

Physical Exercise and Your Health



Regular physical activity can help control weight, reduce the risk of developing diabetes, reduce the risk of developing certain forms of cancer, and helps maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints. A recent study in *Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* found that a high level of physical activity might also be associated with higher self-esteem in teenagers.

Despite the benefits associated with physical activity, few teens regularly participate in vigorous exercise. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly half of youth between 12 and 21 years old do not regularly participate in vigorous physical activity. If you're not exercising regularly, it could be the key to helping you feel better. Below are some tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for making exercise part of your life.

- Walk, cycle, jog, skate, etc. to work, school, or the store instead of driving.
- Park your car farther away from your destination.
- Get on or off the bus several blocks away and walk to your destination.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- Play with your pets.
- Exercise while watching television by using hand weights or a stationary bike, treadmill, or stairclimber.
- Dance to music.
- Make a Saturday morning walk a group habit – this could be a great time to catch up with your friends.
- Walk or ride a bike when doing errands.

Make extra time for these activities for just one week and see how much better you feel. Just 30 extra minutes a day can improve your health and your chance of good health in the future.

Tips for Assertiveness

Do you have trouble saying no to your friends, even when you know you should? Do you feel like you are always doing things for your friends, and never doing anything because you want to? If you answered yes to these questions, you might want to learn how to be more assertive. The University of Iowa Counseling Service defines assertiveness as “the ability to honestly express your opinions, feelings, attitudes, and rights, without undue anxiety, in a way that doesn't infringe on the rights of others”.

Not being able to say no can lead to depression, resentment, frustration, anxiety, and poor relationships. You might think you are avoiding conflict by saying yes to all of your friends' demands, but in the end, you may just be building up resentment within yourself that can explode at any moment and ruin your friendships.

So, how do you successfully say no to your friends' demands on you? The University of Iowa Counseling Service describes three parts of an assertive response:

- 1) **Empathy/validation:** Start by saying something that lets the other person know that you understand his or her feelings. This prevents him or her from feeling like you are attacking him or her.
- 2) **Statement of the problem:** This part describes your difficulty and tells the other person why you can not meet his or her demands.
- 3) **Statement of what you want:** This is a specific request for a specific change in the other person's behavior.

The following example demonstrates an assertive response.

Scenario: You just started your senior year of high school, and you have a lot of hard classes this semester. Most of your friends graduated last year, so they don't have any school obligations. They are constantly calling you on weeknights and wanting you to hang out, but you have a lot of homework. They make you feel guilty by making fun of you for saying no, so you usually cave and go out with them. Your grades are starting to slip, and you are constantly stressed at school because you rarely have your homework done. They call and want you to go to a movie the night before a big exam in a class that you haven't opened the book for all semester. You know exactly what will happen if you say no. How do you tell them you can't go?

Response: I know that you really want me to go with you, and I really want to hang out with you [empathy/validation], but you also need to understand that I still have school and homework to deal with [statement of the problem]. All of you graduated last year, and you didn't go out every night when you were in school. Please don't make me feel guilty for not being able to hang out with you [statement of what you want]. I can still hang out on the weekends.

Following these steps for assertiveness can help you get your needs met while not offending your friends. Instead of keeping your true feelings inside and causing more stress for yourself, try telling your friends what you need.

Managing your Time Management Skills



Does it ever seem like there are just not enough hours in the day? Juggling homework, extracurricular activities, work, family, friends, and many other obligations can make life seem quite hectic at times. Finding a way to balance all of the many things going on in your life can help reduce stress and anxiety. The George Washington University Counseling Center provides the following ten tips for better time management.

- 1) Use a calendar to keep track of all of your appointments.
- 2) Make and use “to do” lists everyday.
- 3) Prioritize “to do” activities into high, medium or low priority and do high priority tasks first.
- 4) Divide large tasks into smaller parts and work on them a little at a time. This will make them seem less overwhelming.
- 5) At any given moment, ask yourself what the best use of your time is and act accordingly.
- 6) Anticipate deadlines and high stress times such as midterms or finals and plan for them ahead of time.
- 7) Schedule time for 15-20 minute breaks. You will be much more productive if you take some time to relax.
- 8) Schedule time to take care of yourself. A proper diet, exercise, and sleep will help you stay mentally alert.
- 9) Learn to say “no” to activities that are not of high priority and that you do not have time for.
- 10) Learn to say “later”. Postpone phone calls and other distractions until break times or after you've completed the task.

Managing your time can't increase the number of hours in the day, but it can help you use the 1440 minutes you do have more efficiently.