

How you feel about exercise has a lot to do with how you think about physical movement

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Exercise.

You do it because you know it's good for you.

But it's such a slog you compensate with candy or a bigger serving of dessert as a reward for your efforts, and before long you've upended your best intentions.

It doesn't have to be that way, however.

What if you thought you were taking pleasant break from your routine, rather than engaging in exercise? What if you made it fun?

Something that gives you pleasure?

That question recently was answered in research from Cornell University Food and Brand Lab.

If you perceive that a physical activity is a joy and not a chore, you'll eat fewer high-calorie sweets afterwards, according to the Cornell findings published in "Marketing Letters" – a journal of research in marketing.

However, it can be hard to convince yourself that you're having a good time and don't need a treat to compensate. You may have an even harder time motivating your children.

You may use a different vocabulary to describe exercise, challenge yourself to find new ways to stay active and find benefits for doing so, say fitness experts.

"When you're exercising because you should, the pleasure is gone," says Jonathan Ross, personal trainer, spokesperson American Council on Exercise.

"When you do something as an obligation you usually don't enjoy it. It's hard; it's grueling because you didn't enjoy it and feel you deserve a reward afterwards," says Ross, Annapolis, Md.

Instead of exercise, he suggests a different term: quality physical movement. You're moving every day, whether it's walking the dog or running to beat the light.

Turn up the intensity and add a fun challenge and you're getting physically fit, without the negative association of exercise.

For example, play walking games, says Ross, author of "Abs Revealed."

He suggests tossing a tennis ball on the ground or to a partner, walking on the cracks, going up and down the curb or walking on unstable ground.

Keep changing the focus so you're not bored.

Share quality physical movement time with friends or family members. That's rewarding enough. It doesn't need to be topped with dessert.

In Franci Cohen's home, activity equipment is as much a part of the decor as the sofa.

"I allow my living room to be turned into a gym," says **Cohen, personal trainer, exercise physiologist, Brooklyn, N.Y.**

She might have the rare home outfitted with a trampoline.

"They come home from school and jump on the trampoline before doing homework," says Cohen, who has four children ranging in age from 2-1/2 to 14.

One of her children is a dancer, another is a gymnast and a third plays tennis, practicing hitting balls against a wall in the house.

In order for children to like being physically active they have to have some input in what they can do, according to Cohen.

"If I told my children to run around the block five times before dinner, they would have so many excuses to not do it," she says.

You also have to say OK to something they enjoy doing (although you may decide a trampoline is more than your home can withstand).

"They will be excited. Excitement is what motivates people," Cohen says.

If you're trying to lose weight by eating less and exercising, make your fitness routine fun so you're not tempted to reward yourself with food afterwards, say researchers from the Cornell study.

In one study on the exercise-food connection, 46 adults were told they'd engage in an outdoor activity.

Then the volunteers were divided. One group was told it would be taking a one-mile walk to exercise. The same walk was described as sightseeing to the second group.

After the activity the participants were invited to help themselves to M&Ms that they poured into re-sealable bags. The researchers unobtrusively weighed out the candy while the participants were engaged in another activity.

Those who exercised took significantly more candy than the volunteers who were sightseeing.