



## Initiating Physical Activity

### Coping

 Intervention

 30 min

 Client

 Yes

Engaging in regular physical activity (PA) can help people flourish. PA refers to any body movement that requires energy expenditure above that of resting level (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004). Compared with exercise, PA is not necessarily structured, conducted at high-intensity, or undertaken to maintain or improve physical fitness. PA includes low- and moderate-intensity activities, such as yoga, walking with a friend, or cycling to work. Current guidelines recommend that adults engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity PA on most days of the week. A growing body of research has examined the effect of PA on mental health outcomes, and convincing evidence suggests a strong relationship between PA and psychological well-being (Biddle, Fox, & Boutcher, 2000).

The self-determination theory (SDT) may be used to, at least in part, explain the mental health benefits of PA. According to the SDT, the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - across the lifespan leads to an ongoing sense of psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Regarding engagement in PA, autonomy may be enhanced through having the opportunity to gain meaningful control and responsibility (i.e., over the type of PA in which one engages, one's PA schedule, and one's body and performance). Competence may be enhanced through gradual skill development and mastery, and relatedness may be increased when the PA is undertaken in a supportive group environment.

This tool differs from other behavioral activation tools in that it is grounded in the SDT. This tool aims to help people become more physically active to enhance well-being through developing a greater sense of freedom, competence and mastery, and connection with others.



### Author

This tool was created by Lucinda Poole (Ph.D.).



### Goal

The goal of this tool is to help people devise an action plan to integrate physical activity into everyday life.



## Advice

- Examine the client's motivation to engage in his or her chosen activity. The SDT asserts that one should be intrinsically motivated to undertake chosen activities, actions, and behaviors. This means doing something primarily because of the interest and enjoyment that the activity provides.
- Note that current guidelines recommend that adults *accumulate* 30 minutes of moderate-intensity PA on most days of the week. This may be helpful to pass on to clients who are struggling to find time for PA in their day.
- If your client is struggling to implement his or her plan, revisit Step 1 (initial reasons for taking up PA) to increase motivation and Step 4 to address barriers to change.
- When clients are considering possible ways to overcome barriers, the practitioner may offer suggestions.



## References

- Biddle, S. J., Fox, K., & Boutcher, S. (Eds.). (2003). *Physical activity and psychological well-being*. Routledge.
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- Mutrie, N., and Faulkner, G. (2004). Physical activity: Positive psychology in motion. In P. A. Linley, & S. Joseph (Eds.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 146-164). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470939338.ch9>



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## Instructions

In this exercise, you will devise an action plan to help you integrate physical activity into your life. By becoming more active in your day to day life, you may begin to develop a greater sense of freedom, mastery, and connection with others, which can have a profound effect on your emotional well-being.

### Step 1: The 'why'

Write down at least five reasons why you have chosen to become more physically active at this point. Perhaps you deem physical activity to be important and valuable, or perhaps you find it to be enjoyable or interesting.

### Step 2: The 'what'

The second step is to choose the type of physical activity in which you would like to engage. You might pick something that you have always wanted to try or something that you have previously enjoyed. As you decide, consider the following:

- Will this activity give me a sense of freedom, responsibility, or control?
- Will I be able to improve my skills and ability with ongoing engagement in this activity?
- Is there a social element to this type of physical activity? For example, playing tennis, walking with a friend, attending a yoga class. If you can, select an activity that involves connecting with others in some way.

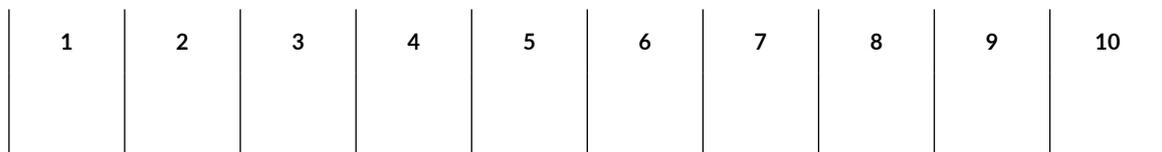


### Step 3: The 'when'

Schedule the most convenient time for your chosen physical activity. Consider the time of day that works best for you (e.g., early if you are a morning person, midday during your lunch break) and days of the week (e.g., during the week, weekends). Schedule at least two occasions for your chosen activity in the coming week:

### Step 4: The 'how'

Consider how motivated you are to start your chosen activity. Regarding your upcoming start date (identified in step 2), rate your current level of motivation on a scale of 1 to 10; 1 = not at all motivated; 10 = extremely motivated.



Not at all motivated

Extremely motivated

If your motivation levels are low (below 5), identify what seems to be getting in the way:



Are there other potential barriers that may prevent you from engaging in the chosen physical activity? List them below:

What can you do to overcome these potential barriers? List some options below:

*Helpful hints:*

- Wake up earlier. Create more time in your day by setting your alarm earlier than usual.
- Get active at lunchtime. We all (should) have a lunch break, so why not try spending a portion of this time engaging in physical activity. Getting active at mid-day can help boost your metabolism, give you energy, reduce stress, and improve your focus when you return to work.
- Eat well and drink plenty of water. Consuming nutritious food and keeping hydrated gives you energy and prepares your body and mind for physical activity.