

## **Giving Yourself Grace**

When trying to balance work, family, relationships, school, and your own wellbeing, starting or continuing an exercise plan can be very difficult. Sometimes life can get in the way, and we may not be able to exercise as we planned for a specific day. How do you respond to those setbacks? Do you respond by not exercising? Do you double your workout for the following day? Or do you go back to your normal routine the next day? Amidst our hectic lives, it is important to remember to be kind to ourselves, to engage in self-care, and to have self-compassion for yourself and others.



### **Self-Compassion and Exercise:**

By definition, self-compassion is a reaction to one's suffering of personal mistakes, perceived inadequacies, or various experiences of life difficulty. Self-compassion can be especially useful when one is responding to a personal exercise setback. When individuals experience negative emotions towards an event, they may remain focused on that immediate situation, which may undermine their ability to focus on their long-term goal. Ruminating about failures can have detrimental consequences to goal progress including self-blame and self-criticism, decreased motivation, and problem-solving, all which may make it difficult to reengage in an exercise goal.

According to [the Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology](#), an individual's capacity to self-regulate health behaviors is influenced by one's level of self-compassion. Self-regulation requires that one set and pursue a goal, monitor goal progress, and adjust behavior when one makes insufficient progress. Self-compassionate individuals should succeed at self-regulation because they set and pursue goals for self-determined intrinsic reasons (e.g., personal growth and wellbeing) rather than for extrinsic reasons (to get a "6-pack"). According to the self-determination theory, the self-determined pursuit of goals is optimal as motivations of this intrinsic quality are associated with increased effort, long-term motivation, psychological wellbeing, and goal achievement. Furthermore, self-compassion is negatively associated with exercising out of extrinsic reasons, such as out of obligation or concern about one's appearance in the presence of others.

### **Mindfulness and Exercise:**

Mindfulness, one of the three dimensions of self-compassion, may reduce those pondering thoughts. Specifically, mindfulness allows individuals to acknowledge their feelings in a situation, without ruminating or overidentifying with these feelings. This pattern of response to a setback may allow individuals to accurately perceive when a discrepancy exists between their behavior and their desired goal and initiate problem-solving to fix their behavior and re-engage in an exercise goal. This form of self-compassion may reduce the negative affect after an exercise setback, which may allow you to have more focus on your long-term exercise goal. Here are [2 ways](#) you can include mindfulness into your exercise routine:

1. **Pause and consider your purpose.** Remember why you want to meditate. Is it to train your mind to focus and sustain attention or to learn to navigate emotions? This twofold motivation can help get you up and out, and keep you going.
2. **Exercise kindness.** Notice the quality of your thinking during workouts: Can you appreciate your current ability, speed, and endurance just as they are? If you work out in a virtual group, can you let go of the “comparing mind” and instead thank yourself for showing up for this healthy activity, and then go at the pace that’s just right for you?

So now I ask you, what motivates you to exercise? Do you force yourself to go to the gym because you want to look good? Or do you go to the gym to relieve stress and stay healthy? By altering your mindset and changing your goal from extrinsic to intrinsic can leave you feeling happier and more motivated to get back on track.

Most importantly, remember that life happens! When there is a bump in the road, we keep moving forward. Whenever you start to get discouraged, think back to the intrinsic reason why you started exercising in the first place and keep moving forward. Although exercise setbacks may push us away from our goals, being self-compassionate, practicing mindfulness, and giving ourselves grace can help us get back on track to our normal exercise routines.