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Cooperative Extension Service

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3 Steps to a Healthier Lifestyle

Recently a good friend of mine asked me to design a program that would help get him into shape. This is a fairly common occurrence for me as most of my friends, at some point, have come to me for nutrition or exercise advice. While I always enjoy helping people live a healthier life, my approach to these types of questions has changed a bit recently. In the past I would often take the time to draw up elaborate exercise and eating regimens, only to see nearly all of them abandoned within a month of starting. Why is this? While these were great plans to get into shape, they were no more useful to my friends than any other fad diet or exercise program: they were not *sustainable*. It was not realistic to expect my friends to quickly adopt a completely new lifestyle.

Since realizing the flaw in my old ways I have developed a new method for designing specialized fitness programs. In fact, the same program that I recently sent to my friend will work for every one of you. I will even go as far as to say that my new and improved 3-step program is guaranteed to get anyone on the road to fitness. Are you ready for this?

Step 1. Find an activity you like.

Step 2. Do it.

Step 3. Repeat.

Are you disappointed? You shouldn't be. At least I didn't prescribe you 5 sets of lunges and enough squats to ensure you wouldn't walk for a week (apologies to those I may have shared this plan with in the past). My point is that to experience a lifetime of the benefits of physical activity we need to find something we truly enjoy. Sounds really simple, right? Then why has 'exercise' become a bad word, and why are so many of us suffering through workouts that we don't enjoy? Finding an activity you truly enjoy helps ensure that staying active does not become an obligation, and helps you to make time for activity in your busy schedule. Staying healthy and being active doesn't need to be a chore—the decision is yours.

This topic has become so important that the federal government has released their first comprehensive guidelines on physical activity (found at www.health.gov/paguidelines). They recommend that adults get at least 2.5 hours/week of moderate-intensity physical activity and also include muscle-strengthening activities 2 times/week. These activities can be anything from walking, bicycling, and aerobics to general gardening or snow removal. Keep in mind these guidelines are based on the amount of activity for substantial health benefits, but lesser amounts can still be beneficial, and any activity is better than none. So start today: find something you enjoy, do it, and live a healthier life. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*