

Watch TV and Get Fit

(From August 2014 newsletter)

Fall is a great season for TV fans – tons of shows return with fresh seasons and great new programs make their debut. As the months go on, the unfolding plots aren't the only thing that keeps us indoors and glued to our TV screens. As the beautiful fall weather creeps slowly towards the cold winds of winter, it's easy to find ourselves indoors and inactive. Don't let these forces keep you from your health goals! In the next two newsletters we will present various ways to use TV time to get active. In this issue we present easy ways to get started.

Redefine TV commercial time as exercise time

In the average hour length television show we watch about 20 minutes of commercials. We watch about eight minutes of commercials during the average 30 minute show. This is prime time to work towards your fitness goals.

Is that enough time to make an impact? Yes! The [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#) recommends *accumulating* at least 150 minutes of moderate activity each week. This means that with just half an hour a day for five days a week you can reduce risk of diseases, injuries, and depression while increasing fitness and health. And this activity does not have to be done in one block. It can be accumulated over the course of the day. Melanie Pridemore, owner/operator of [6 Dimensions Wellness](#), a local wellness coaching and personal training company, explains that “research has shown it comes down to smaller chunks of time.” If you exercise during 20 minutes of commercials, you only need to find another 10 minutes of activity to meet your daily goal. This ten minutes could come from wide variety of activities, such as parking a little further from the office, or taking a short walk at lunch.

What is moderate activity? If you are new to exercise, moderate activity is a good place to start. According to [Harvard School of Public Health](#), moderate activities get you moving hard enough to burn off three to six times as much energy per minute as you do when you are sitting quietly. A good example is brisk walking: if you walk fast enough to cover a mile in 15 – 20 minutes you are walking

moderately. Other examples are raking the lawn, ballroom dancing, moderate housework, and leisurely bicycling.

How to use TV commercial time

Now that you know how accumulating moderate activity works, exercising while watching TV makes sense. “Five, ten, 15 minutes counts, and can be more feasible,” says Pridemore. With that in mind, put those commercials to use. Here are some commercial break fitness activities:

Step it up: If you like to walk, take some laps around your home. Just be sure to steer clear of the refrigerator! Walking in place is also a good option. Pridemore recommends that beginners start slow and “progress into intensity”. Ways to increase walking intensity include raising your knees a bit higher or increasing your pace. If you are looking for more challenge, go up and down the stairs. If you don’t have a staircase handy, setting up a sturdy box or container to step up and down from can serve just as well.

Push and pull to build strength: Here are some easy ways to strengthen your entire body without leaving the room.

- Back and legs: Use resistance bands to do exercise for your back and legs, such as seated rows, leg extensions and more can be done easily with inexpensive resistance bands. Spark People has an excellent [resistance band program](#).
- Arms shoulders and chest: These can be used to perform biceps curls, shoulder presses and other upper body exercises. You can make inexpensive weights by using cans from your kitchen, or filling plastic bottles with sand.
- Core muscles: Strengthen your abdominal and lower back muscles the floor. Start with [easy activities like partial curls, pelvic tilts, or modified knee planks](#). Progress as you get stronger.
- Total body: Go to the wall to condition most of your major muscle groups with two simple exercises on the wall. [Wall pushups](#) are a great way to strengthen your upper body, and are much easier than traditional pushups. [Wall sits](#) strengthen your lower body.
- Use the couch: If your couch is reasonably firm, you can use it as an exercise platform. Many muscle strengthening activities can be done right on the couch: modified pushups, bridges, and arm dips are just a few. [Prevention Magazine](#) and the [Chicago Tribune](#) articles illustrate how to do these. You

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can also do “chair squats”: Simply stand up and sit down. Repeat continuously till the commercial break is over. If you get winded, do ten in a row, then rest for 20 - 30 seconds.

Multi-task: Be extra productive, and get creative with some housework chores – call it cleaning with passion. Just be sure you do moderately intense chores. Moderately intense housework includes vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, and washing windows. If you want to do a light intensity chore like dusting, add extra movement like dancing at the same time.

How about the rest of the show?

You don’t have to stop with the commercials. Here are some fun ways to be active during the actual show:

Make it a game: A creative way to be more involved in your show and still accumulate moderate activity is to make a [TV fitness game](#). This is especially fun if you are watching TV with other people. First select a show you like. Then think of things that happen often in that show and commit to doing a particular exercise each time that thing happens. Pridemore gives the example of any time someone cries in *Grey’s Anatomy*, try some jumping jacks. Some great game examples can be found at [Tumblr](#) - tailor them to work for you!

Really dance with the stars: If you love music-based shows like *The Voice* and *Dancing with the Stars* why not dance along with the action? Have some fun while you get active. You don’t have to do the same moves as the pros – just keep moving and have fun!

Friendly competition: If you love football and a little good-natured competition, make a game out of it with your friends or family. Whenever your team scores a touchdown, your friends do some sit ups. When your team is scored on, it’s your turn! Instead of letting the game decide who buys the wings next time, turn it into a chance for both you and others to stay healthy. This can work for all sorts of shows where there is a choice to make – such as who wins *Chopped*, which house they choose in *House Hunters*, or who is eliminated in *The Bachelorette*.

Keep it up!

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Using the commercial breaks of TV shows can really add up, putting you on track for the recommended 150 minutes per week. Not only will you reap great health benefits, but you will efficiently use time that might otherwise go wasted. You'll accomplish a lot without giving up a chunk of your day.

In the next issue we will present a detailed TV - time fitness routine, and describe how to increase intensity as your fitness improves.