

**Learn to love your workout:** exercise shouldn't be drudgery. A motivation expert tells how to make it an enjoyable, permanent part of your life. (Jay Kimiecik )(Interview)

**Men's Fitness** , Oct, 2003, by Ben Kallen

Most of us know that regular exercise is a vital part of staying healthy over the course of a lifetime, not to mention being as strong as possible and looking like a big ol' stud. But while plenty of people see exercise as important, damn few seem to think of it as fun. That could be why recent government surveys found that only a third of Americans engage in moderate or vigorous exertion on a regular basis, and that a quarter get virtually no exercise at all. Even you guys who work out several times a week probably still have moments when you'd rather attend a Kate Hudson double feature than go to the gym one more time.

The real issue with exercise today isn't that people don't understand the value of movement or don't have enough willpower, says Jay Kimiecik, Ph.D., an exercise motivation expert at Miami University in Ohio. It's that they simply haven't learned to enjoy it--a situation he intends to remedy with his book *The Intrinsic Exerciser: Discovering the Joy of Exercise*. If you often face your workout with as much pleasure as you approach, say, cleaning the bathroom, you need his advice as much as anyone.

**MEN'S FITNESS:** Most people don't think of working out in a gym or on an exercise machine as "fun," but as something that's necessary to reach their health and fitness goals. Is that a problem?

Kimiecik: For many people it is. When I researched this topic and interviewed "exercise maintainers," I discovered that people who are successful over the long term are those who develop a strong enough passion for movement that they overcome the motivational obstacles others fall prey to. You might say "If I do this I'll be stronger," or "If I do this I'll live longer," but that often isn't sustainable over time. If you want to maintain an exercise program indefinitely, you need to make a connection with the experience.

So, for most people, simply knowing why they need to exercise isn't enough to keep them doing it. Much of the information provided about exercise, although well-intentioned, actually pulls people away from enjoying it. From a health perspective it makes sense: We know if you are active it can reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes or obesity. But I'm not sure that's the optimal way to help people be active. Guys who get up at 5 a.m. to go to the gym do it because they've made it an intrinsic part of their life, and can't see life without it.

What do those guys have that others don't?

For one thing, they've found a program that really fits their need to feel a certain way. If you want to get that too, you need to ask yourself how you feel when you're doing certain activities, and how it is you want to feel. Do you like to feel rhythmic? Do you like to feel powerful? Do you like feeling interactive with other people or going solo? I don't think a lot of people spend a lot of time while they're actually doing the movement seeing how they really feel. They try to distract themselves from the feelings rather than experiencing them.

For instance, when I first started doing ball push-ups, I didn't know how it would feel. But I found after a few times that doing those pushups really went along with the way I wanted to be. I wanted the sense of quickness and being powerful.

Then what do you recommend for someone who's just starting to exercise and wants to find a workout program he'll stick with?

First, he should make sure he's getting some correct guidance or training so he's doing things in the right way. Then, he should start experimenting with different kinds of movement and paying attention to how they feel when he's doing them. Even with resistance training, there's no one way things have to be done. The challenge is to find a program that's motivating for that person as an individual.

Some guys really only want to work out to put on more muscle. Is that not the "right" kind of goal?

Those people certainly can put on muscle through weight training, but the desire itself may not be enough to keep them in the gym. Fortunately, weight training can be an "intrinsic" activity. You have to pay attention to it--unlike running on a treadmill, where you can let your mind go. When you're doing a squat or dumbbell flye, you have to pay attention, both for safety purposes and to do it with the correct form.

So the factors that keep him motivated are also factors that will make him more successful in his workout.

In the gym, the more intrinsic you are, the better your performance is likely to be. Pushing yourself, challenging yourself--the things that make you better also keep things interesting. Having started a fairly rigorous weight-training program myself, I can say this doesn't happen overnight. At first, I wasn't enamored of it. So why did I keep going back? There was something about the challenge of the activity.

Since the majority of people don't exercise nearly as much as they should, it's clear they need to be doing something differently.

People think exercise is something that they have to do, but that's hard work and no fun--and clearly that approach isn't succeeding. This way of looking at things is a little bit unique, but we'll find it more commonplace in the future.

## FOUR STEPS TO EXERCISE ENJOYMENT

According to motivation expert Jay Kimiecik, do the following and you'll end up working out because you want to, not just because it's good for you.

1. Get an inner vision of yourself as an exerciser. Think about which kinds of exercise best fit your lifestyle and your self-image. Experiment with different activities until you find the ones that best meet your inner need for such things as feeling strong, feeling in rhythm or learning new things.
2. Develop a sense of mastery. Instead of focusing on how much fat you're losing or muscle you're building, develop inner goals such as learning to understand your body, putting a lot of effort into every workout improving over what you did last time, and learning new skills. Reaching these goals will help you build confidence in yourself as well as improve your body.
3. Stay in the moment. Successful athletes often talk about being in a state of "flow," in which they're so absorbed in what they're doing that they seem to accomplish it without thinking. You can practice this by becoming aware of what you're doing, both mentally and physically, throughout your workout. Instead of "tuning out," try to enjoy the sensation of every movement.
4. Let exercise help you to meet your other needs. Working out can help satisfy your desires for social interaction, discipline, relaxation or self-discovery, or just give you a break from the rigors of the day. Think about the major nonphysical needs in your life, and try to figure out how activity can help you to achieve them. This can make exercise a much more powerful experience and keep you coming back for more.