

# 20 Biggest Health Excuses That Hold You Back

*By Jessie Knadler*



## 1. I hate snacking on veggies

**Solution: Get your veggies in a creamy, crunchy form.**

Keep a container of hummus in the fridge and dip in whole wheat crackers or pita when you need something that tastes rich and sinful, recommends Suzanne Havala Hobbs, DrPH, a clinical assistant professor at the University of North Carolina School of Public Health. Half a cup qualifies as a veggie serving! Another proven way to boost your intake: Keep a bowl of fruit on your desk or kitchen counter. Stashing your produce in a crisper drawer pretty much guarantees it will be a snack afterthought. You may not necessarily feel like having fruit, but if that shiny Granny Smith apple right in front of you looks good and smells great, you might find yourself in the mood.

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## 2. I can't shake my sweet tooth

**Solution: Satisfy it—but avoid the super-sweetener high fructose corn syrup.**

Processed foods frequently contain large amounts of high fructose corn syrup. The sweetener is metabolized differently from other forms of sugar, and some studies suggest that its effect on your insulin levels actually prompts you to eat again sooner. (Another processed-food ingredient, trans fat, also may

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pack on extra pounds per calorie.) Besides, says Hobbs, “High fructose corn syrup tastes sweeter than other forms of sugar, which may condition us to want ever-sweeter foods.”

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For a healthy snack that satisfies your sugar need, mix some dark chocolate chips with nuts and dried fruit. You’ll get the sweet sensation you’re craving along with filling protein and fiber from the nuts and fruits.

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## 3. I don’t have time to exercise

**Solution: Start with mini workouts and add on from there.**

If your weekday exercise has gone from sometimes to never, well, join the club. Between a full workweek, dealing with kids’ activities, and cooking and errands, it’s practically a miracle any busy moms find time to hit the gym. The best solution: Sprinkle shorter sessions throughout the day. In fact, one study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that short-but-frequent workouts (10-minute exercise sessions, four times a day) produced the same health benefits as a daily 40-minute session.

So forget the rule saying you need to clock an hour straight at the gym for a workout to count. You can lower your blood pressure and cholesterol, cut your risk of type 2 diabetes, and control your weight if you just take a quick walk whenever you have time, says Rod K. Dishman, PhD, an exercise psychologist at the University of Georgia.

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## 4. Something always comes up

**Solution: Have a backup plan.**

Having a fallback makes you 20% more likely to fit exercise into your day, according to Dishman. So make sure you stow a few exercise DVDs at home for days when you can’t manage anything more ambitious; keep resistance bands at the office for breaks at your desk. Mixing up your fitness routine can also help. In one study, 66% of people who exercised on their own (running, cycling) and in structured classes (tai chi, Pilates) continued to work out for at least 6 months, compared with 39% of those who depended solely on classes and 60% of those exercising on their own.

## 5. I hate getting sweaty

**Solution: You don't need to.**

Excessive panting and sweating in a beginner exerciser means you're working too hard, says John Bingham, a former couch potato turned marathon runner and author of *The Courage to Start*. Instead, pick an intensity officially known as "somewhat hard." You'll recognize it because you'll breathe heavily but still be able to carry on a conversation. (Heart rate to aim for: 120 to 150 beats per minute.) You'll get nearly as much cardiovascular payoff as if you went all-out, Dishman says.

## 6. Sorry, but exercise just is not fun

**Solution: Find an activity that matches your personality**

One study from the University of Florida found that matching your routine to your temperament boosts the likelihood that you'll enjoy your workout (and, hence, keep doing it). If you're social and chatty, the study showed you're apt to be happiest with high-intensity exercise, preferably done to music (try a Spinning or Zumba class). If you're a little high-strung with a tendency to be anxious, indoor solo activity may be more your speed (hop on the treadmill and try an interval workout to keep things fresh). If you're generally open to new experiences, check out a dance class, where you're always learning new moves and routines.

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## 7. What's the point? I never see results

**Solution: Don't forget to strength-train too.**

If you're a strict cardio queen, it can take as long as 4 months before you begin to notice shapely muscle where a mound of fat used to be, says Kara Gallagher, PhD, co-owner of Mohr Results, a nutrition and fitness company based in Louisville. Lifting weights can cut that time in half. To maximize the visible payoff, work out at high intensity most days of the week, and don't spot-train; instead, engage the whole body. Moves such as squats and walking lunges are effective, Gallagher says, especially if you hold 8- to 10-pound hand weights while doing them.

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## 8. I'm afraid I'll fail

**Solution:** Imagine how you'd encourage a friend to take the leap.

If you dream of starting your own baking business or traveling around southeast Asia, don't get bogged down in all your worries and potential barriers, says Judith Sills, PhD, author of *The Comfort Trap*. "Instead, think of ways to sneak around them." For instance, ask yourself how someone else might figure out how to start a small business or write a novel. "Visualizing another person doing it makes it easier to grasp that change is possible," says Sills.

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## 9. It's too late to start something new

**Solution:** Embrace discomfort—at least temporarily.

Change is hard, but perpetual dissatisfaction is no picnic either. "You won't make any real progress unless you're willing to be temporarily uncomfortable," says Robert Leahy, PhD, a clinical professor of psychology at Weill Cornell Medical College and author of *The Worry Cure*. "Taking one step backward from your easy life is the first step forward." You may even learn that what you thought would be excruciating (putting your house up for sale, having a one-on-one with your boss or partner) isn't nearly as unpleasant as you thought.

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## 10. I don't have the willpower

**Solution:** Don't aim to be perfect.

Years of research on behavior change provides strong evidence that people who diet and demand perfection of themselves are likely to respond to slip-ups by pigging out. In studies on smokers trying to quit, Alan Marlatt, PhD, director of the Addictive Behaviors Research Center at the University of Washington, found that people who could avoid turning a stolen puff into a full-blown relapse were 3 times as likely to maintain their healthier habits at the 2-year mark.

A similar dynamic is likely to apply to those on a diet, he adds. So if you just can't pass on the cherry pie at your local diner, don't label yourself a weight loss loser. Savor every bite and vow to have a healthier dessert tomorrow. Realize that missteps are an inevitable part of the journey that will bring you to your goal.

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## 11. I nosh when I'm depressed. Or bored.

**Solution: Outsmart your emotional eating habit.**

“Focusing on why you engage in emotional eating implies that there’s a deep psychological problem,” says Gary Foster, PhD, director of the Center for Obesity Research and Education at Temple University. “But for most people, emotional eating is simply a bad habit.” To break the cycle, look at what you’re usually doing when your emotional munchies hit—and change the pattern. If crankiness makes you chow down on chips while sorting through the mail after work, don’t sort through the mail right after work. Throw a leash on your dog and go for a walk instead. Or eat whole grain crackers and an apple before you leave the office so you’re not cranky and ravenous when you get home.

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## 12. I hate feeling deprived when I diet

**Solution: Indulge in your favorite treats—but set a price for them.**

“I made a resolution not to have a candy bar unless I ate a piece of fruit first,” says food behavior researcher Brian Wansink, PhD, author of *Mindless Eating*. “When I wanted candy, I usually couldn’t find a piece of fruit. Or I found one and the sweetness of the fruit satisfied my craving.”

Another anti-deprivation strategy: Set three small weight loss goals each month—none of them eliminating a food entirely. Instead of vowing you won’t eat bagels, commit to skipping bagels for breakfast. You’ll only have to stick to any goal for 30 days, but the diet changes tend to last, says Wansink.

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## 13. I always gain the weight back!

**Solution: Weigh yourself daily.**

In an 18-month study of 314 volunteers who’d shed 20% of their body weight, researcher Rena Wing, PhD, and colleagues at the Weight Control and Diabetes Research Center at the Miriam Hospital in Providence, RI, found that daily maintenance is key. Participants who got on the scales every day were 82% more likely than others to keep the weight loss off.

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## 14. My libido went MIA

**Solution: Lower your standards.**

So you're not exploding with desire? So what? Studies show that many women who report a lack of interest in sex respond just fine once they're in the midst. "Women assume that mental desire must precede physical arousal, and that if the desire isn't there, well, they must not like sex," says marital therapist Michele Weiner-Davis, author of *The Sex-Starved Marriage*. "But for many women, that's not true." The next time your husband approaches you, just do it. "See if the light bulb goes on."

One common libido dampener for women who are years into a relationship: comparing their desire with the drive they felt in the early days of the union. "Don't wait for fireworks," Weiner-Davis says. "Work with the embers. You have to find out what you need to feel sexier. Go out and buy new underwear—not for him, but for you."

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## 15. I'm exhausted—who has energy for sex?

**Solution: Don't make sex a cost-benefit analysis.**

"Asking yourself, Do I get 7 hours of sleep tonight or do I have sex? does not lead to passion," says psychologist Kathryn Hall, PhD, author of *Reclaiming Your Sexual Self: How You Can Bring Desire Back into Your Life*. "Sex ends up being quick and efficient, and women's orgasms—more than men's—become compromised." Every now and then, Hall says, forget the laundry and other tasks, go to bed half an hour earlier, and make sex the priority.

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## 16. My plate is too packed to think about sex

**Solution: Schedule "gripe sessions" to keep your To Dos from spilling over into the bedroom.**

Take a few minutes at the end of the day to decompress by yourself, says Weiner-Davis: Read a magazine, play with your dog. Then get together with your husband to vent about both of your days. Just limit the shared kvetching time to less than 30 minutes—allowing it to drag on indefinitely can set a negative vibe (definitely not sexy).

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## 17. I get enough sleep, but I'm always tired

**Solution: Check your thyroid or iron level.**

A sluggish thyroid, the organ at the base of your neck that regulates metabolism, is a common energy sapper among women over age 50, says Lynne Kirk, MD, professor of general internal medicine at the UT Southwestern Medical Center. More than 5% of all 50-plus females have signs of a failing thyroid, Kirk says, but the problem is frequently overlooked by doctors. "Have a blood test to screen for hypothyroidism every 5 to 10 years after the age of 50," she recommends. If you're pre-menopausal, get checked for anemia—a common cause of fatigue in younger women.

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## 18. I'm wiped out from too much stress

**Solution: Pepper your day with relaxation cues.**

Stress is physically exhausting, says William Boggs, MD, former medical director at the Center of Integrative Medicine at the University of Maryland. So turn a frequent activity into a trigger for a relaxation exercise: Every time you grab a glass of water, for instance, stop for a few minutes of deep breathing. "This brings your stress levels down," he says, "and equips you to handle the next stressful situation that comes along."

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## 19. There is just not enough time in the day

**Solution: Take advantage of waiting around.**

When you run errands, always come prepared for downtime, says time-management consultant Julie Morgenstern, author of *Time Management from the Inside Out*. "Always bring extra activities, like a stack of thank-you notes you've been meaning to write, so you can stay productive." Other time-savers: Ask for the first appointment of the day, when your doctor (or hairstylist) is unlikely to be running behind. Avoid filling prescriptions at the beginning of the month; that's when lines are longest. And on your voicemail, ask callers to repeat phone numbers so you don't have to listen to messages twice.

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## 20. I feel guilty about taking me time

**Solution: Shift your focus.**

You may be making yourself feel worse by imagining that you ought to be able to do it all—and have time for yourself, says Susan Piver, author of The Hard Questions book series. “True contentment comes from a life fully lived,” she says. “Take a deep breath and remember why you’re doing what you’re doing. Thinking about that is energizing.” And what you’ve heard is true: You will be a better \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank: mom, wife, employee) when your personal needs are being met and you’re giving yourself the time you need to rejuvenate and feel healthy.