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No- and Low-Cost Fitness

By Colleen Crawford

Gym membership, group fitness classes, exercise equipment, personal training, and a fashionable workout wardrobe are must-haves for an effective fitness program, right? No! Cost is a frequently cited barrier to starting or continuing a fitness program, but it doesn't have to be. The true keys to an effective fitness program are movement and consistency. In honor of Financial Wellness Month, I've gathered the following no- and low-cost methods for incorporating movement into your lifestyle.

With milder weather upon us, heading outside for some exercise is a natural fit – and it's free! Going for a walk around your neighborhood, workplace, or exploring a new trail in a local park are all simple ways to add movement into your day. Ready to kick your walk up another notch? Try adding intervals of faster walking or jogging into your walk to ramp up your heart rate. If you have children, take them to the park and make use of the playground! Climbing up the stairs to a slide, swinging or hanging on monkey bars, and balancing on stepping stones will all challenge your muscles in new ways.

Make use of readily available items in your environment.

Stairs, sturdy chairs or benches, gallon jugs of milk, bags of pet food, small children, and your own body are tools that can be used to strengthen your body. Small children (or your cat or dog!) that like to be held offer added resistance to squats, lunges, overhead presses, and more. Climbing stairs in your home, workplace, or community will challenge your legs, heart and lungs. Household items are a great substitute to enhance your strength training if free weights are unavailable. And of course, you can exercise your body, using only your body! Whether your focus is on improving cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, or balance, your own body can be all you need.

For a small investment, equipment such as resistance bands, inflatable stability balls, and hand held free weights are a great addition to any fitness program. Because you can use these items to perform many different exercises, you can continue to make progress while avoiding boredom. If you're looking for more structure or guidance in your fitness program, there are countless DVDs available (many at the library for free!) that will allow you to follow a program and learn from an exercise expert.

Finally, look for free fitness offerings from your local gyms, yoga studios, and park district. These places regularly offer free promotional classes or discounted trial memberships. Take advantage of these promotions and enjoy trying something new!

Check out the following resources for more ideas on how to stay fit without breaking the bank:

[25 Ways to Get Fit if You Don't Have a Gym Membership](#)

[How to Move More Anytime Anywhere](#)

[15 Minute Beginner Workout – No Equipment Needed](#)

[20 Minute Playground Workout](#)

"This article was written prior to social distancing and shelter-at-home protocols were mandated. Please continue to heed those guidelines while participating in fitness activities during this time. ■



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