



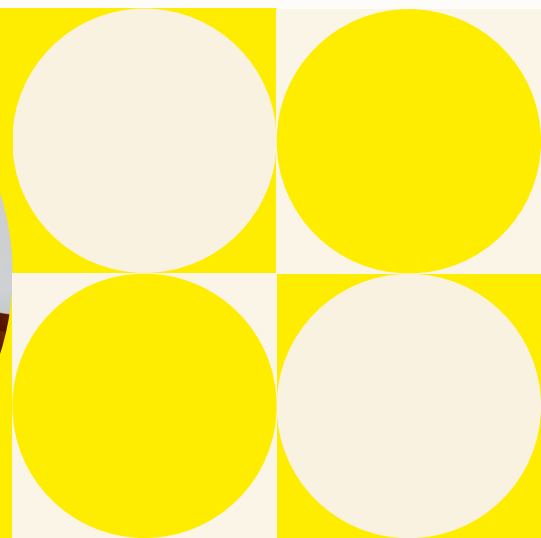
# Getting Back into Exercise: *A Fresh Start Guide*



## Starting from Scratch (Again)

January often provides renewed motivation to move your body. Perhaps you've taken a break from exercise – whether due to injury, illness, busy periods at work, or simply falling out of the habit – and now you're ready to start again. The good news is that it's never too late to start again, and your body is remarkably adaptable. The challenge is doing it in a way that's sustainable, enjoyable, and doesn't lead to burnout or injury.

One of the biggest barriers to getting back into exercise is the all-or-nothing mindset. There's a tendency to compare yourself to your past fitness levels or to set overly ambitious goals that quickly become overwhelming. If you used to run 10k three times a week, the temptation is to jump straight back in. But fitness, like any skill, needs to be rebuilt gradually.



## Understanding the Benefits of Movement

The benefits of regular physical activity are profound and extend far beyond weight loss or muscle tone. According to the NHS, physical activity can reduce the risk of major illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and cancer by up to 50%. It also lowers the risk of early death by up to 30%. Even modest amounts of movement – a brisk 10-minute walk, for example – have measurable health benefits.

Exercise is also one of the most effective interventions for mental health. Research published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine found that physical activity can be as effective as antidepressants for treating mild to moderate depression. Movement releases endorphins, reduces stress hormones like cortisol, and improves sleep quality. It also provides structure, a sense of achievement, and often opportunities for social connection.

For those returning to exercise after a break, the cognitive and emotional benefits can be just as motivating as the physical ones. Many people report feeling more energised, focused, and resilient when they're regularly active.



## Starting Safely and Building Gradually

The key to getting back into exercise is starting where you are, not where you were or where you wish you were. This means being honest about your current fitness level and building up slowly. The principle of progressive overload – gradually increasing the intensity, duration, or frequency of exercise – allows your body to adapt without overwhelming it.

If you're completely new to exercise or returning after a long break, starting with something as simple as a daily 30-minute walk can be enough. Walking is low-impact, accessible, and can be easily incorporated into daily life. From there, you can gradually increase the duration or add in other forms of movement like swimming, cycling, or strength training.

It's also important to listen to your body. Delayed-onset muscle soreness (DOMS) is normal when you're starting out, but sharp pain, dizziness, or extreme fatigue are signs to ease off. If you have any underlying health conditions or concerns, speaking to your GP before starting a new exercise routine is a sensible precaution.





## Tips for Getting Back into Exercise

1

**Set realistic goals:** Focus on consistency (e.g., “move for 20 minutes three times this week”) rather than outcomes (e.g., “lose 10 pounds”).

2

**Start small:** Every bit of movement counts. Build up gradually rather than diving in at full intensity.

3

**Schedule it in:** Treat exercise like any other appointment. Put it in your calendar and protect that time.

4

**Mix it up:** Variety prevents boredom and works different muscle groups. Combine cardio, strength, and flexibility work.

5

**Track your progress:** Note how you feel after exercising, not just what you did. Improved mood and energy are victories too.

6

**Find accountability:** Exercise with a friend, join a class, or share your goals with someone who’ll check in on you.

7

**Celebrate effort, not perfection:** Every time you move your body, you’re investing in your health. That’s worth acknowledging.

Getting back into exercise doesn’t have to mean gruelling workouts or rigid schedules. It’s about reconnecting with your body, finding movement that feels good, and building habits that support your long-term health. This January, give yourself permission to start small, be kind to yourself, and simply move.