

# Motivation Matters

## Hurdle motivational obstacles & begin a fitness regimen



Story & Photos by  
Fire Captains  
Jeff & Martha Ellis

**W**e frequently hear, “How do I start a fitness regimen? It’s been *forever* since I exercised.” Following a period of inactivity, people often want to resume exercise but don’t know how to do so safely and effectively. Simply making the commitment to begin a workout program is a huge step. As such, we always recommend consulting a physician first.

Although we’re well past New Year’s resolution time, that doesn’t mean you can’t make a new *life* resolution. Deciding that you want to be healthier, stronger, leaner, faster or, most importantly, live longer, is a great start. This decision benefits not only you, but also the citizens in your community who you vowed to serve and your crewmembers who count on you. If all you need is a little help getting started, then read on.

### PUSH THROUGH THE PAIN

Many of you have written to us that your mind is willing to start the process, but your body is resisting. Keep in mind that if you haven’t exercised for an extended period, you likely gained weight and lost conditioning. This didn’t happen overnight, and you can’t fix it overnight. So, Lesson No. 1: Be patient.

Frustration and disappointment are tough emotions

to manage and can be extremely detrimental to a fledgling fitness program. That said, align your expectations and reality as much as possible. Easier said than done? You bet. You may want to pick up right where you left off the last time you were physically fit; however, to be successful, you must be honest about your fitness level and *not* compare yourself to others. Loathing the fitness fanatics in your department for their unbridled enthusiasm and seemingly endless energy won’t help. You must continuously dig deep for your motivation.

Maintaining motivation is challenging for most of us. Working out, especially when you’re in very poor condition, will be uncomfortable at best. Early in the process, you’ll need to push through this stage until fitness becomes a habit.

To help stay on track, write out your plan. Decide which day is your rest day and which days are training days. This schedule is yours, to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, until, well, you get the idea. When it’s your rest day, rest, and when it’s a training day, train, come fire or high water. (Yes, there will be those rare occasions when training is just not an option, but don’t look for excuses to skip workouts.)

Motivation is a slippery little devil. Because of its illusive nature, sometimes you have to beat it at its own game. Let’s take a typical afternoon after a busy morning that didn’t allow for a workout. Your mind is telling you to work out, yet the gravitational pull of the lounge chair and the mindless TV show you’re watching are almost too much to resist. Your motivation may begin negotiating with you, sounding something like, “I promise, we’ll work out twice as hard tomorrow ....”

No matter what, do everything in your power to at least don your PT clothes. This may take incredible effort on your part, but get it done. Remarkably, sometimes this is all it takes. Once you’re there, it’s a short trip to the gym.

If you find yourself parked in front of the tube in your PT clothes, it’s time to pull out the heavy artillery. You must convince yourself to just get into the gym. This may involve additional negotiating with your reluctant motivation. Assure yourself that the workout doesn’t have to be painful. Tell yourself that you’ll go easy that day. As long as you get up and move, who cares if it’s an easier workout than you may have scheduled? If that’s the way it ends up, you’re still farther ahead of the game than if you hadn’t exercised at all. ►

Pay close attention to your heart rate during both your exertion and resting phases of aerobic conditioning. Track how high it rises during exertion and how long it takes to decrease during rest periods. A faster decline is better.



If you haven't lifted weights for a long time, you can inflict significant damage on your body if you start too heavy (i.e., what you could lift the last time you were actively training). Use a spotter, if needed.



The truth of the matter is, in most instances, once you're in the gym, you'll likely train harder than what you'd visualized while sitting in the lounge.

### AEROBIC CONDITIONING

In the beginning, it really isn't critical what your training encompasses. Just move! Try to do some type of aerobic training 3–4 times a week. Don't get discouraged if you need to rest after the first few minutes. It's better to rest than get hurt, push your cardiovascular system too hard, too fast or not train at all.

Time everything and write it down. If you run for 4 minutes and need to rest, time your rest period and start again when you can. The next time you do an aerobic workout, try to exercise a bit longer with the same amount of rest or with a shorter rest. If you can't, so be it. You'll eventually get there.

Pay close attention to your heart rate during both your exertion and resting phases. Track how high it gets during exertion and how long it takes to come back down during rest periods. A faster decline is better. Check your heart rate again when you feel comfortable enough to resume exercising. These are measures of conditioning with which you should be familiar. They also help ensure you don't do too much too fast (see the sidebar "Heart Rate 411," January issue, p. 112).

Before long you'll be able to run for longer periods with shorter periods of rest. And soon thereafter, you'll be able to exercise without stopping to rest at all. Once you get to that point, you can begin incorporating into your routine the more advanced principles of aerobic training that we discussed in previous articles (see "Get Moving, Part 1," December issue, p. 86, and "Get Moving, Part 2," January issue, p. 110).

### RESISTANCE TRAINING

The principles we just discussed for aerobic training also apply to resistance training. If you haven't lifted weights for a long time, you can inflict significant damage on your body if you start too heavy (i.e., what you could lift the last time you were actively training).

To realize gains in resistance training, you must lift at least 60 percent of your one rep max (1RM), which is defined as the amount of weight you can lift just one time for any given exercise. Each exercise will have a unique 1RM, so conduct a 1RM assessment for every resistance exercise you intend to incorporate in your program. *Note:* Performing such an assessment on your own can be dangerous. Don't physically lift your 1RM unless you're a highly conditioned individual and you use a spotter.

You can get a good idea of your 1RM in a safe and effective way without lifting extremely heavy weights. An unfit individual can determine their 1RM using lighter weights and a little basic math. *Tip:* Spread out the effort over several days. You'll likely experience sore muscles afterward, so focus on a couple of muscle groups each day.

Prior to lifting the weights necessary to calculate your 1RM, perform a 10-minute aerobic warm-up that makes you break a sweat. Once you've completed this aerobic warm up, you're ready for an exercise-specific warm up, which involves performing the exercise with about 50 percent of the weight you ultimately anticipate lifting. For example, if you plan to execute a bench press with 200 lbs., warm up on the bench by doing 5–8 reps with 100 lbs. If you're not sure what your 1RM may be, err on the conservative side, and warm up with a very light weight that comfortably allows for 5–8 reps.

Once you're warmed up, begin your theoretical 1RM lift with a moderate weight, using a spotter if needed. If you can lift it six times without feeling strained, stop and increase the weight. After a 2–3-minute rest, try again until you fail at 10 or fewer repetitions. Once you fail at 10 reps or fewer, write down the weight you lifted and the number of reps you successfully completed.

You're now ready to use the following chart to determine your theoretical 1RM. You'll see that the chart has three columns: one with the number of repetitions completed, one with values with which to multiply the weight successfully lifted and one that lists the corresponding percentages of your 1RM that the weight lifted represents.

### Determine Your Theoretical 1RM

# of Reps	Coefficient	% of 1RM
10	1.33	75
9	1.30	77
8	1.25	80
7	1.20	83
6	1.18	85
5	1.15	87
4	1.11	90
3	1.08	93
2	1.05	95
1	1.00	100

Source: The National Strength and Conditioning Association

Let's run through an example: You go to the gym and use the incline bench press. You successfully crank out seven reps at 100 lbs. but can't do any more. Find the row for seven reps. In the middle (coefficient) column you'll see the number 1.2. Multiply 1.2 by 100 (the amount of weight lifted). This gives you 120 lbs., which is your theoretical 1RM. The right-most column shows that the 100-lb. weight is 83 percent of the 120-lb. 1RM value you just computed.

You can use these steps with virtually every resistance exercise, including whole-body movements, such as power cleans and squats. You won't likely be able to go to failure on these lifts, but you will have a good idea of when you've run out of gas and don't have another rep left.

Once you know your theoretical 1RM for each of your resistance-program exercises, you can confidently use this value to calculate the weights you should lift to achieve your desired outcome. (Remember, to see gains from a resistance program, especially one aimed at increasing power or strength, you need to lift at least 60 percent of your 1RM.)

That said, what's your desired outcome? You have four choices: strength, power, hypertrophy (size) or muscular endurance. Also, you must assess your level of training and experience (e.g., novice, intermediate or advanced). With these factors in mind, you're ready to use the following chart.

Decide what types of gains you hope to achieve from the list in the first column. In the second column,

determine the load (as a percent of 1RM). If you're a novice or unfit, start at the low end of the load percentage. If you're fit or advanced, start toward the high end. These are good guidelines for designing your workout plan based on the results you hope to achieve.

What's Your Desired Outcome?

Desired Outcome	Load as % of 1RM	# of Reps	# of Sets
Strength	70–85%	7	2–6
Power (single effort)	80–90%	1–2	3–5
Power (multi effort)	75–85%	3–5	3–5
Muscle Size	67–85%	6–12	3–6
Muscle Endurance	Up to 67%	12+	2–3

Source: The National Strength and Conditioning Association

Try to perform some type of resistance training 3–4 times a week. Remember, you don't have to spend 5 hours in the gym to get an effective workout. Be efficient, make a plan and get it done. You should have no problem feeling spent after lifting weights for about an hour, including warm-up. You can focus on legs and lower back one day; arms, shoulders and upper back another day; and whole-body lifts a third day. (We'll address whole body lifts, such as power cleans, dead lifts and others in upcoming articles.)

Until then, if you're looking for a resource on whole-body lifts and established workout programs, check out [www.Crossfit.com](http://www.Crossfit.com). We've recommended this Web site to many people who have found it very beneficial. Every evening the site publishes a recommended workout for the following day with great descriptions and a video showing the lifts.

Keep in mind that although the Web site's recommended workouts are for more advanced athletes, it's still a great place for any level individual to get workout ideas. There are no "Crossfit Police" who are going bust you for not completing the prescribed workout or for gearing it toward your needs. Use the Web site's recommendations as guidelines, and take advantage of its creative suggestions.

### GET OUT THERE!

We hope this information provides you the initial guidance and direction to step confidently into the gym. As you spend more time working out and getting reacquainted with the process, you'll find out what works for you and what doesn't. That's where the fun starts, because the workout becomes an extension of you. You'll learn the way your body responds as you approach your ultimate goal. ☺

Captain Martha Ellis has been a firefighter with the Salt Lake City Fire Department (SLCFD) for more than 11 years, serving as a firefighter, engineer, media technician and ARFF training officer. She has won the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge Women's Division five times, and held the



world record for eight consecutive years. She is currently the fire marshal for Salt Lake International Airport, and she works as a certified fitness coordinator for the SLCFD.

Captain Jeff Ellis of the Murray (Utah) Fire Department (MFD) has served as a firefighter, engineer, hazmat technician and shift training captain. He has been a certified fitness coordinator for the department since 1996. As a competitor in the Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge, he has won two overall world championships and three Over 40 world championships and helped MFD take the team trophy. He has been active in teaching all aspects of firefighting, including swiftwater rescue and fitness and nutrition in the fire service.

Time for new turnouts or a new life resolution?