

5 ways to get the most out of online fitness classes during COVID-19

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With the proliferation of online fitness options during the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be tricky to sift through the good and the bad. Credit: Shutterstock

With the risks of inactivity during the COVID-19 pandemic, staying

active is more important than ever. Efforts to reduce the spread of the virus have forced us to adapt how and where we move, spurring an explosion of online fitness classes. Zoom, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are redefining the "homebody."

But with the rapid rise of living room bootcamp classes, it can be tricky to sift through the good and the bad. As researchers, fitness professionals and experts in behavior change and online fitness delivery, we want to help you move safely, find classes you enjoy and choose workouts that help you reach your goals—whether you are new to online fitness or not.

1. Safety first

Are you ready to move more? The [Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines](#) recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity [aerobic physical activity](#) throughout the week and strengthening activities on two or more days per week. Whether you are just getting started, meeting the guidelines or exceeding them, a [self-screen](#) and/or conversation with your family doctor can help ensure you are ready to move more. From there, consider:

The credentials of the individual teaching your class. Did your instructor complete an undergraduate degree in health/fitness? Have they been certified by an accredited board, for example, the [American College of Sports Medicine](#) or the [Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology](#)? Your instructor's credentials matter for both your safety and your fitness results.

Checking in with yourself during class. How hard are you working? One way to monitor your effort is by using a [rating of perceived exertion \(RPE\) scale](#) ranging from zero (no exertion; for example, when you are sitting down or lying on the couch) to 10 (maximum effort; the hardest you could ever possibly work). Though intensity varies from person to

person and changes based on the fitness class, you can start by targeting your moderate-to-vigorous zone (four to seven out of 10 on the RPE scale).

Another easy way to check-in with your intensity during class is by using the talk test: if you can't maintain a conversation while exercising, try lowering the intensity. If you could belt out your favorite song, you can try bringing the intensity up a notch.

Setting up your environment for safety. Is your home gym also the office, living room and/or bedroom? Whatever your set-up, make sure you clear some space, have some water handy, keep equipment off to the side, optimize your view of your computer/phone/tablet and consider what footwear is necessary.

2. The fun factor

What do you like to do? Put the fun back in your workout! As adults, we tend to focus on the workout, and not the fun, but research shows that the best way to maintain your fitness habit is to [keep your exercise enjoyable](#). This means you should be having fun during your workout, so you can bask in that post-exercise glow.

If you're getting bored of your usual fitness routine, change it up! Now, more than ever, there are (nearly) endless online options for you to try out—from dance to yoga to boxing to bootcamps, and everything in between. To avoid boredom, also consider variety (it is the spice of life, after all). Not only have researchers found that variety is linked with [greater physical activity](#), the Canadian 24-hour Movement Guidelines also suggest a range of activities in order to improve heart and bone health, muscular fitness and overall well-being.

3. Availability and access

What can you take part in and at what cost? Some programs have on-demand classes, others offer live programs and some do both. There are many free options: for example, [Yoga with Adriene](#), [Lululemon at home classes](#) and a range of paid memberships such as [Your Truth Online](#), [AloMoves](#) and [Peloton](#).

Love supporting local? Check out the fitness studios in your city or province; many are now offering online classes.

4. The perks

What else are you getting out of your workout? Do you receive additional motivational cues and support, like quick tips, check-ins or words of wisdom during your class?

A great fitness instructor [holds an important leadership role](#) and is [essential for creating a positive environment](#)—whether in person or online. We know that the [motivational environment created by your instructor is key to ensuring you enjoy your class](#), which is as important as the actual exercise for helping you develop the habit of engaging in regular physical activity. Instructors are also in a great position to help you set and check in with your goals.

New to goal setting or not getting it from your instructor? Try setting a [SMARTT](#) goal (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely, together) for your activity.

5. Be kind to yourself

How are you treating yourself? As you start or continue your fitness journey, remember, these are unprecedented times, and we have all had to make some pretty big changes and sacrifices. [Practicing self-compassion](#) as you navigate your (new) fitness routine can help you feel

better.

Start by noticing your self-talk: How do you speak to yourself when class gets hard? If you find it is more negative than positive, flip the script and speak to yourself like you would a dear friend.

Do you think you are the only one struggling? Remember, many of us are new to online fitness and are at different stages of our fitness journeys. Building a new habit is never without its struggles!

Are you on auto-pilot? Next time you start a fitness class, turn off emails and put your phone away; focus on doing one thing at a time.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, physical activity is one way to take care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and (if in a group-based fitness class) socially. There are so many available fitness opportunities that it can be overwhelming. These quick tips can help you to start or maintain your [fitness](#) routine, try out new activities with local and international instructors and create lasting behavior change so that you can keep moving more—redefining the "homebody!"

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: 5 ways to get the most out of online fitness classes during COVID-19 (2021, January 7) retrieved 31 December 2022 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-ways-online-classes-covid-.html>

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