

## ***Shift your Exercise Mindset***

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***Your core beliefs about something can impact every aspect of your life. How do you feel about exercise?***

Greg Walton, a psychologist at Stanford University, conducts research on how brief, one-dose interventions can change your mind in a major way. In one study, he spent one hour with freshman at an Ivy League university. He wanted to address the way that most students feel that they don't belong, and help students understand that this is a normal feeling when you are in a new environment, and that it can change. First, he had the students read how upperclassman had initially felt out-of-place, and then learned to fit in and belong. Then, the students were asked to write their own essay about how their current experience was similar to what the upperclassmen had expressed. Then, the students were asked to read their essays for an informational video that would be used in orientation the following year, to support new freshman in adjusting to college. That was it – one hour – to hear how others felt and reflect how they felt, about belonging at college. He tracked them throughout their educational experience – and found that the students who participated had better physical health, better academic performance, and increased happiness throughout their college experience. In other research, Walton has found that this brief intervention is better at reducing college retention than a financial scholarship, and it can support female students in traditionally male science programs.

Other researchers have conducted similar experiments in a variety of settings, and discovered similarly amazing results. For instance, brief training about stress management (helping you view stress as something you can handle and learn from, rather than something that overwhelms you) or brief training for impoverished high school students in high crime areas (focusing on how you can make choices about who you are and what you want to do with your life) can yield long-term positive outcomes.

The bottom line is that what you think about something has powerful effects on how you feel, how you behave, how you think. And often, the core belief you have about something may be something you have never even thought about or questioned – it's a deep-seated belief that affects you, without you even realizing it.

I'd like you to take a minute and reflect: what is your core belief about exercise?

My guess is that you've absorbed the current belief about exercise that you probably see every day in the media: Exercise is a health-promoting activity that you need to do. Being inactive sets you up for a variety of illnesses and chronic health conditions.

Which is, of course, true. But the problem is that it's not particularly motivating. Research has shown that guilt-based motivation – being told that something is good for you and what will happen to you if you don't do it – isn't motivating. For instance, research studies show that when the warning labels on cigarettes are more graphic (for instance, a picture of someone dying from lung cancer), people who smoke actually smoke more – the graphic label makes them anxious, and they turn to their cigarettes to soothe their fear. To put this in perspective for a time-strapped, working mom who knows she should exercise – you read an article about how important exercise is – you know you should exercise to reduce

your risk for heart disease and breast cancer and diabetes – but you can't figure out how to fit one more thing into your over packed schedule – you feel stressed – and instead of exercising you grab a sweet treat and crash on the couch for a bit of mind-relaxation through a favorite TV show. Sound familiar?

You already know that exercise is good for you. You don't have a knowledge gap.

***\*What you need is a mindset shift.\****

This week, every time you think of exercise – what you should do, why you should do it, how on earth you're going to fit it into your schedule, blah blah blah. Stop. Just stop.

Say to yourself, "I exercise because it's fun and it feels good." Take a few breaths and absorb that message.

You don't actually have to exercise this week – just work on how you think about exercise. The more you think about exercise as fun – the more likely you are to actually do it – and the more experience you'll have with it being fun. And that means that when you do exercise – do something you enjoy – something that will actually reinforce the idea of exercise as fun.

Maybe the Cardio Salsa class? Or a walk with the dog around the park? Playing tag with your kids? A black-out spin class to Pink Floyd? What did you have fun doing as a kid? Hula-hoop, jump rope, hop scotch, riding a scooter? It all counts as exercise! Find something you can truly say in the doing, "this is FUN!" And then, have fun doing it.



Kimberlee Bethany Bonura, PhD, is #TheFitEnoughMom. Dr. Bonura is an exercise scientist, an Experienced-Registered Yoga Teacher with the Yoga Alliance, a certified personal trainer, and a certified group fitness instructor, and a working mom of two. Her mission is to help everyone realize that fitness can be fun and accessible – no stress, no guilt, and definitely no pain!