**7 Habits of Highly Effective Exercisers**

Day after day, working out can feel like a drill. Yet fitness devotees somehow muster the motivation to get exercise regularly. Steal their tricks and (almost) never miss a workout again.

By Jennifer Soong



**Get Motivated, Stay Motivated**

Five or six days every week, Sue Wolcott, 41, hits the treadmill in her basement. It's a habit that started after she named her exercise machine Ripley. "It's as in 'Believe it or not, I'm working out,'" says Sue, a teacher in Grand Island, New York. "I would never skip out on meeting a friend, so I decided to treat my treadmill like a person." It's become, ahem, a running joke in her set; one pal now refers to her own treadmill as Dusty. "It's just us being silly, but when I'm asked if I've seen Ripley, I really love answering yes," Sue says.

Despite what you may think, the trick to exercising regularly isn't finding your inner enforcer. Rather, "it's getting creative and tapping your natural motivations," says Kelly McGonigal, PhD, a health psychologist and fitness instructor at Stanford. We asked women who work up a sweat almost every day for their stick-with-it solutions. Check out our seven fail-proof favorites.

**1. Don't put away your gear.**

From the moment she rises, Kristina Monét Cox, 26, has exercise on the brain. That's because the first things she sees are her sneakers and workout clothes. "I've got them next to the bed in plain sight," says Kristina, the CEO of a communications firm in Houston. "I've also got dumbbells right where I can see them in the bathroom, and a [balance ball](https://www.fitnessmagazine.com/workout/exercise-ball/best-stability-ball-exercises/), a yoga mat, and a jump rope strategically placed throughout the house." Forgetting to exercise is never her problem.

Why it works: Visual cues are a wake-up call to your brain. "We all have competing priorities like work, family, chores. Sometimes we need a reminder to keep exercise at the forefront," McGonigal says.

Do it yourself: If you don't have the space to display your gear (or if it'll mess with your decor), choose just one or two prime locations that you'll never miss. Better yet, "pick places where you spend a lot of time and can use the equipment, like by the TV or the phone," says Amanda Visek, PhD, assistant professor of sport and exercise psychology at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

**2. Turn your commute into a workout.**

On days that Monica Vazquez, 27, a master trainer for New York Sports Clubs in New York City, can't do her usual run, she stuffs her essentials — keys, cash, credit card, phone and ID — into a fanny pack and jogs home from work instead. "Running is a great workout, but it's also great transportation," she says. "Sometimes I get home even earlier than I normally do taking the subway."

Why it works: Running, walking, or biking somewhere you have to go anyway makes exercise feel time-efficient. "And you don't have to carve out another part of your day for it," says Michelle Fortier, PhD, professor of health sciences at the University of Ottawa. "It's an effective strategy for people who are busy from morning to night."

Do it yourself: Your logistics may be a bit more complex if you drive to work or don't have good public transportation at your disposal. Maybe you can carpool in the morning or park your car a mile from the office and speed walk the distance to and from your job. If you don't have a safe place at work to stash your stuff, invest in a lightweight backpack with waist and chest straps (we like Patagonia's Pocket Pack; $69, [patagonia.com](http://patagonia.com/)) or swap your purse for a fanny pack on days that you plan to run home.

**3. Invest in more workout clothes.**

For years, Gina Cancellaro, 36, a paralegal in Bronxville, New York, owned only one sports bra. "I didn't want to spend the money," she admits. Then one day she realized that this was a barrier to her working out: "My usual excuse was that it wasn't clean." So she went to the mall and loaded up on bras — and cute tops and shorts. Now she exercises five days a week.

Why it works: "Having the right clothing doesn't just remove a hurdle; it reinforces your identity as an exerciser," McGonigal says. "And when exercising is an integral part of your identity, it isn't optional anymore. It's just part of your life." Plus, you've got to wear those adorable new workout clothes somewhere.

Do it yourself: Stock up on at least a week's worth of gym outfits to eliminate any last-minute hand washing in the sink. Think of it as spending now to save yourself grief later. To truly simplify your life, you may want to get several of the same tops and bottoms. "There's no time-consuming decision making that way," says Patricia Moreno, a FITNESS advisory board member and body and mind coach for the Web site SatiLife. "Look for basics that are comfy and show off your assets — whether that's your shoulders or your abs — so you feel good just suiting up."

**4. Log your workouts online.**

A surprising thing happened when Michelle Busack, 38, started to post her exercise routines on Facebook: Old friends from high school whom she hadn't seen in years began writing comments. "At first they just congratulated me," says Michelle, a nurse in Columbus, Indiana. "But now we've bonded over this and they're my biggest cheerleaders." In fact, if she doesn't post a workout update for a few days, they'll demand to know what's going on.

Why it works: Social networking sites like Facebook and DailyMile offer an extra layer of social support. "You've got potentially all of your online contacts holding you accountable," says Michele Olson, PhD, a FITNESS advisory board member and professor of exercise science at Auburn University at Montgomery in Alabama.

Do it yourself: Choose a social platform or online fitness tool. Then get in the habit of chronicling your progress after your workout every day so that your friends know when you usually exercise — and when you've slacked off. Post your minutes, your miles, or whatever motivates you most.

**5. Involve your causes.**

A political junkie, Rachel Simpson, 31, decided to use her partisan loyalties to help herself [lose weight](https://www.fitnessmagazine.com/videos/exercises/lose-weight.htm). She vowed to exercise four times a week; for each week she failed to do so, she agreed on Stickk (a Web site that helps people stay committed to their goals) to donate $25 to the library of a former president she didn't like. "Suddenly, working out was mandatory!" says the recent law school graduate in Minneapolis. Three months later she was down 16 pounds — and hadn't betrayed her party.

Why it works: Strong feelings, especially antipathies, have a multiplier effect. "Losing $10 to an enemy feels like $20 or even $30, so you push yourself harder," says Dean Karlan, PhD, professor of economics at Yale and a founder of Stickk.

Do it yourself: On Stickk, you can pledge to give a minimum of $5 to a charity or an individual (you provide the name and address) you like if you meet your goal or to one you dislike if you fall short. (Your credit card is charged.) Or sign up to raise money for a charity on the Web site Plus 3 Network: You pick from a list of goals that have prearranged corporate sponsors; if you meet yours, they'll pay the charity.

**6. Make friends with class regulars.**

The thought of spending time with her Spinning buddies pushes Marie Bruce, 24, a coach and events director in Austin, Texas, to her morning class three times a week. "We're a tight-knit group," she says. "If I'm grumpy when I walk in, they don't let me stay that way for long." During the past six years, she's grown close to her extended gym family; in fact, they're invited to her upcoming wedding.

Why it works: It's smart time management. "You get your social fix while doing physical activity," Fortier says. Both boost health, and the better you feel, the likelier you are to want to exercise.

Do it yourself: Some classes foster friendships more than others, so you'll have to do some sleuthing. "Arrive early and observe," suggests Moreno, who teaches IntenSati, a mix of aerobics, dance, yoga, and kickboxing. "Are people staking out their places in silence, or are they chatting and laughing and flitting around the room?" Another good sign: The instructor seems to know everyone's name.

**7. Create an exercise contest.**

Taking a page from *The Biggest Loser*, Elizabeth Kirat, 35, and her friends are embroiled in a sweaty battle to see who can diet and exercise off the most weight. Every six weeks, they call the winner. "There's money at stake, but it's really the bragging rights that keep you returning to the treadmill," says Elizabeth, a photographer in Denville, New Jersey. So far she's dropped 10 pounds.

Why it works: Competition turns a solitary pursuit into a fun group one. "By trying to beat each other, you're actually pulling each other along," Visek says. "Even playful heckling validates that you're working toward a similar goal."

Do it yourself: The contest can be for anything: most steps walked, most hours logged at the gym, highest percentage of body weight lost. Aim for anywhere from four to 10 participants. "Fewer than that, and one person who's not really trying can hobble the group. More than that, and it's hard for everyone to interact," Visek explains. To keep group members engaged, limit the competition to six-week rounds and have weekly check-ins, when people put money in the jar. "Your incentive is regularly refreshed in your mind that way," Visek says. Once everyone has agreed to the rules, let the games begin!