



Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

The Best Time to Exercise

Q: I have four children and a very demanding job. My energy levels have been low for several months and I realize I haven't been taking very good care of myself. If good intentions were money, I would be a multi-millionaire but the reality is that I seldom find the time to exercise. My physician strongly recommends I become more physically active and I was wondering what time of the day is the best for exercising. *Eager Igor*

A: Dear Eager Igor – Bravo on looking to become more active! This small change in your life will provide you many benefits that largely depend on how consistently you exercise. To address your question, the time of day you choose to exercise is very important because this will determine how consistent you can be. For example: scheduling your workouts during the busiest time of your workday is a recipe for failure.

The secret to living an active lifestyle is to find a time to exercise that best suits you and then to stick with it. If you struggle to find "Active Time", just do what you can. Even 10 minutes of movement will have positive effects on your health. As being physically active becomes more of a routine, finding the time to exercise should become easier. Here are some pro and cons associated with what time of day you decide to exercise:

Early morning workouts:

1. Are often better suited to "morning" people;
2. Make it easier to be consistent because there are usually fewer scheduling conflicts first thing in the morning;
3. Will elevate your metabolism throughout the day – more calories burned;
4. Stimulate the release of endorphins to boost your mood;
5. Help you feel more energized and productive;
6. Require a longer warm-up and while your body is not initially prepared to perform maximally early in the day, if you consistently train at this time of day, your body will adapt and be able to perform at a higher level.

Late afternoon and evening workouts:

1. Are often better suited to "night owls";
2. Are more vulnerable to unexpected events such as being delayed by a traffic jam on the way home from work;
3. Require less warm-up because your body temperature is higher at this time of day. Your strength, flexibility and reaction times are all better in the late afternoon and perceived exertion (how hard you feel you are working) is the lowest. These changes improve your ability to physically perform late afternoon and evening workouts;
4. May help re-energize you after your work day. Conversely, you may be drained at the end of a long day and have little energy left for your workout;
5. Can make it easier to get some extra sleep time in the morning;
6. Training intensely less than 1 hour before your bedtime, can make it harder to fall asleep and result in a poorer quality of sleep if you train intensely less than 1 hour before bedtime.

Bottom Line: There really is no bad time to exercise. Making the time to exercise can be quite challenging and the most important strategy is to find something you enjoy doing and a time to exercise that is best suited to your life. What really matters is that you exercise regularly because the trail to fitness is paved with consistency. Exercise really is medicine!

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Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

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