

# “My Dog Ate My Running Shoes” - Challenges of Excuses for not Exercising

Michael L. Sachs, Ph.D., Bruce S. Cohen, Ph.D., Allison K. Ives, M.S.

## ABSTRACT

Excuses for not exercising are the professional and personal bane of our existence as exercise psychologists - they are everywhere, and number in the hundreds. While not everyone makes excuses for not exercising (there are many who exercise regularly and making excuses doesn't even come into consideration), the majority of individuals who exercise (which, alas, is a minority of the population) do use them at least occasionally. This study examined 50 of the most commonly used excuses as well as strategies for countering these excuses. There were 92 respondents solicited from various exercise and sport psychology related electronic listservs, mean age of 33.6 years (SD=12.35), 80% females/20% males, and 53.8% indicating they were currently engaged in exercise and sport psychology consulting. The most common excuses encountered were “not enough time” (n=52), followed by “too tired” (n=14) and “other responsibilities” (n=12). The most challenging excuses noted were “no time” (n=29), with “too tired” and “not in the mood” second (n=14). Tables with the 50 excuses in order for commonness of occurrence and challenging status are provided on the poster. Of particular importance were the strategies recommended for addressing these excuses. For example, for “not enough time,” “making a schedule/plan,” “waking up early,” and “figuring out time spent watching tv” were suggested. For “too much work,” “exercise will lead to greater productivity,” “using exercise as a work break,” and “committing to exercise/scheduling exercise” were suggested. The excellent strategies suggested by the study respondents for each of the 50 excuses are provided on the poster. These recommendations, from exercise and sport psychologists engaged in research and applied work in these areas, are invaluable in addressing the significant challenges addressing excuses made for not exercising!

## INTRODUCTION

It is clear that we are in the midst of a sedentariness epidemic of obesity proportions. This epidemic is manifested in leisure time choices (engaging in sedentary leisure pursuits, such as watching tv, playing video games, using the computer for social networking) that are stationary or seated in nature. In our work settings we have jobs that call more often for physically inactive, computer based activity, and use ‘newer’ methods of communication (e.g., e-mail, instant messaging, texting, tweeting, PDF files, etc.) to communicate from a fixed location rather than walking down the hall to talk with a colleague.

Exercise and Sport Psychologists, and other Health and Wellness Professionals, have a fairly good understanding of how to motivate people to exercise, first addressing people's choice of leisure time physical activity, but then identifying the excuses people make for not exercising. We also have a sense of what strategies might be effective for countering these excuses. However, we do not have the information needed to most effectively target, or deliver, these strategies to particular individuals. This research will examine effective use of communication/social networking strategies to best deliver these strategies to individuals when they need them most – when they are considering using an all-too-convenient excuse for not exercising. In the present study we were interested in which excuses individuals in the exercise and sport psychology field (by virtue of membership on various exercise and sport psychology listservs) most often found (in their professional and/or personal experience) were cited for not exercising, which they found were noted as most challenging, and what strategies they had found (or thought would be) most effective in countering these excuses.

## METHODOLOGY

A survey approved by Temple University's IRB was sent out via several listservs (SPORTPSY, Division 47, ESPD). There were 92 respondents, mean age of 33.6 years (SD=12.35), with 80% females and 20% males, and 53.8% indicating they were currently engaged in exercise and sport psychology consulting.

Table 1. Excuses and Strategies for Countering Excuses

Excuse	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
1 I don't have enough time.	make a schedule/plan	wake up early	figure out time spent watching tv/workout
2 I have too much work to do.	exercise will lead to productivity	use exercise as a break from work	committing to it or scheduling it in
3 I'm too tired.	you'll have more energy/feel better afterwards	try a short or easy workout	workout in the morning or plan exercise
4 I'm sick.	rest if it is truly a sickness (esp. respiratory)	low intensity exercise may help you feel better	this can be a reasonable excuse
5 I'm injured (bad kneed, ankle, shoulder, etc.)	find an alternative exercise/modify	work other parts of the body	swimming
6 I've got a medical condition and can't exercise.	talk to a doctor	not a legit excuse/some exercise can be helpful	n/a
7 I just had a baby.	motivation to lose baby weight	workout with the baby	start out easy/talk to a doctor
8 Exercise hurts.	no pain, no gain/it's supposed to hurt	you're doing it incorrectly	change the type of exercise/break it up
9 I don't have a thing to wear.	no dress code/don't have to wear Nike clothes	go shopping/reward yourself with new clothes	not an excuse
10 I'm not in the mood.	exercise will change/elevate mood	committing to some exercise/try a little	get a buddy, listen to music, change location
11 I'll start on New Year's Day!	start today/no/why wait?	make a plan/set goals	start slowly
12 I'm tired of the same old workout.	change it up/vary workouts	try a class or trainer	ask questions/search online for tips
13 I don't know what the best exercise to do is.	ask a trainer or professional for help	look online	ask friends, start moving with fun and easy
14 Exercising is a waste of time.	then you will early/see what happens	other ways people waist time	n/a
15 I don't like exercising alone.	find a partner/friend	join a group or club, or class	external factors: music, tv, trainer
16 I'm too old to start exercising.	never too hold	some exercise is better than none/try a little	n/a
17 I hate exercise.	find something you like	what do you hate about it?	go with friends
18 I get bored easily.	TV, music	switch up workouts, take a class	go outside
19 I can't get motivated to exercise.	set goals	find someone	find something to motivate you
20 Exercise is not a high priority for me right now.	make it a top priority	think of the health benefits	put it in your daily routine
21 Exercising is not challenging enough for me.	make it more challenging	get a trainer	n/a
22 Exercising is not fun.	make it fun for you	make it social, find a friend/partner	try a game or other activity
23 Exercise stresses me out.	exercise reduces stress	understand why, where is the stress coming from?	try something new
24 The gym is too crowded.	go during off-peak times/early morning	go outside	exercise at home
25 I don't believe I can stick with an exercise program.	set goals/routine/plan	find a coach/someone to help	take small steps
26 I'm too stressed out right now to exercise.	exercise reduces stress	do something simple	n/a
27 I'm too self-conscious to exercise in front of others.	workout at home/not a gym	start slow/get a trainer	focus on yourself
28 I'll never be able to look like her/him.	set realistic goals	focus on you, being healthy	do what you can, for yourself
29 I don't like to sweat.	swim	do low intensity activities (like walking) at first	sweating is good
30 I get out of breath too quickly.	start slowly/slow down/pack yourself	exercise will help	stop smoking/see your doctor
31 The weather is terrible.	workout inside or at home	toughen up, go outside	join a gym
32 I'm too young to worry about exercising.	never too young	exercise will help you as you age	not a good excuse/you're getting older
33 I've got great genes and don't need to exercise.	genes aren't everything	grandparents had different lifestyle	do it for your health/lifeline
34 My significant other doesn't like to exercise.	encourage them to try with you	find a buddy	find your own time exercise
35 Everyone loves me just the way I am.	health benefits	don't worry what others think/do it for you	n/a
36 I don't have a goal.	make some	SMART goals	try different things
37 I've had terrible experiences in the past.	overcome them	don't do the same thing/think of a way to redo	personal trainer to help
38 I keep having to start my exercise program again.	new strategy/goal	stay with it/keep going	n/a
39 My body will change too much.	you'll be healthy	your body will change (positively)	understand body composition
40 I get plenty of exercise at work.	evaluate if this is true	many different exercises/benefits	are you in the fitness/athlete profession?
41 I weigh the same as I did 20 years ago.	be healthy with exercise	weight does not = fitness	n/a
42 I don't like to compete with others.	not a competition	exercise alone	find a program that works for you
43 Gyms are too expensive.	workout at home/not a gym	outdoors	n/a
44 I don't think I want to change right now.	switch classes/find a new one	communicate with instructor about teaching	n/a
45 I have other plans.	make small changes	give it a try	n/a
46 I'm totally uncoordinated - I can't play sports at all.	plan/schedule/time management	make exercise a priority	n/a
47 I've got family responsibilities - my kids especially.	don't have to play sports	don't need to be coordinated	many ways to exercise
48 It is unsafe to exercise in my neighborhood.	involve the whole family	arrange your schedule	gym babysitters
49 I don't like the "No pain...no gain" philosophy.	workout at home/during lunch	join a gym/safe place	drive somewhere
50 Please add another excuse.	start slow/find a program good for you	create your own philosophy	do as much as you can/don't have to work

Table 2. Most Common Excuses Cited

Excuses	# of responses
Time	64
Too tired	50
Other commitments	31
Not motivated	23
Injured/sick	11
Doesn't like exercise	11
Doesn't feel like it/lazy	9
Doesn't know how	9
Not convenient	7
Money	6
Bad weather	5
Self-conscious	5
Doesn't need to	3
No buddy or spouse doesn't	3
Get enough exercise already	2
Starting over is hard	2
Burn out	2
Satisfied with body	1
Not satisfied with body	1
Not active	1
Doesn't want to wake up early	1
I'm going to die anyway	1
Gym is too crowded	1
Don't have a car	1
Too sore	1
Bad past experience	1
Not athletic	1
No gym membership	1
Too little immediate payoff	1
Celebrating	1
Too hard	1
Just miss one day	1
Don't want to work out near others	1
Can stay thin without exercise	1
TOTAL	260

Table 3. Most Challenging Excuses Cited

Excuses	# of responses
Time	49
Too tired	40
Other commitments	20
Injury/sick	19
No motivation	15
Don't like exercise	9
Don't want to go alone	6
Bad weather	5
Sticking with it	4
Bored	4
Money	4
Unsafe	4
Location of gym	3
Don't know how/ lack of experience	3
Doesn't want to change	3
Don't like the gym	3
Don't like to sweat	3
Not a part of my lifestyle	3
Don't know what to do	2
Lack of support	2
I'll do it tomorrow	2
Embarrassed	2
Self-conscious/not confident	2
Hopeless	2
Not fat, why exercise?	1
No car	1
Will start next week	1
Little immediate payoff	1
My body will change	1
Finding what works	1
Too skinny	1
Medications	1
I exercise sometimes	1
TOTAL	218

## THE NEXT STEP(S)

Having gained a sense of these excuses and strategies, our next step is to put these strategies into practice. ☺ This will encompass a variety of mediated approaches (e.g., print material, e-mail, phone calls, social networking) and individually focused interventions to maximize effectiveness of these approaches and strategies.