



## Motivation for Diet and Exercise

Getting in shape through diet and exercise is rarely a linear process; even the most dedicated person is bound to have setbacks.

“But by setting realistic goals and facing your fears and stumbling blocks, you can get fit and improve your health as a result,” says Michael Gerrish, an exercise physiologist, psychotherapist and author of *The Mind-Body Makeover Project*.

According to Gerrish, addressing your inner obstacles is the key to success.

He offers the following suggestions for using your mind to make over your body and your life.

Expect to question your goals as time goes on. “Remember that everyone has lots of ups and downs on the way to reaching their goals, and doubting your goal doesn’t mean it’s not worthwhile,” says Gerrish. “If you resume some old unhealthy habits for a while, simply focus on getting back into your program and doing the best you can.”

### Trust Your Instincts

Learn to trust your instincts and don’t judge (or ignore) your moods. “Don’t feel compelled to shake feelings off. Instead, heed the message they give,” says Gerrish. “Let them act as a guide for determining how and when to shift gears.”

Stay focused on what success means to you; forget about what other people think. “Don’t use societal standards as a basis for setting your goals,” says Gerrish. “If you do, you’ll set yourself up to feel like you’ve failed regardless of what you achieve.”

Learn from what you see others do, but remember you’re unique. Resist the urge to compete and compare — it’ll send you down the wrong path. “Keep things in perspective, because we don’t get dealt the same cards — genes, athletic ability or metabolism,” says Gerrish.

### Set Realistic Goals

Be more modest and set “mini-goals” you can reach in a few days or weeks, rather than setting lofty, unrealistic goals.

“Achieving success breeds confidence and ensures your efforts are fueled to stick,” says Gerrish. “For example, instead of setting a goal of losing three inches off your waist, strive to lose one inch in a month.”

Stop to celebrate every success before you set any more goals. “If you have a habit of raising the bar every time you achieve a goal, take more time to savor your success,” says Gerrish. “You need to acknowledge how far you’ve come to increase how far you’ll go.”

Stop criticizing your body. Think about what you say to yourself and the words you typically choose. Are they mostly self-defeating words such as “I’m not” or “I can’t”? Replace all negative statements and thoughts with ones like “I am” and “I can.”

You’re going to fall off your diet and exercise program now and then, so prepare to climb back on. “All of us go off our diets and miss a workout once in a while, but if you climb ‘back on your horse’ when you do, over time you’ll stop falling off,” says Gerrish. “With practice and patience you’ll learn how to center yourself and control the reins.”





## Do You Have a Healthy Attitude?

A positive attitude depends on genetic influences, health habits, social connections, emotional support and spiritual involvement. You can't change some of these factors, but you can learn new ways of thinking and behavior to help maintain a positive mind-set — and live a healthier life.

“Your beliefs about a particular situation are very important in terms of your immune system’s response to stress. The more optimistic you are, the higher the level and function of key immune cells in your body,” says psychologist Suzanne Segerstrom, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the University of Kentucky. “While a stronger immune system doesn’t necessarily mean you feel better, it does affect how easily you get sick or how well you respond to or recover from illness or surgery.”

So does having a good connection to family, friends and acquaintances. In general, social ties guard against stress and contribute to a positive attitude. “A strong social support system encourages better health habits,” says psychiatrist Redford B. Williams, M.D., director of behavioral research at Duke University Medical Center. Company can also ward off depression.

Experts warn, however, that some people feel more comfortable being alone. If forging ties to family and friends actually stresses you out, you’re better off respecting your need for solitude rather than trying to become someone you’re not, suggests Dr. Segerstrom.

“As you practice healthy habits, you affect your health positively,” says Dr. Gordon. “You soon feel the results of your efforts. That reinforces not only a positive attitude, but also the control you now have over your life, to make it the best it can be.”

## How Stress Hurts

Some of us handle stressful situations better than others. When you succumb to stress, you trigger a process that shows the link between your mental and physical health:

- When you’re under stress, your brain increases production of CRF (corticotropin-releasing factor).
- CRF stimulates your hypothalamus to increase the production of ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone).

- ACTH tells the adrenal gland to produce cortisol, an immune-suppressing hormone.
- The more cortisol, the weaker your immune cells — and the more susceptible you are to illness.

## Positive Steps

A positive attitude and healthy social behaviors can affect your health. Here’s what you can do:

- **Evaluate and defuse stressful situations.** Weigh what’s important and what’s not. Take a few deep breaths.
- **Try meditation.** It may be difficult at first to sit still and do nothing, but you’ll be amazed at how relaxed you can feel.
- **Get in touch.** Cultivate a network of friends and acquaintances. Make sure there’s someone you feel close to, a confidant who can provide support.
- **Let go. Express your feelings.** When you allow yourself room to feel and show emotions, you reduce stress and a tendency toward pessimism. But don’t dwell on your emotions.
- **Take care of yourself.** Get plenty of sleep, eat healthful foods and exercise.
- **Team up with your doctor.** When you’re actively involved in medical decisions, you take control over your body and your health.

