

Rise and shine like a star ...



SUSAN SWARBRICK

Put in the time to achieve big results by utilising just a little space in your living room

ARE you sitting comfortably? That's the first step, according to Glasgow-based personal trainer and fitness expert Jennifer Wilson.

She has devised a series of simple exercises to help blow away the cobwebs, become more active, and feel re-energised in the gloomy winter months.

Even better – these can be done from the comfort of your living room with minimal space and equipment required.

First up: time to overhaul that posture. “When it is cold and miserable, we tend to hunch up and that feeling of being closed off across the chest can begin to make our moods feel lower,” says Jennifer.

“Try to keep an open posture with the shoulders back and down. That will lift your mood naturally.”

No one is expected to make the leap from couch potato to gym bunny overnight, but by gradually incorporating small changes it can make a huge difference to an overall sense of wellbeing.

“Any extra activity helps – even walking around during the TV ad breaks if the weather is too bad to go outside,” explains Jennifer. “Move about the house or simply get up and make a cup of tea.”

“Try to incorporate outside activities such as

going for regular walks. If the weather is bad, go to a shopping centre and walk around there instead. Aim to get as much fresh air as possible. Concentrate on your breathing and ensure you are taking plenty of big, deep breaths.

“When we have that closed-off posture from being hunched up, it means that we use only the top part of our chests which can create stress within the body. Doing all these little things is probably more beneficial initially than trying to get yourself really sweaty with a big workout.”

If the thought of a gym filled with dumbbells, treadmills and other assorted instruments of torture leaves you quivering, the age-old adage of variety being the spice of life is one to remember.

“A lot of people think they don't like exercise, but it is often simply that they just haven't found

something they enjoy,” says Jennifer. “You really don't need to go to a gym or an organised fitness class. Experiment with different things to find out what you like.”

“Think about joining a walking or cycling group – even try a range of activities rather than being focused on one single

pursuit. There is nothing worse than the feeling of waking up in the morning and thinking: ‘Oh no, I have to go to my gym class ...’ Dragging yourself along because you feel that you should be there is never going to be enjoyable. When you do find something you love, it will motivate you and won't feel like a chore.”

While it is tempting to want to see instant results, the key is to build up gradually and not overdo things. “The biggest pitfall comes when people try to change everything in their life at once,” says Jennifer. “They decide to go on a diet and exercise five times a week but that can be overwhelming.”

Her advice is to be kind to yourself and take it easy to begin with. “Perhaps just change one thing the first week and if that works out then add something else,” she adds. “Gradually build up to your goals. I often see people being far too hard on themselves. The all-or-nothing approach doesn't work for most people. For many, it needs to be small, sustainable changes they can incorporate into their lifestyle and won't feel like they are making too much of a sacrifice. If something feels like a punishment that, in turn, means not associating eating healthy or exercise as a good thing.”

Through her work as founder of the Warrior Woman Project, a programme which aims to build self-confidence and remove a fear of failure, Jennifer gets clients to create a “wheel of happiness” evaluating key areas including their career, family, religion, health and fitness.

This allows us to prioritise what is important and requires the most immediate attention.

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STAR JUMPS: Start with the feet together and hands at your sides. Jump so that the feet move outwards to around shoulder width apart. The hands come up until they are level with your shoulders. Then jump the feet back in. Try to land softly to avoid putting unnecessary impact on the joints. If you aren't comfortable with jumping you can step one foot out at a time. Remember to alternate sides. Targets: good for toning.

Another tip is to regularly review all progress. According to Jennifer, people often set goals such as marathon running or to lose 10 stone only to find themselves in a rut. “Instead of stopping to evaluate progress, they keep ploughing on regardless and end up feeling unhappy,” she says. “I recommend reviewing where you are every four weeks. That way you can make changes as necessary and don't end up going too far in the wrong direction.”

If you do deviate from the plan, take a deep breath and reboot. “I know people who have started a diet and done brilliantly for the first few weeks, but then have had a night out

or a cheat day, and never gone back to the plan,” she says. “Months pass and they haven't noticed that they have fallen back into old patterns.”

“If you have a bad day, whether it is eating the wrong foods or not exercising, don't beat yourself up about it. Never think: ‘It's all gone to pot, that's game over.’ Circumstances might be out of your control. As soon as they are back in control – whether it is the next meal or the next day – start again.”

● For more information on the Warrior Woman Project or to book a one-to-one fitness session, visit freedomtraining.co.uk

Simple Swaps

- Sweets for dried fruit
- Fizzy drinks for water, fruit juice or milk
- Biscuits for crackers and oatcakes
- Crisps for plain popcorn
- Pastries for a small scone or malt loaf
- Cereal for porridge
- White bread for wholemeal
- Chips for baked or boiled potatoes
- Mince or sausage for chicken or turkey
- Fried for grilled

For more information, please visit the Healthier Scotland website www.takelifeeon.co.uk

Step-by-step guide to home fitness



PRESS-UPS: Knees should be hip width apart with a straight line from back of the neck to the tailbone. Hands are just positioned just wider than the shoulders in line with the chest. Bend at the elbows making sure the chin stays beyond the fingertips as you lower towards the floor. Keep tummy tight and squeeze the backside, then push the floor away when returning to start position. Targets: arms, core, chest and shoulders.



STEP-UPS: If you don't have a step like this one, you can use the stairs at home. With feet hip width apart, place one foot onto the step. Lift the other leg until the knee is level with the hip. Step all the way back and place the foot on the floor. Alternate between legs. Targets: stomach and legs.



WALKING LUNGE: Stand with feet hip width apart. Take a long step forward and keeping shoulders over the hips, drop the back knee down towards the floor. Keep tummy and backside tight. Take a step out the front and repeat. Targets: bottom, legs and stomach.



SHOULDER BRIDGE: Lie on the floor with your feet hip width apart, roughly a fist distance between the knees. Tilt the pelvis back to push the lower part of the spine into the floor, squeezing the backside to push the hips up until they are level with the knees. Keep the tummy tight. Targets: stomach, bottom and legs. Helps increase mobility in the spine.