



# Overcoming Accessibility Barriers to Physical Fitness

With the help of community, free or low-cost resources, and team support, veterinary nurses can overcome obstacles that can make fitness inaccessible.

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**T**he benefits of movement are plentiful, but access to physical fitness is undoubtedly a privilege. Veterinary nurses may experience numerous barriers that prevent them from accessing or engaging in physical activity. Common barriers include cost, “gymtimidation,” and safety concerns.<sup>1</sup> These limitations can be challenging, but not impossible to overcome. With help from the community, free or low-cost resources, and team support, veterinary nurses can successfully cultivate a long-term workout program that works for them.

## AFFORDABLE FITNESS FOR VETERINARY NURSES

In the NAVTA 2022 Demographic Survey, 39% of respondents reported that low salary was the most challenging aspect of the veterinary nursing profession.<sup>2</sup> Although the average wage has increased by 25% in the last 5 years per the same survey, many veterinary nurses

continue to live with financial constraints.<sup>2</sup> Reportedly 1 in 3 individuals has a second job in addition to their role as a veterinary nurse.<sup>2</sup>

Between living expenses and student loan payments, a gym membership is often at the bottom of one’s list of priorities. Fortunately, there are ways to make exercise more affordable. Implement these tips to avoid breaking the bank while still participating in consistent cardiovascular and resistance movements.

- **Watch free videos.** Video platforms such as YouTube and Instagram host a wealth of fitness clips you can follow from the comfort of your own home. Use specific keywords to search for the type of workout you would like to try along with your desired level, such as “for beginners” or “low impact.” Previous articles in this Movement Is Medicine series offer videos with movement demonstrations along with the proper technique.
- **Hit the pavement.** Walking is a fantastic movement modality that is both beneficial and entirely free. Walk at a brisk pace for 150 minutes each week to fulfill your aerobic exercise requirements. For example, aim to walk your dog (or a healthy patient) around the block if the weather permits, or retreat to an indoor mall if it doesn’t.
- **Participate in group classes.** Many community centers and organizations offer low-cost or free group fitness classes. Keep an eye on your area’s community events calendar for upcoming classes.
- **Dance it out.** It is nearly impossible to resist the urge to move your body when listening to your favorite song. An easy and free way to engage in aerobic exercise is through dance. Simply close your bedroom

### Benefits of Movement

The “Movement Is Medicine” series focuses on how intentional movement can protect your body on the job and how physical activity can bring you a range of physical and psychological health benefits.

**SCAN THE QR CODE** to read articles in this series on topics ranging from avoiding back pain to strength training.





door, hit “play” on your playlist, and dance like no one is watching (because they aren’t).

- **Locate community park gym stations.** Many community parks have outdoor fitness equipment for free public use. These are often located near or within playgrounds. Most include equipment where you can use your body weight to perform resistance training movements, such as push-up bars, dip bars, and more.
- **Thrift gym equipment.** It is often easy to find inexpensive fitness equipment on resale sites such as Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace. Routinely search for items such as weights, jump ropes, or stability balls to purchase low-priced secondhand items.

### INCLUSIVE MOVEMENT FOR VETERINARY NURSES

Unfortunately, some fitness environments may be inaccessible due to feelings of discomfort or intimidation. This phenomenon is so common that the term “gymtimidation” was coined to describe the pressure caused by working out in public.<sup>3</sup> Anyone can experience gymtimidation regardless of fitness level or ability, and surveys reveal that approximately 50% of adults do.<sup>4</sup> However, individuals in marginalized groups, including women, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+ folks, and people with disabilities, are often at a higher risk of experiencing gymtimidation.

The ability to feel welcome and safe in a gym setting is vital in order for veterinary nurses to maintain a long-term fitness program. The good news is that inclusive fitness establishments are becoming more commonplace. If you choose to pursue fitness outside of your home, choose a space where you feel safe.



During your search, ask facilities these questions to avoid spaces where you might feel uncomfortable:

- Do you offer a gym orientation for new members?
- Does your establishment have a policy against discrimination and harassment?
- Do your group fitness instructors offer personalized modifications based on ability?
- Do your trainers use inclusive language?

### FITNESS THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Veterinary nurses can benefit immensely from the support of their veterinary practice and management teams as well as the community at large. Wellness incentive programs and employer-funded gym memberships can help offset the financial cost, while resource lists of inclusive gyms can promote safety and reduce gymtimidation. Establishing a fitness routine while working as a veterinary nurse is possible, and doing so can improve your long-term health. **TVN**

#### Saleema Lookman

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.



#### References

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