

Enjoying your workout is the best motivation

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

It's an all too familiar story: Despite resolutions to lose weight, get in shape, or simply stay fit, it's all too easy to fall off the exercise band wagon. Studies estimate that up to 50% of gym members drop out within the first six months of a new exercise program. But why is it so hard to stay motivated?

"Training plans are based on sport science, rather than psychological factors, and we thought that there must be a different way to analyze this

behavior," says Benjamin Wienke, the first author of the study and a doctoral student at Humboldt University in Berlin. "So we decided to look at whether there could be an emotional explanation."

Wienke and his collaborator, Darko Jekauc, interviewed a group of 24 men and women about their exercise habits, lifestyle, and their preferred activities. Unsurprisingly, their results quickly showed that enjoyment was a common factor amongst those who kept a regular exercise routine. But the next question was, exactly what factors trigger this enjoyment?

Further analysis of the interview responses revealed four major aspects that translated into the positive emotions that people associated with their sporting activities: perceived competence, perceived social interaction, novel experiences, and physical exertion.

Perceived competence - the sense of achievement, mastery, or winning - was at the top of the list for both men and women. Next on the list, social interactions also ranked as one of the most enjoyable aspects of their activities, and this ranged from team sports to simply meeting friends at the gym.

Participants additionally reported that they were motivated by the adventure of trying new activities as well as the reward of physical exertion. Several participants described the happy sense of being physically exhausted after their workouts and how this could help them distance themselves from the day-to-day worries of work and life.

Wienke's next steps will be to confirm these findings in a larger study group, but he believes that the incorporation of these four factors into exercise programs could help people exercise more regularly.

"This could be a starting point to change the focus of sport programs to finding what people love doing, with less focus on technical data like

counting calories," says Wienke. "These four factors could help increase adherence, and people would enjoy their programs more and achieve their goals better."

More information: Benjamin Wienke et al, A Qualitative Analysis of Emotional Facilitators in Exercise, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01296](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01296)

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