



## **Am I Hungry? Book Excerpt Build a Positive Attitude About Exercise**

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Most people know that physical activity is very important yet many people choose to lead sedentary lives – and even more find it difficult to start an exercise program or stick with it. On the other hand, some people use exercise merely for weight control and don't recognize how critical it is for achieving optimal health. But physical activity and exercise have been proven to help you feel better and live a longer healthier life – even if you don't lose weight.

Although exercise is one of the most powerful tools available for improving health and managing weight, even the word “exercise” can conjure up negative thoughts and feelings. If you are not very active or not exercising regularly, perhaps you have some negative thoughts of your own. Isn't it time to start building more positive thoughts?

***“I know I should exercise but I hate it so I just can't seem to make myself do it.”*** Many people have negative feelings about exercise, as can be heard by the use of words like “should,” “hate” and “make myself.” These thoughts and feelings come from negative past experiences like being chosen last for teams, boring exercise routines, and discomfort or pain from doing too much too fast. Some people only exercise when they are trying to lose weight so they have come to think of exercise as a punishment for their overeating. However, *this time* you can find fun physical activities that suit your personality and lifestyle. You can start slowly and allow your body to adjust gradually so it is not uncomfortable. You can choose to focus on all the great things it does for you and how wonderful you feel instead of how much weight you should lose.

***“I don't have time.”*** It will only take 1/48<sup>th</sup> of your whole day to exercise for 30 minutes – and most people waste a lot more time than that on unproductive activities like watching TV! Being physically active is more important for your health and well-being than most of the other things you think must get done each day. The key is giving it the priority that it deserves.

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

***“I'll start exercising when I've lost some of this weight.”*** Doing any kind of extra physical activity uses additional calories and builds your metabolism. In addition,

physical activity 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 are losing weight, you may lose fat *and* muscle. It may become gradually harder to lose weight – and almost impossible to keep it off!

***“I’m embarrassed to be seen exercising.”*** Ironically most other people are so focused on themselves, they are not going to notice you anyway! Those that do will likely admire you. Eventually you will feel less self-conscious but in the meantime, find activities and places that make you feel comfortable so you can focus on all of the wonderful benefits. Remember, you are doing this for yourself - to feel better and become healthier.

***“Exercise is really hard for me.”*** Physical activity doesn’t have to be hard or hurt to be beneficial. In fact, it is more important to find activities that are convenient, comfortable, and enjoyable so 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 is always possible to find some way to increase your activity level. If you have been very inactive, start by increasing your “lifestyle” activity then work toward a regular exercise routine. You will be amazed at how much your body can adapt to whatever challenges you give it!

***“I’m so out of shape – I don’t even know where to begin!”*** Of course it is important to check with your doctor before you begin any new exercise program. Once you have been medically cleared, you have to start somewhere – so start where you are! There is no such thing as instant fitness. If you start this week by increasing your activity level, little by little, three months from now you will be leaner, stronger, more energetic, and healthier. If you choose not to start, then don’t be surprised if you are exactly the same as you are today!

***“I was doing pretty well until I got sick (or busy or company came or I went on vacation...)”*** Quitting your exercise program because you missed a day, a week, or even longer makes as much sense as eating the whole bag of cookies because you ate three! No person and no schedule are ever perfect. If this is going to become part of your life, you need to be as *consistent* but as *flexible* as possible. Many people have found that writing their exercise schedule on their calendar helps them stay on track. If they miss a session, they simply reschedule it, the way they would any other important appointment!

***What are your other negative thoughts and attitudes about exercise?*** Can you counter them in a positive way? Develop positive statements about activity and repeat them often to yourself. For instance, instead of saying, “exercise is boring”, say, “being active gives me the opportunity to relieve stress and feel better.” Repeat affirmations like “I can feel myself becoming healthier and more energetic”, “It feels so good to move my muscles!” and “I can do it!” Start thinking of your self as an active, healthy person – and you will become one!

Am I Hungry? Book Excerpt Module 2: Build a Positive Attitude About Exercise

*This excerpt is from Am I Hungry? by Michelle May, M.D. This material is based on the Am I Hungry? Multidimensional Weight Management System; more information is available at [www.AmIHungry.com](http://www.AmIHungry.com). Dr. May is a Board Certified Family Physician who writes and speaks widely on healthy approaches to weight management. Contact her at [MMay@AmIHungry.com](mailto:MMay@AmIHungry.com) or 480 704-7811.*