yet many find it difficult to start or stick with an exercise program or choose to lead sedentary lives. Others use exercise to burn calories but quit when they aren't on a diet (even though exercise has been proven to help people feel better and live a longer, healthier life regardless of weight).

Although exercise is one of the most effective tools available for improving your health, just mentioning the “E-word” can conjure up negative thoughts and feelings. If you aren't very active, perhaps your self-talk is getting in your way. Isn't it time to start thinking in more powerful terms?

**Ineffective Thought:** *I know I should exercise but I hate it so I just can't seem to make myself do it.*

Notice all the negative words like “should,” “hate” and “make myself.” These thoughts and feelings may stem from past experiences like being chosen last for teams, boring exercise routines, and discomfort or pain from doing too much too fast. Some people use exercise as punishment for overeating. Do it differently this time! Find enjoyable physical activities that suit your personality and lifestyle. Start slowly and allow your body to adjust gradually so it's not uncomfortable. You can choose to focus on all the great things exercise does for you and how wonderful you feel instead of how many calories you should burn.

**Powerful Thought:** *I enjoy becoming more physically active each day.*

**Ineffective Thought:** *I don't have time.*

It takes 1/48<sup>th</sup> of your whole day to exercise for 30 minutes—and most people waste a lot more than that on less productive activities like watching TV. Being physically active is more important for your health and well-being than most other things you think must get

done each day. The key is giving it the priority it deserves.

**Powerful Thought:** *I make time for my health and well-being.*



**Ineffective Thought:** *I don't have the energy.*

No matter how you feel initially, you're likely to feel better within just a few minutes of starting to move. Physical activity raises your endorphins (“feel good chemicals”) and serotonin levels (“calm chemicals”). These good feelings usually last long after the exercise is finished too. Exercise also increases your strength and stamina and helps you sleep better so you'll be more productive and feel more energetic. If you feel tired, see if moving for ten minutes increases your energy; promise yourself you can stop and try again another day if you still aren't feeling any better. Most of the time, you'll feel so good that you'll want to continue.

**Powerful Thought:** *I feel myself becoming healthier and more energetic every day.*

**Ineffective Thought:** *I'm embarrassed to be seen exercising.*

Most people are so focused on themselves, that they aren't paying attention to you anyway. Those who do will likely admire you (and if they don't, it says more about them than about you!). Eventually you'll feel less self-conscious but in the meantime, find activities and places that feel comfortable so you can focus on all the benefits.

**Powerful Thought:** *I exercise for me.*

**Ineffective Thought:** *Exercise is really hard.*

Physical activity doesn't have to be hard or hurt to be beneficial. In fact, it's better to find convenient, comfortable, and enjoyable activities that you'll stick with instead of hard activities you'll quit. Finding a partner, trying new activities or new routes, rewarding yourself with a hot bath or massage, and setting small, achievable goals are great ways to make exercise more fun. Even if you have physical limitations it's possible to find ways to increase your activity level. If you've been very inactive, start by increasing your “lifestyle” activity first then add a little at a time. You'll be amazed at how much your body adapts to whatever challenges you offer.

**Powerful Thought:** *I have more stamina, strength, and flexibility each day.*

**Ineffective Thought:** *I'm so out of shape—I don't even know where to begin!*

If you have any medical problems or symptoms, check with your health care professional before you begin an exercise program. Once you've been medically cleared, you have to start somewhere. There's no such thing as instant fitness—so start right where you are. If you start this week by increasing your movement, little by little, you'll feel stronger, more energetic, and healthier.

**Powerful Thought:** *I do whatever I can to become more fit and healthy.*

By repeating a powerful thought like, **I am an active, healthy person**, you are taking an important step toward becoming one!

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