

1. Within an hour of arising in the morning. As discussed in chapter 8, according to national surveys, many of us are quite sedentary in the morning hours, and this keeps our metabolism sluggish. Whether you do it before or after breakfast, morning physical activity helps to increase your morning metabolism.⁶ And there's another consideration: Moderate exercise in the morning before you eat breakfast may give you even more of a boost in burning off excess body fat, based on the theory that after a full night's sleep there is little glycogen (stored carbohydrate) in your muscles to supply energy, and therefore more fat is used as fuel.⁷ One study of runners directed by Anthony Wilcox, Ph.D., at Kansas State University in Manhattan reported that two-thirds of the calories burned during prebreakfast workouts were from fat, while fat calories accounted for slightly less than half of those burned during afternoon runs.⁸

2. Within 15 to 30 minutes after eating your midmorning snack, lunch and midafternoon snack. Research indicates that your body's metabolic rate goes up by about 10 percent after a meal or snack as a result of the chemical processes that are activated to get that food digested. And there's evidence that this 10 percent can be increased—and at least in some cases, may be *doubled*⁹—if 5 to 20 minutes of moderate (not vigorous) physical activity such as walking takes place while these initial digestive processes are still going on.¹⁰

3. In the early evening—within 30 minutes after eating. You can help further increase your body's fat-burning power by scheduling some kind of enjoyable physical activities in the early evening. As physiologist Melanie Roffers puts it: "Exercising at this time of the day elevates the metabolic rate just as it's winding down."¹¹ Exercising after eating has been shown in some studies to increase your calorie-burning by 30 percent to 50 percent for at least 3 hours following the meal.^{12,13} And since overeating high-fat foods in the evening is associated with weight gain, evening exercise may help ease this appetite and reverse other factors responsible for the increase in body fat.¹⁴ As an added benefit, a brief, early-evening fitness activity may increase your comfort in forgoing high-fat foods during the key evening hours when most binges tend to occur.¹⁵

Now you can stop feeling guilty if you miss a formal exercise session; you can add "active minutes" in other ways, and see and feel the benefits. Start emphasizing *active living* to take the dread and drudgery out of fitness. As science learns more about exercise, fewer of the old hard-and-fast rules apply.