

# Behavioral Management Strategies for Initiating and Maintaining Exercise Adherence

## A Tool for Health Care Professionals

Techniques	Practical Applications/Recommendations
<b>Preparation</b>	Establish realistic expectations for patients new to exercise/physical activity.
<b>Shaping</b>	Begin the exercise program at a dosage (frequency, intensity, duration) that is comfortable for the patient and increase slowly until an optimal level is attained.
<b>Goal-setting</b>	Goals should be individualized and based on the patient's physiologic and psychological status. Goals that are specific, yet flexible, are more effective than longer term goals.
<b>Reinforcement</b>	Patients should be queried as to what reinforcers (rewards) would work for them. Rewards might include certificates of achievement, attendance records, or getting a medal for having completed an event (10 K run).
<b>Stimulus Control</b>	Environmental cues or stimuli (written notes, watch alarms, dates on a calendar) may be used to remind patients to maintain their exercise commitment. Having a routine time and place for exercise establishes a powerful stimulus control.
<b>Contracting</b>	A behavioral contract has been shown to enhance the commitment to exercise. Signing the contract formalizes the agreement and makes it more significant.
<b>Cognitive Strategies</b>	Patients should be oriented to the advantages and disadvantages of exercise. Individuals who select their own goals generally demonstrate better adherence.
<b>Generalization Training</b>	Specific steps should be taken to generalize the exercise habit from a structured class or home setting to other environments (travel, work, etc).
<b>Social Support</b>	Support of family, friends, coworkers should be sought from the beginning. Finding a compatible exercise partner often serves to enhance exercise adherence.
<b>Self-management</b>	Patients should be encouraged to be their own behavior therapist. They should practice self-reinforcement by focusing on increased self-esteem, enjoyment of the exercise itself, and the anticipated health and fitness benefits.
<b>Relapse Prevention Training</b>	Prepare patients for situations that may produce relapse and ways of coping with them so that a complete relapse is avoided. Relapses should be viewed as inevitable challenges, rather than failures.

Adapted from: Methods for changing exercising behaviors. In: American College of Sports Medicine's Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription, 6th ed.. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins; 2000:p243-244.

