

# DECISIONAL BALANCE



**AMERICAN COLLEGE  
of SPORTS MEDICINE**  
www.acsm.org

This tool is intended to assist you in:

- Thinking about the costs and benefits of changing your exercise behavior
- Determining what is involved in your decision to change your physical activity habits

## Weighing Decisions

When people weigh any decision, they look at the costs and benefits of the choices they can make. Remember that having mixed feelings often occurs when making decisions. Especially a decision as challenging as integrating at least five weekly exercise sessions of 30 or more minutes into your already busy schedule.

## Decisional Balancing

Most people actually change their exercise habits on their own. When they are asked what brought about the change, they often say they just “I just thought about it and decided it was time.” In some way, they evaluated the consequences of their on again off again activity patterns and the pros and cons of becoming more active. The pros for activity outweighed the cons and they made the decision to change. Weighing the pros and cons of changing happens all the time. Examples include changing jobs or deciding to move or get married.

You can do the same thing with the costs of changing on one side, and the benefits of changing on the other side. This process will help you look at the good things and less good things about becoming more active.

To change, the scale needs to tip so the costs outweigh the benefits. This is called Decisional Balancing.

## Think about changing your exercise habits?

Ask yourself: What do I stand to lose and gain by continuing my inactivity or inconsistently active lifestyle? At some point, you may have received real benefits from regular exercise, such as more energy, relaxation, fun or stress reduction. However, because you are reading this, you are considering both the benefits and the costs.

## Decision to Change Exercise Habits

One thing that helps people when thinking of changing is to list the benefits and costs of changing or continuing their current behavior. Below is an example of a Decision to Change Exercise.

	<b>Regular Exercise</b>	<b>Inactivity</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More energy</li> <li>• Look better</li> <li>• Feel better physically</li> <li>• More self confidence</li> <li>• Sleep better</li> <li>• More active with friends</li> <li>• Much more productive at home and work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One less thing to think about</li> <li>• More time to watch TV</li> <li>• More time to work</li> </ul>
<b>Costs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have to buy shoes and other equipment</li> <li>• Could get injured</li> <li>• Can take away time with family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More easily stressed</li> <li>• More cranky</li> <li>• Weight gain</li> <li>• Feel embarrassed about how I look</li> <li>• I eat more and drink more</li> <li>• Can't be as active with the kids</li> <li>• Am worried about my health and longevity</li> <li>• Not as productive at work</li> </ul>

The next page contains your chance to decide ►

## Decision to Change Exercise: It's Your Turn

Fill in the costs and benefits of changing and compare them, and ask yourself if are the costs worth it.

	Regular Exercise	Inactivity
Benefits		
Costs		

### It's Your Decision

Now list the most important reasons why you want to change. You are the one who must decide what it will take to tip the scale in favor of change.

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### Think About This

If someone offered you \$100,000 to comfortably integrate four exercise sessions into an otherwise busy work week, you would certainly do it. How would it be different if there was no payment involved?

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