

Lose Weight With Morning Exercise

Walk the dog, join a health club, get into running. Whatever you do, you've got to move your body as much as possible if you want to lose weight.

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WebMD Feature

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There's no getting around it: To lose weight and keep it off, you need to exercise. But some days that hardly seems possible. Our days are overbooked already! Yet experts agree - exercise must become part of your overall daily lifestyle. And starting the morning with exercise is the best habit of all.

"The key is getting exercise whenever you can - whether it's morning, afternoon, or evening," says Cedric X. Bryant, PhD, chief exercise physiologist of the American Council on Exercise. "Your goal is to move your body as much as possible."

But by starting your morning with physical activity, you set the day's pace, Bryant says. "Morning exercisers tend to stick with their exercise habit," he says. "By doing the bulk of exercise first thing in the morning, you get your exercise in before other distractions can intrude. We can all relate to that -- because once the day gets going, it's hard to get off the treadmill called life."

The Case for Morning Exercise

Research suggests that morning exercise improves sleep, a benefit that could also promote weight loss, Bryant tells WebMD. One study of overweight women between the ages of 50 to 75 showed that those who engaged in consistent morning exercise (about four hours a week) slept better than those who exercised less. The evening exercisers had more trouble falling asleep - even if they fit in the four hours a week.

Bryant explains the connection of sleep and weight loss: "We know that if you have poor quality sleep, it influences certain hormones that control appetite. It is possible that by exercising in the morning -- instead of evening - the exercise affects the body's circadian rhythm (your internal body clock) so you get better-quality sleep. Good sleep helps control the hormonal balance that helps control appetite."

Brisk exercise (an hour or more daily) has helped more than 4,000 "successful losers" in The National Weight Control Registry -- they've all lost 30 pounds or more and kept it off for a year or longer. Many of them break up their exercise into shorter spurts throughout the day instead of doing a single, marathon workout session.

"Think of your morning exercise like a business appointment - one you can't easily cancel," says Gary Foster, PhD, clinical director of the weight and eating disorders program at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. "It takes discipline. But if you're overweight, you're at risk for a heart attack. If you don't do something about your weight, it's indirect self-destructive behavior. It's the same as smoking a pack of cigarettes daily. This has got to be the highest priority because it's your health."

Working Exercise Into Your Life

One way to make exercise a daily habit is to integrate your workout into your regular life, says Walter Thompson, PhD, professor of exercise physiology at Georgia State University in Atlanta. Physical activity - not just exercise *per se* -- can become part of your daily routine, Thompson tells WebMD. "People think they have to strap on running shoes and run a marathon to call it exercise. I talk more about integrating physical activity into your daily lifestyle."