



Starting a Sustainable Fitness Routine

Consistent exercise can improve overall health and prevent injury

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As veterinary nurses, we urge pet owners to remain consistent with their pet's physical activity, and the intention around our own fitness program should be no different. While a single session can result in immediate benefits, such as reduced anxiety and improved sleep, habitual movement has far greater rewards.¹

A consistent exercise routine can improve physical function, increase mental alertness, decrease arthritis-related pain, minimize your risk of fall-related injuries, and reduce the risk of premature death, among other benefits.¹ These benefits occur with at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity each week.¹

Unfortunately, only 24.2% of adults meet these minimum recommendations for aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities, meaning most of the population doesn't engage in regular movement.² If you fall within this group, it's not too late to start. Movement can easily become a regular and enjoyable part of your routine. Protect your health by committing to a fitness program you will look forward to.

STEPS TO ESTABLISH A SUSTAINABLE FITNESS ROUTINE

It is a common misconception that exercise must feel like a chore. However, the old saying "No pain, no gain" has no place in a sustainable fitness routine. Yes, exercising may challenge you both mentally and physically, but it should never hurt. More importantly, it should be enjoyable. Consider these steps to establish a consistent fitness routine.

Find an Activity You Enjoy

If you feel good during or after your workout, you will be more inclined to participate in it consistently.

BOX 1

Examples of Traditional and Nontraditional Forms of Exercise

- Walking
- Hiking
- Pickleball
- Running
- Stand-up paddleboarding
- Weightlifting
- Jumping rope
- Gymnastics
- Yoga
- Roller skating
- Hula hooping
- Rock climbing
- Dancing
- Resistance bands
- Bicycle riding
- Swimming
- High-intensity interval training
- Kayaking
- Gardening
- Kickboxing
- Rowing
- Tai chi
- Soccer
- Snowshoeing



Brainstorm which modalities of movement you already know you enjoy. Do you feel relaxed after a yoga session? Do nature walks lift your spirits? This is a great place to start.

It is also worthwhile to investigate other forms of movement you haven't yet explored. Don't limit yourself to the traditional forms of exercise; consider activities like gardening, pickleball, roller skating, dancing, or whatever else piques your interest. Examples of traditional and nontraditional forms of exercise can be found in **BOX 1**.

Gradually Ease In

When recommending physical activity for a canine patient, you wouldn't suggest the owner take the pet for a 5k run tomorrow. In the same way, it's important to ease into your own movement routine to reduce your risk of injury. Consult with your physician beforehand to ensure it is safe for you to do so. Then, begin with 10 minutes of movement a few times each week and gradually increase the duration and frequency.

Consider Intensity

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity each week.¹ The "talk test" is a simple way to measure the intensity of any given activity.³ Moderate intensity is a level you can engage in while still holding a conversation, like walking briskly or line dancing. However, during vigorous-intensity activities, such as running or jumping rope, conversing becomes challenging due to elevated respiratory and heart rates.⁴

Based on the intensity level of your activity of choice, you can determine how many minutes you should engage in each week. Spread this out over a few or several days; choose whatever works best for your schedule and feels best for your body.

Stack Your New Habit

An effective way to add any activity to your routine is by engaging in what James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*, describes as habit stacking. This strategy involves identifying something you already do every day and pairing it with your new movement activity. For example, you could complete your favorite strengthening and stretching movements while your



coffee brews each morning or place a swimsuit and towel in your car and stop to swim a few laps at the public pool on your way home from work.

Clear suggests that this strategy works because "habit stacking increases the likelihood that you'll stick with a habit by stacking your new behavior on top of an old one."⁵ With time, it will become part of your natural routine.

Find an Accountability Partner

With a friend by your side, everything is easier, so consider enlisting a fitness accountability partner. Studies suggest having a buddy for support can maximize the effectiveness of your new venture.⁶ This could be a friend, family member, or fellow veterinary nurse who is also interested in adding exercise to their routine. If you live in close proximity and have a similar schedule, you could sweat together. However, even a daily check-in text may motivate you to stick with your workout program.

Mix It Up

While finding an activity you enjoy is beneficial, it can be equally important to vary your workouts. Diversifying your physical activity can increase your adherence to a program and even increase enjoyment.⁷ It can also minimize your risk of overuse injury from repetitively performing the same motions. Aim to



change up your routine every few weeks by adding in varying workouts. This doesn't have to be a significant shift; you can try Zumba if you typically engage in dancing or take a Pilates class one day instead of yoga.

Listen to Your Body

In order for a fitness routine to truly be sustainable, it is important to incorporate recovery days. Rest will allow the muscle tissues to repair and prevent fitness burnout. Aim to take 2 to 3 rest days per week to allow your body to recover, but don't hesitate to take more if your body needs it. Postworkout muscle soreness is common when beginning a workout routine, but if you experience any acute or chronic pain, discontinue the exercise and see your physician.

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Since entering the veterinary field in 2009, Saleema has held a variety of roles and positions. This diverse experience led to the discovery of her true passions for patient care, education, and mentoring. Saleema is currently part of the Boehringer Ingelheim Tech Champion team, delivering continuing education presentations to veterinary nurses. Saleema lives out her passion for fitness as a certified personal fitness trainer and group fitness instructor.



Considerations in the Veterinary Practice

Building a sustainable workout routine does not have to take place solely outside of the veterinary hospital. There are several actions veterinary nurses and management can take to support an active workplace.

- **Initiate a hospital fitness challenge.** Leadership can get the entire team involved by initiating a hospital-wide fitness challenge. For example, team members can play “fitness bingo” or represent the hospital in a sponsored fun-run event.
- **Start a walking club.** Consider starting a practice walking club. Veterinary nurses and other staff members can arrange to meet before or after their shift to walk together.
- **Consider compression gear.** Working a 10-hour shift can be grueling; wearing compression garments under your scrubs may help. These close-fitting clothes have the potential to aid in muscle recovery and provide you with relief on the job.⁸

Aim to Make Fitness Fun

For many, fitness is not synonymous with fun. However, making movement something you are eager to engage in is possible. By finding an activity you genuinely enjoy, seeking an accountability partner for support, and making it a regular habit, you can experience the benefits of habitual movement. As a result, physical activity can play an important role in elevating veterinary nurses' quality of life both in and out of the hospital. **TVN**

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