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How Parents Can Get Inspired - Why Is It So Hard to Exercise?

By Alice Oglethorpe

Anyone can have a hard time making exercise part of their routine. But throw kids into the mix, and it can almost feel impossible.

Why is it so hard for busy parents to exercise? Often it comes down to motivation.

“Parents typically don’t get enough sleep and spend their days constantly responding to needs of another human being,” says Dominique Wakefield, a personal trainer and wellness coach based in Berrien Springs, MI. “That combination is emotionally and physically draining, which leads to less motivation for physical activity.”

It’s easy to put exercise on your “wouldn’t it be nice” list, but fitness is too important to keep on the back burner.

“There are so many health benefits that come from being physically active, like reducing your risk for chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease, but it’s especially important for parents to stay fit,” Wakefield says. “Plus, working out can give you more energy and reduce stress -- extra benefits that parents especially need.”

Another reason to be an active parent: You'll set a great example for your kid. “Children learn behavior by what they see around them, and it starts early,” Wakefield says. “So when kids see their parents exercise, they become likelier to be active as adults.”

Try these four tricks to tap into some surprising sources of motivation, making it easier than ever to reach your fitness goals.

Become an early bird. Willpower isn't an unlimited resource -- the more you use it throughout the day, the less you have left at night to force yourself to go to the gym. That's why some people get in their workouts in the morning, when their drive is at its maximum levels.

And that's not the only reason to become a morning exerciser. "If you wait until later in the day, it's a lot likelier that things will pop up and get in the way of working out," Wakefield says. "Your kids go to bed early, so do the same. That way you can wake up and work out, knowing that you've already done something for yourself that day."

Get other people involved. "Parents love family time, which is why that often gets priority over exercising," Wakefield says. Combine the two and you'll be motivated to move since you're doing something you love -- spending time with your kids. There are a lot of physical activities that are good for all ages. Go play Frisbee in the park, play tag, go on a bike ride, or work in the garden.

If you want to do something that isn't kid-friendly, find a friend who likes the same things you do, like running or spinning. "It provides accountability," Wakefield says.

"You won't want to let the other person down by not showing up to exercise. Plus, chatting with a friend makes working out more enjoyable!"

Set smaller goals. "Most of the time, people don't work out because it seems like an intimidating, daunting task," says Erin McGill, senior director of product development for the National Academy of Sports Medicine. "But you don't have to spend an hour at the gym to be active -- there are lots of little ways to make everyday activities and chores just a little harder. And it's so much easier to fit 10 minutes of movement into your day every few hours than find a larger chunk of time in your schedule."

<u>A few ideas:</u> Take one bag of groceries in at a time from the car, do sets of 10 squats or pushups in between loads of laundry, or take stairs two at a time to get your heart rate up.

Keep equipment front and center. Sometimes a simple thing like putting your workout gear in your living room can be key to feeling more motivated.

"Out of sight, out of mind is true, but so is the opposite," Wakefield says. "Put things like resistance bands or an exercise ball in a visible place, and you'll get that extra nudge to actually use them. Every time you see them, you'll get reminded."

Retirement Isn't Free - But Your 401(k) Match Is

Retirement savers, are you making the most of your company's 401(k) match? Even though a quarter of the year has gone by, you can take steps to make the most of your ompany's 401(k) match. Each year, Americans leave billions of dollars in 401(k) company matches on the table. Here's how to avoid becoming one of the estimated one-of-four employees who misses out on free money.

Understand the Value of an Employer Match

A 401(k) or similar employer-sponsored retirement plan can be a powerful resource for building a secure retirement-and an employer match can add a substantial amount to an employee's nest egg. Let's assume you are 30 years old, make $40,000 and contribute 3 percent of your salary ($1,200) to your 401(k). And, only for the sake of this example, let's also assume you continue to make the same salary and same contribution each year until you are 65. After 35 years, you will have contributed $42,000 to your 401(k).

Now let's assume you get a match from your employer. One of the most common matches is a dollar-for-dollar match up to 3 percent of the employee's salary. Taking full advantage of the match literally doubles your savings, even assuming no increase in the value of your investments: Instead of having set aside $42,000 by the time you retire, you will have set aside $84,000.

That's $42,000 in free money. Looked at another way, it's a no-cost way for you to increase your contributions by 100 percent.

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Recognize the Tax Advantages

In addition to offering the potential for free money through a match, employer-sponsored retirement plans can give you significant tax advantages. With a traditional 401(k), for instance, your contributions are made with pre-tax dollars-meaning the money goes into your retirement account before it gets taxed. In addition, your contributions, any match your employer provides, and any earnings in the account (including interest, dividends and capital gains) are all tax-deferred . That means you don't owe any income tax until you withdraw from your account, typically after you retire.

With pre-tax contributions, every dollar you save will reduce your current taxable income by an equal amount, which means you will owe less in income taxes for the year. But your take-home pay will go down by less than a dollar. Here's how that works. Building on the example above, the $1,200 you contribute to a traditional 401(k) lowers your federal income tax bill for the year because you owe taxes on only $38,800 rather than $40,000. If you're single, your total federal tax bill using the 2017 IRS tax rate schedule is $3,848 instead of $4,028-a tax savings of $180.

Matches and Roth 401(k)s

A growing number of employers offer a Roth 401(k) option, where employees make contributions with after-tax money-and neither the contributions nor any earnings they generate are taxed down the road when the money is withdrawn. While employers can match Roth-directed contributions, IRS rules require that all matched funds reside in a pre-tax account, just like employer-contributed matching funds in a traditional 401(k) account. As a consequence of this rule, the matching funds your employer contributes to your Roth 401(k) (and any earnings on those funds) will be taxed as ordinary income when you withdraw them. If you contribute to both a Roth and a traditional 401(k), the match is applied first to the traditional 401(k) amount and then, if necessary, to any Roth-directed funds.

Play Catch Up

Not all employers provide matches-so if you are uncertain, ask your company's human resources or benefits department. Find out what the maximum percent of salary your company will match-and increase your contribution amount if you find that you are not contributing enough to achieve the full match. Also be aware that even contributing at the match threshold may not be enough to fund a secure retirement. Most investment professionals recommend a savings level of 10 percent or more to generate enough replacement income during retirement to maintain your standard of living-and to start saving at this level as soon as you begin working.Use FINRA's Save the Max calculator to see if you are on track to save the $18,000 maximum ($24,000 if you are 50 or older) in your 401(k) this year.

The bottom line is that it makes no sense to pass up free money. A company match:

- Works out to a 100 percent increase in the amount of money you set aside each year that is matched, without incurring any risk-and remember you can, and probably should, contribute more than the match threshold.
- Offers the potential for tax-deferred compounding of that larger sum over time-specifically, your contributions plus the amount of the company's match.
- Reduces the risk of falling short of the savings necessary to fund a secure retirement.

For more information about smart strategies for saving for retirement, visit the Retirement section of FINRA.org .

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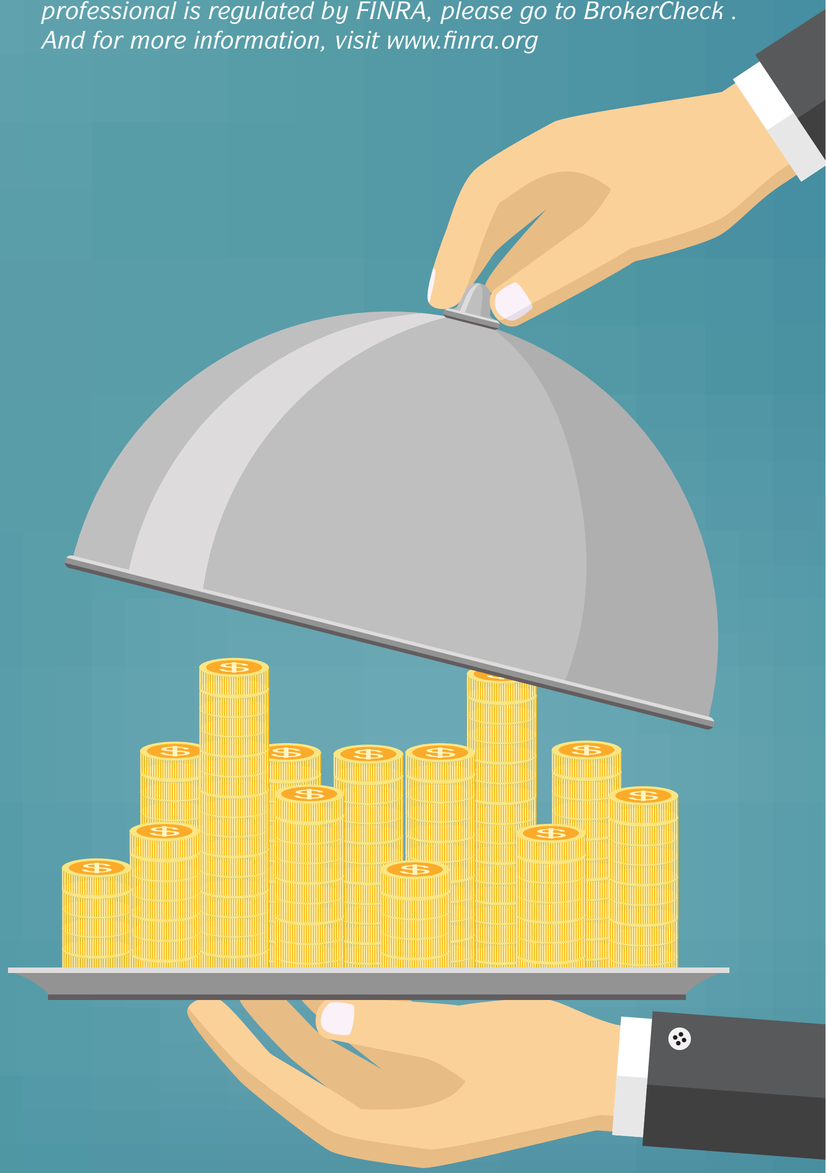

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