CONSUMED

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Replace Negative Exercise Self-Talk with Powerful Thoughts

By Michelle May, M.D.

Most people know that physical activity is important yet many choose to lead sedentary lives—and even more find it difficult to start or stick with an exercise program. Others use exercise merely for weight control and quit when they aren't on a diet even though exercise has been proven to help people feel better and live a longer, healthier life even if they don't lose a pound.

Although exercise is one of the most effective tools available for improving health and managing weight, even the "E-word" can conjure up negative thoughts and feelings. If you aren't very active, perhaps your self-talk is getting in your way. Isn't it time to start thinking in more powerful terms?

"I know I should exercise but I hate it so I just can't seem to make myself do it." Notice all the negative words like "should," "hate" and "make myself." These thoughts and feelings may stem from past experiences like being chosen last for teams, boring exercise routines, and discomfort or pain from doing too much too fast. Some people think of exercise as punishment for overeating. However, *this* time you can find enjoyable physical activities that suit your personality and lifestyle. You can start slowly and allow your body to adjust gradually so it's not uncomfortable. You can choose to focus on all the great things exercise does for you and how wonderful you feel instead of how much weight you should lose.

Powerful Thought: *I enjoy becoming more physically active each day.*

"I don't have time." It only takes 1/48th of your whole day to exercise for 30 minutes—and most people waste a lot more than that on less productive activities like watching TV. Being physically active is more important for your health and well-being than most other things you think must get done each day. The key is giving it the priority it deserves.

Powerful Thought: *I make time for my health and well-being.*

"I don't have the energy." No matter how you feel initially, you're likely to feel better within just a few minutes of starting to move. These good feelings usually last long after the exercise is finished too. It also increases your strength and stamina, and helps you sleep better so you'll be more productive and feel great. Even when you feel tired, commit to exercising for at least ten minutes. Promise yourself you can stop and try again another day if you still aren't feeling any better. Most of the time, you'll feel so good that you'll want to continue.

Powerful Thought: *I feel myself becoming healthier and more energetic.*

"I'll start exercising when I've lost some of this weight." Doing any extra physical activity burns calories and builds your metabolism. In addition, it reduces cravings and curbs your appetite by raising your endorphins ("feel good chemicals") and serotonin levels ("calm chemicals"). Besides, if you don't exercise while you're losing weight, you may lose fat *and* muscle. It'll become gradually harder to lose weight—and even harder to keep it off.

Powerful Thought: *I support my metabolism with regular exercise.*

"I'm embarrassed to be seen exercising." Ironically most other people are so focused on themselves, they don't notice you anyway. Those that do will likely admire you. Eventually you'll feel less self-conscious but in the meantime, find activities and places that feel comfortable so you can focus on all the benefits.

Powerful Thought: *I exercise for me.*

"Exercise is really hard for me." Physical activity doesn't have to be hard or hurt to be beneficial. In fact, it's more important to find convenient, comfortable, and enjoyable activities that you'll stick with it. Finding a partner, trying new activities and new routes, rewarding yourself with a hot bath or massage, and setting small, achievable goals are great ways to make exercise more fun. Even if you have physical limitations it's possible to find some way to increase your activity level. If you've been very inactive, start by increasing your "lifestyle" activity first then work toward a regular exercise routine. You'll be amazed at how much your body can adapt to whatever challenges you offer.

Powerful Thought: *I have more stamina, strength and flexibility each day.*

"I'm so out of shape—I don't even know where to begin!" Of course it's important to check with your health care professional before you begin any new exercise program. Once you have been medically cleared, you have to start somewhere. There's no such thing as instant fitness—so start right where you are. If you start this week by increasing your activity level, little by little, three months from now you'll feel stronger, leaner, more energetic, and healthier.

Powerful Thought: *I do whatever I can to become more fit and healthy.*

Replace your negative self-talk with more effective messages. By repeating then acting on the powerful thought, ***"I am an active, healthy person,"*** you're taking an important step closer to becoming one!

Michelle May, M.D. is a recovered yoyo dieter and the award-winning author of *Eat What You Love, Love What You Eat: How to Break Your Eat-Repent-Repeat Cycle.* Find additional articles and resources at **http://AmIHungry.com/**.

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