

Pick up the heartbeat, not the remote

27 February 2013

Want to get fitter and stronger but short on energy and time? FIONA CASSIE talks to nurse-turned-personal trainer Jo Stark about squeezing exercise into your life minute by minute.

Being short on time is no longer an excuse not to exercise, says Jo Stark.

Nor is not being able to afford a gym membership. Just squeeze ten-minute bouts of exercise into your life three times a day and you are on your way to making a difference to your health and wellbeing. And yes, vacuuming does count.

Registered nurse Jo Stark retrained after having her first two children in quick succession and now combines being a mum of her three children, aged 12 to five, with being a self-employed personal trainer.

"I understand what it is like to be a tired, busy working mum and how hard it is for women to fit exercise into their life."

She also understands that at times most of us just want to curl up on the sofa after a demanding day that started too early and went on too long.

However, picking up a skipping rope for a few minutes or not bailing out of the planned walk or swim with your friend has its rewards, not only physically but mentally, with the release of all those good endorphins.

"If you are feeling stressed out or anxious or a bit down, I know myself that when I've made the time to exercise that it's really helped. It generally does pick you up... and you sleep better," says Stark.

Even if you know the benefits, you may still have to force yourself to overcome the excuses that stop you taking that first step or plunge into the pool.

Excuses excuses

One of the first excuses for busy people is "I don't have time".

"People don't say 'I don't have time to clean my teeth or take a shower'," says Stark. So her first tip for busy people is: just as they prioritise time for personal hygiene or grooming, they need to prioritise time for exercise.

Her second tip is: if you really can't find a free hour then break your exercise up into manageable bites during the day. When it comes to exercise, 'less' can sometimes be 'more'.

"People think 'I have to have an hour-long walk' or an 'hour-long workout at the gym' and because they can't find a spare hour, they do nothing."

Most people can squeeze ten-minute bursts of exercise into their lives three times a day, believes Stark. It may not be quite as good as 30 minutes in one hit, but it is much better than nothing, and what you do in those ten minutes can really count.

Which brings us to her third tip, particularly for the time-poor: consider downloading one of the free Tabata-style training apps that use the concept of HIIT (high-intensity interval training) to get more intensity out of those stolen minutes.

Tabata are four-minute workouts – about the time of an average ad break – broken into eight rounds of '20 seconds on and 10 seconds off'.

"You can choose anything you like – say, skipping, marching on the spot, press-ups, squats, or lunges – it doesn't have to be anything spectacular."

She suggests trying a Tabata-style workout or two in the ad breaks of your favourite TV programme or some other time you can squeeze into your timetable. (NB: start at low intensity at first and build in

some time for a suitable warm-up and cool-down to match the type and level of Tabata workout you are doing.)

Avoid exercise you hate

Stark's fourth tip is: choose a type of exercise you enjoy and you are more likely to keep motivated.

Along with finding an exercise you love, find a like-minded person or group to do it with and who will keep you accountable.

Her fifth tip is: make the most of incidental exercise you can build into your daily routine – i.e. park the car a block further from work, bike to work and save on petrol, take the stairs if you can, and play ball in the backyard with the kids after work. Yes, that includes housework.

“If I've spent couple of hours cleaning the house, I actually consider that my workout for the day and wouldn't do anything else.”

Tip number six: be organised. Keep an exercise and food diary that sets out your plan for the week and tick off what you achieve. Set out your exercise gear the night before, right down to your socks, underwear, iPod or MP3 player, and headphones, so you have no excuse for not doing that planned morning jog, walk, or workout. Maybe register for an event like a fun run or duathlon so you feel committed to train.

Finally, getting fit doesn't have to cost an arm and a leg. All you really need to invest in is a good pair of shoes.

Rather than wasting precious time driving back and forth to the gym you can also invest in some cheap and simple equipment you can use in your lounge or backyard. Stark says her last skipping rope cost \$6, a resistance band is about \$10, and a Swiss ball is around \$20.

If you're stuck with ideas of what to do with the equipment, she says get online and you will find a thousand and one ways to use your resistance band and workouts you can do safely at home.

Getting fit does not have to involve paying a third party to be your exercise conscience – a friend or family member can help you stay accountable and motivated ... and pick you up again after those weeks when sick kids, an overcrowded ward, or too many Christmas parties sees you slipping early to bed rather than into your running shoes.

To get you back on the fitness path, always keep in mind the big picture – what are you exercising for?

Some want to lose weight, some to build muscle, some are training for an event, and others to keep anxiety, stress, or the blues at bay.

Remember that and get back to squeezing exercise into your daily routine.

Tips to tempt you to exercise

- Prioritise exercise as an everyday essential like cleaning your teeth.
- 'Less is more' – exercise in small, intense bursts throughout the day if you can't spare a whole hour.
- Consider downloading a free Tabata or Nike Training app to your phone to give you inspiration.
- Chose a type of exercise you love. Do you like moving to music? Prefer to be alone, with a mate, or in a group?
- Make the most of incidental exercise – climbing the stairs, housework, playing with kids.
- Be organised – keep an exercise and food diary and set out your fitness gear the night before if your plan is to take a walk or a swim the next morning.
- All you really need is a good pair of shoes – getting fit doesn't need to involve expensive equipment or gym memberships.

NOTE:

***Before beginning new kinds or level of exercise or activity –
Please check with your healthcare professional for exercise or activity that is suitable for you.***