

# HOW TO STAY MOTIVATED IN WINTER



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# How to Stay Motivated in Winter

Whether you've already got an established fitness routine, or are just embarking on one, Winter can be a tricky time of year to stay focussed and on track. There's something about the darker nights and mornings that link in to our natural instincts that lean towards comfort food, staying warm and hygge.\*

Our minds and bodies are tricked into thinking the days are shorter due to the decreased daylight hours, but in reality, we still have the same number of hours in each day. It's tempting to either stay in bed later or go straight home after work rather than exercise.

Missing the odd training session or over-indulging occasionally in stodgy Winter comfort foods, won't knock you too much off track. However, if we're not careful, these behaviours can soon become habit. It takes a minimum of twenty-one days for a new routine or outlook to become a habit. The average time is sixty-six days, or just over two months (1).



When maintaining or establishing new routines or habits, doing something is always better than doing nothing and these somethings do build up over the course of a week, a month or a year.

Current NHS guidelines for 19 to 64 year olds are 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity per week (e.g. brisk walking and cycling) or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity per week (e.g. running and skipping), plus two or more strength training sessions per week (2).

(\*Hygge: A Danish word for a mood of cosiness and Winter comforts.)

On particularly busy days, we might find it more difficult to fit structured exercise in to our daily routines. It's important not to feel guilty about this, after all, we all have responsibilities. Our aim should not be perfection, but being able to honestly say that we do our best with the time we have available.

So, how do we stay motivated and focussed?

By cultivating the right mindset and focussing on the positive aspects and achievement that each change brings. Give yourself a mental incentive or reward. We're not talking cake here but instead making small changes to your outlook that can increase your positive thinking and motivation.

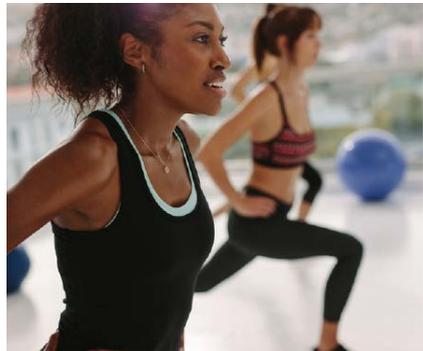
**Here are some ideas to help keep you on track through the Winter months...**

## Make it work for you.

What time of day do you prefer to exercise?  
Before or after work, during the day or a combination of the two?

How would you prefer to exercise? Gym, running, Personal Training sessions or Group Exercise?

Look at your schedule and ask yourself how can you fit this in and maintain or establish this as habit.



### INCENTIVE:

I get to choose the times and types of exercise that work for me.

## Focus on what you have done, not on what you haven't done.

Think about all the physical activities you may already do during the day. Whether it's mowing the lawn, walking the dog or walking from the bus stop. These all count.

Start small. Molehills are easier to conquer than mountains. Whilst some people can embrace a whole new routine immediately, others find it easier to make small changes and establish these before adding further changes. If you find eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day difficult, then aim for three. Establish this, and then build from there.



If you can't commit to training five times a week, aim for two at first before looking to increase it.

### INCENTIVE:

**I'm choosing the goals and commitments I feel are achievable.**

### ACHIEVEMENTS:

**I can feel good about doing my best.**

**I've eaten three portions of fruit and vegetables every day this week.**

**I've completed two training sessions and three brisk walks this week.**

## If morning is your preferred time to exercise, get up an hour earlier.

Yes, this is an old one! But here's the trick. If getting out of bed is difficult at the best of times, simply place your alarm away from the bed so you physically have to get out of bed in order to turn it off. This also has the added benefit that if you use your phone as your alarm, it's away from your bed, which may help reduce the temptation to scroll in bed and improve your sleep quality.

### INCENTIVES:

An hour to myself.

Allow enough time for a relaxing shower and/or a pot of your favourite tea or coffee after exercising.

### ACHIEVEMENT:

I've exercised already today so I now have the evening to myself.

## Leave your exercise kit out ready...

...or even put it on the radiator overnight so that your clothes are warm when you put them on.

### INCENTIVES:

Warm clothes.

I don't need to find my kit as it's already out.

### ACHIEVEMENT:

I've got myself organised.

Drink a glass of water upon waking.

**INCENTIVE:**

Rehydrate myself after sleeping.

**ACHIEVEMENT:**

One glass towards my daily fluid intake.



Build exercise into any unused time.

For example, stretch one side of your body for a few minutes as the kettle boils, then the other side as your morning tea or coffee brews. Allow yourself enough time to enjoy your brew.

**INCENTIVE:**

A pot of tea or coffee and time to savour it.

**ACHIEVEMENT:**

Ten minutes stretching every day is seventy minutes a week.

## Go for a lunchtime walk.

Even five minutes can make a difference and improve your mental outlook. Often in Winter, it can feel as if we're travelling to and from work in the dark, so getting some daylight can make a huge difference. Many of us may be affected by low mood or SAD/Seasonal Affective Disorder during the darker Winter months. Lack of daylight can be a contributing factor. Any time spent outdoors in Winter can be helpful, especially if you can combine it with some activity. If you can manage a fifteen minute brisk walk, then you could walk as far as 1 mile. The average brisk walking speed is 2.5 to 4 miles an hour.

### INCENTIVE:

Some fresh air and some time to myself or with a friend/colleague.

### ACHIEVEMENT:

I've walked a mile.

## Batch cook.

If you've got a healthy lunch or dinner ready, it's easier to avoid healthier options. Alternatively, think of using a slow-cooker and having a meal ready for when you get home from work or your evening workout, rather than snacking or buying a ready-meal. Adding beans, pulses and vegetables to soups, stews and casseroles will increase the nutritional value of your meals.



### INCENTIVE:

I don't have to cook as it's already done and waiting for me.

### ACHIEVEMENT:

Making healthy, comforting meals.

## Get a workout buddy to help keep you focussed.

As well as training with your personal trainer, this could be a friend or even a fitness app on your phone.

Sharing your workouts or goals with someone else adds accountability and can increase motivation and support as you may find it harder to let someone else down rather than just yourself.



### INCENTIVE:

I've got someone I can talk to and we can help motivate each other.

### ACHIEVEMENT:

Working out together can be fun and motivating. Just make sure the workout itself is focussed and that you're not distracted too much by your conversation.

## Mix things up.

Doing the same thing can lead to boredom and decrease motivation. Trying something new can help keep exercise fresh and invigorating.

### INCENTIVE:

Change can be refreshing and uplifting.

### ACHIEVEMENT:

I'm challenging my body and mind in different ways.

## Indulge.

Yes, that's right. Indulge. The trick is how you indulge, and how often. This could be a long, hot soak in the bath or a day out somewhere new. It could also be cake, a glass of wine or something else viewed as not quite so beneficial.

Factoring in an occasional so called 'unhealthy' indulgence does help develop a healthier overall approach to food. Food shouldn't be viewed as good or bad, but as food, some of which is more beneficial and healthier than other foods. There are many recipes for healthier versions of traditionally viewed 'treat foods,' such as chocolate brownies made with prunes or mashed pulses. But even these, when consumed regularly and in large quantities, would prove to be unbeneficial.

The trick is to indulge now and again, enjoy it and look forward to the next time knowing that yes, you can. Think of how you can indulge yourself without food or alcohol or look at healthier versions of treat foods. If you crave something sweet, a few dried apricots, some homemade popcorn, or a couple of squares of dark chocolate may suffice.



### ACHIEVEMENT:

Enjoying treats in moderation.

These are only suggestions and starting points. Think about how you can improve your own mindset and make some tweaks to your lifestyle. Keep at it, one week at a time. Remember small changes when combined become a bigger overall change. And, before you know it, Winter will be giving way to Spring.

**References:**

1. <https://www.sciencealert.com/how-long-it-takes-to-break-a-habit-according-to-science>
2. <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>