

First Things First

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Shortly after lift-off, flight attendants regularly instruct passengers that in the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure they are to secure their own oxygen masks before assisting their young children with their masks.

Before I had children, I paid little attention to this admonishment as I'm sure is the case with most people. However, two children later I now have a greater appreciation for the goal behind that statement. What it means in a nutshell is if you fail to take care of yourself, you may not have the mental or physical capacity to care for those who count on you to take care of them. This instruction also has practical applications in everyday living. As women, especially mothers, we are caretakers. We take care of our husbands, our children, our parents, our girlfriends, our neighbors, and the list goes on.

We are oftentimes so busy taking care of everyone else that we forget to take care of ourselves. That is until it all catches up with us and we find ourselves lacking the capacity to take care of others because our tanks are empty. As a personal trainer, I am often asked by women what time of day is best to exercise. My answer is "whatever time of day will allow you to exercise most consistently." For the majority of women, this is first thing in the morning. It's the time of day when caretaking responsibilities are still asleep. It's also the time of day that offers the least number of excuses for not working out.

So now that you understand the importance of taking care of yourself first, let's talk about how to start. Most women are overwhelmed at the thought of beginning an exercise program. So, let's make it easy. Here are 4 easy steps that will help you to kick-start your exercise program:

1. Decide on a goal and write it down. Do you want to lose 10 pounds? Do you want to lose body fat? Do you want to lose a dress size? Do you want to fit into a certain outfit? Do you want to add muscle? Do you want to tone up? Do you want to run 5 miles? Whatever your goal, make sure that it's measurable. In other words, make sure that you can make periodic assessments that will let you know whether or not you are making progress towards your goal. Make sure that your goal is attainable as well. Don't give yourself a goal of losing 20 pounds in one month. That is not a realistic goal. With proper exercise and a sensible diet, you should only expect to lose 2-3 pounds per week at most.

2. Pick 3 days per week that you can commit to exercising 30-60 minutes each day. You can start out with 30 minutes and as your endurance increases, slowly increase your exercise duration. And remember, three 10-minute exercise sessions per day is just as effective as one 30-minute session. So, if you're having trouble isolating an entire 30-minute block of time, divide it into three 10-minute blocks.

3. Get started. Be honest with yourself. Do you have the self-motivation required to workout on your own? If you know from past experience that you're not likely to continue a workout program more than a few weeks on your own, then call in reinforcements. Hire a personal trainer, join a gym, or sign up for a boot camp. There are many options available to help those who are motivationally challenged to reach their personal health and fitness goals.

4. If you decide to go it alone, make an investment in a few pieces of portable exercise equipment if you don't already have a home gym. Here are a few that I consider to be indispensable for home workouts: a stability ball, 5 & 10 pound dumbbells, and exercise bands.

Are you feeling empowered to begin your exercise program? Are you ready to protect the time that you've set aside for your daily exercise with the intensity of a mama lion protecting her cubs? Great! Then you're on your way. Don't let another day go by. Get started today! And remember, the best way for you to take care of those you love is to first take care of yourself.

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