

Staying active over 55— What are the barriers for women?

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What stops women from getting exercise as they get older? And how do women get over these barriers? To better understand this, the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) conducted cross-Canada focus groups with women age 55 to 70.

We grouped the barriers that the women talked about into three categories:

1. External barriers – things that are beyond our control
2. Impacting barriers – things that impact your ability to participate
3. Internal barriers or secrets

External barriers included things like:

- weather (too hot or too cold, too icy, too humid)
- lack of transportation
- cost of physical activities
- the 'built environment' – for instance, lack of sidewalks.

Impacting barriers included things like:

- poor health
- the demands of caring for partners, grandchildren, and aging parents
- not having a friend to do things with or finding it hard to fit into a 'cliquish' group
- poor instructors
- lack of variety – for instance, wanting to swim or cycle but only walking programs are available
- scheduling problems – for instance, no evening programs for working women



- lack of support from a partner or other family members.
- taking part in something with the word 'senior' or 'older adult' attached. Many women said they are seniors if there is a discount, but otherwise -- forget it!

Internal barriers included things like body image. Women said they would like to swim, but the idea of putting on a bathing suit kept them from doing so. Feeling guilty was another internal barrier. Women felt guilty about taking time for themselves, spending money on themselves and being away from family duties. Women also worried about getting hurt or lacking skills. Many women over 55 say they feel 'invisible' and lack the confidence to ask questions and be self-starters.

Getting over the barriers

The women in the focus groups had a number of ideas on how to deal with the barriers and get more active:

Develop a routine: Schedule physical activity into your day or week and never miss it.

Having a buddy: Having someone to do things with is encouraging. Plus, if you know someone is waiting, say, to go for a walk or run with you, you will make sure to show up.

Invite and get invited: Women like to be invited to do things. Make physical activity special by personally inviting your friends to take part. Be sure to accept any invitation you receive.

Use a pedometer: Using a pedometer to count your steps was mentioned in every focus group. Women saw this as an easy, inexpensive tool that regularly reminded them to keep moving.

Take part in events: Sign up for a competition or event – for example, a run or walk for your favourite charity. You will get active preparing for the day and enjoy looking forward to it. Plus, you'll raise money for a good cause.

Keep a log or journal: Some women found it very motivating to keeping a daily journal or log their activities on a calendar or in a notebook. They 'made appointments with themselves' that they did not want to break. They hated not being able to write something in for the day, and that kept them moving.

Enjoy music: Many women found it motivating to have good music in the background when doing housework or during a fitness class.

Look for progress: Seeing progress in yourself and others is very motivating, no matter how you measure it. It could be losing weight, sleeping better, or being able to shovel your driveway.

Share your success: Many women do not realize how much physical activity can improve their health. Share your own stories or the stories of other women to motivate them.

In the end, women told us that the activity really doesn't matter. As long as it is fun, inexpensive, and social, they will give it a try. The problem is they often

do not know what's out there. Take a wander down to your local community centre, check out a new fountain in the local park, or try out that bike trail you've always wanted to explore ... just get out there and don't forget to bring a friend or two!

Learn more:

[Download the complete Focus Group Report.](#)

About the Author

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