

Five tips to help you get outdoors to work out

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It's never a bad time to start an exercise routine or get back to one. And with warmer weather and more daylight on the horizon, there's ample opportunity to get outside for your daily walk, bike ride or team sport.

The benefits of exercise are also well established. Research on regular physical activity points toward improvements in mental health, reduction in cancer recurrence, improved management of diabetes and healthier

pregnancies, among many others.

But getting outdoors for fitness can often be challenging, whether because of harsh [weather](#) in winter, smoke-filled air in summer or psychological barriers that can sap your [motivation](#).

Amber Mosewich, associate professor in the Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation, studies sport psychology with a focus on athlete stress, coping, emotions, and the psychological skills and resources athletes need to perform at their best while keeping a high level of well-being.

Mosewich has five tips to help you get exercise in the great outdoors and be mindful of your [mental health](#) while you're at it.

Be adaptable

Outdoor environments can be unpredictable. Frigid temperatures and frozen surfaces in winter can seriously limit the ways you can move safely. Wildfires can fill the air with harsh smoke in the summer, and hot days can increase your risk of heatstroke.

It's important to plan ahead for how you might cope and adapt to environmental hazards, says Mosewich. For example, adapting to a smoky day by having a backup activity in another location that doesn't derail your physical activity plan is a simple strategy to keep yourself moving.

Mosewich also recommends building new skills and seeking out resources to learn ways you can build flexibility into your workout routine.

"Oftentimes athletes need to be quite adaptable to meet the demands that

are placed on them. The same goes for anyone looking to make exercise part of their everyday life."

Practice self-compassion

Self-compassion is an attitude based on acceptance, support and a non-judgmental view of yourself.

"Self-compassion involves being kind and understanding instead of being harsh and self-critical," Mosewich explains. "A self-compassionate approach to fitness also recognizes that other people are in a similar experience."

"It involves keeping thoughts and feelings in a balance, as opposed to ruminating or ignoring the situation entirely."

Whether you're starting a new fitness routine or trying to get into one after a disruption, a self-compassionate approach can be important to help you maintain your focus despite different demands or navigate how you might overcome difficult events, she adds.

"On a surface level it may seem like [self-compassion](#) offers a way to cut yourself too much slack or that you might be complacent," she says, "but in fact, it allows you to focus more on doing what would be in your best interest."

Set goals

Keeping measurable and attainable goals allows you to manage your time effectively, based on what you choose to enjoy and expectations about what you're getting out of a workout.

"Making decisions that align with pushing you forward towards that goal is a useful psychological skill," Mosewich notes.

There is evidence that self-compassion can support people in working toward their exercise goals by helping them recognize personal limitations and unhealthy behavior.

Cultivate compassionate motivation

Increasing motivation is important to reaching your outdoor fitness potential, but some kinds of motivation tend to work better than others over the long term, says Mosewich.

For example, she [cites research](#) showing that greater intrinsic motivation is associated with self-compassion among women who work out. Self-compassion is also associated with lower external motivation and ego goal orientation, serving as a buffer against feelings of obligation and self-criticism in [exercise](#).

"A [study](#) on the psychology of self-compassion also points towards the practice as an effective method to increase self-improvement motivation after making a mistake," Mosewich points out.

"If something doesn't go as planned, a self-compassionate person will seek out ways to improve and do better in the future."

Accept different emotional responses

Staying in tune with changes in your emotions is an important skill to learn to build more acceptance and resilience in uncertain environments or events.

"There may be some nervousness or anticipation in advance of a new workout or when undertaking something new," Mosewich explains.
"These are normal emotions and are something we can work through."

Identifying how you tend to react emotionally to a challenge, and how that affects you, can put you in a better position to have strategies in place to counter those reactions, says Mosewich. The strategy will depend on the emotion and the situation.

"For example, nervousness might be reduced by gathering information about the activity, or by doing some breathing exercises. Coping strategies vary—it is important that people have a range of strategies and evaluate their effectiveness."

Provided by University of Alberta

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