



# Building Good Habits

**Mike Prelewicz**  
Sets a Firm Foundation for an Active Lifestyle

*by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor*

**B**ad habits are hard to break. Good habits are hard to establish. Habits are just plain hard. Mike Prelewicz is a senior fitness coordinator at the James City / Williamsburg Community Center and helps people develop the healthy habit of exercise.

Mike's work with the Community Center developed from his life-long enjoyment of being active. "I was never a kid that

stayed indoors and amused myself with video games," he explains. "I played soccer and wrestled. I was always into fitness and working out." In college, Mike took an economics class and "was bored out of my mind." That semester he was also enrolled in a weight-lifting class and decided being active and helping other people achieve their goals was a direction that appealed to him. "I started as a physical education major at Christopher Newport," Mike says. "Then I transferred to James Madison (JMU) in the exercise science area. While there, I worked with the strength and conditioning department training athletes. I loved it. That's when I knew what I wanted to work with was the sports side."

"When someone is thinking about exercising," Mike says, "they're at the first step: They want to make a change." With the New Year,

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# Next Door Neighbors Health

many of us have created resolutions for good habits like exercising regularly.

The attraction for Mike was assisting his clients in reaching a goal, helping them see the results of their hard work. After graduating from JMU, he went back to Christopher Newport University as a strength and conditioning coach training student athletes. Now at the James City / Williamsburg Community Center, he's expanding his knowledge and skills. "It's interesting here because I get to work with a wide range of ages," Mike says, "from 12 to 90-something and with people striving for a variety of goals."

But, not everyone has a history of being active and Mike acknowledges that getting physical can be a challenge for some.

"Have a plan," Mike says. "Start with de-

fining your goals and the steps to get there." The goal is specific to you and the plan is individualized for your fitness level. Mike says a good trainer will start with an evaluation of your goals and your fitness options. "Someone with osteoporosis isn't going to do the same program as someone with high blood pressure," he adds.

The main characteristic of a goal is to make it specific and achievable, and Mike's experience helps him advise clients on what is a reasonable expectation and what isn't. "Some people start by saying 'I want to gain some muscle' or 'I want to lose some weight'. What's your definition of 'some'?" he asks. "Is it five pounds? Is it ten pounds? Fifteen pounds?" He helps his clients break down their goals into achievable chunks in

reasonable time frames. That allows you to monitor your progress and celebrate the victories along the way.

"Find something you enjoy doing," he advises. "Don't make yourself do a routine if you aren't having fun." That's a key to staying with a new habit - make it enjoyable. "My wife and I have three dogs that always want to go out and walk," Mike says. He incorporates the dogs' exercise with his own by taking them jogging around his neighborhood.

That illustrates a point he likes to make that exercise isn't just in a gym. "As long as you're up, active, and moving that's a plus," he says. "Find what you like to do: yard work, golf, just get moving. You don't think of it as exercise, but it is."

One of the biggest challenges to establishing an exercise habit is fitting it into your already busy schedule, and Mike has a solution for that. "Set up exercise like an appointment," he says. "Put it on your calendar as something you make time to do. It doesn't have to be in the gym, there are parks

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with walking and hiking trails.” He makes a good point that exercise goals can be accomplished in many different ways. The county has many parks and classes to choose from. If the gym is too busy, schedule a hike or walk with a friend around the Community Center. “That trail is a two mile loop,” Mike adds. Freedom Park offers a 1.8 mile hiking trail and a ten mile mountain biking trail that accommodates all skill levels. Greensprings Trail is a three mile nature trail.

If the weather doesn’t cooperate, the community centers and recreation centers have numerous classes to fit different interests and schedules.

“The biggest thing,” Mike says, “is not to become discouraged. If it were easy, everyone would be walking around looking like an Adonis. If you could buy it in a bottle or in a store, it would be out by now.” Finding a combination of enjoyable activities not only leads to success, but also helps establish a healthy habit because there are more options.

During the exercise season of the new year, many people become discouraged when the gym is too crowded and the throng of exercisers tie up favorite machines. “That’s when you know you’re setting a habit,” Mike explains. “You get frustrated when you can’t do it.”

He likes to show his clients alternatives to achieve their fitness goals, things they can do when their regular routine is interrupted. “Using different machines or doing different exercises keeps you from becoming bored with the routine,” he adds. “That way you’re not getting on a treadmill every time. You can use a stationary bike, an elliptical [exercise equipment]. If the water aerobics class isn’t on a certain day, you can hike a trail or get your walk in around your neighborhood.”

Alternative exercises in your routine give variety and keep boredom at bay.

Developing a community of friends who also exercise helps with habits too. “Working out with a partner, a group, or just showing up at the gym at the same time each day,” Mike says, “leads other people to look for you and they will miss you when you don’t show up. They encourage you to be there and ask ‘So where were you?’ They start giving you a hard time, start holding you accountable.” This fitness community becomes important in establishing a habit.

Mike’s final advice for an exercise habit: “Have fun. When you enjoy what you’re doing, you’ll keep doing it until it’s a new part of your healthy life.” NDN

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