

**WOMEN'S  
HURDLES**

**GOLDEN RULES  
MANIFESTO**

**HOW TO ENGAGE WOMEN  
IN SPORT AND EXERCISE  
TRYING TO OVERCOME  
THE GENDER GAP**

# GOLDEN RULES

## 1. INVOLVEMENT of the WHOLE DECISION MAKING PYRAMID

For a true change in sports and organized physical activity, participation, women should have more opportunities to participate in decision-making in sports organisations and institutions, as well as in administrations and agencies dealing with sports. Women have to cover all positions of the organizational pyramid as well as all roles involved (decision makers, directors, coaches, referees, trainers...).

## 2. WOMEN of ALL AGES NEED TO PRACTICE SPORT or PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Some sensible phases in women's life and particular women's categories should be carefully monitored.

## 3. PERSONAL MOTIVATION IS THE DRIVER

Women should be assisted to break down practical and personal barriers and build up a consistent personal motivation for a #Beactive lifestyle. The formation of groups based on personal needs and motivation will favor sisterhood and therefore persistence.

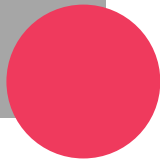
## 4. COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

The word "sport", "gym" and its traditional accompanying images can trigger negative associations for many women as competition, medals, fatigue. Proper communication about the experience women will have in practicing physical activity is fundamental. Patronizing should be avoided, positive messages about fun and well-being, and less about health, are necessary.

## 5. THE ROLE of TESTIMONIALS – ROLE MODELS

Physical activity and sport are associated with images of fitness and beauty and this may feed feelings of inadequacy. However, on the other hand they can be a wonderful motivational trigger. Thus, it is important to use real role models showing women confident being themselves.





## 6. THE ROLE of PARTNERS

Partners should be encouraged to support women in practical ways (domestic chores e.g. childcare and cooking) to free up women's time as well as offering emotional support and positive encouragement.

## 7. THE ROLE of CHILDREN

For a working woman, time spent with their children is never enough. Organizing sports or physical activity together with their children may allow to optimize time slots and avoid guilty feelings.

## 8. THE ROLE of the WORKPLACE

For a working woman, the need to optimize time availability is crucial. The opportunity to be engaged in physical activity at workplace during worktime could be very useful. Employers should offer flexibility in work schedule, and opportunities for exercise in the workplace (trainers and properly equipped places- Corporate wellness makes a lot of sense). In return they will get happy and healthy employees and an impressive increase in productivity.

## 9. THE ROLE of TECHNOLOGY

Technology may offer varied and updated advantages such as training (individual/group) at distance but with an online trainer for women who can't or don't want to go to the gym. Personal touches in communications are fundamental (e.g. text message reminders about forthcoming sessions, messages to offer encouragement after missed sessions).

## 10. THE IMPORTANCE of PERSISTENCE

On many occasions in a woman's life the adherence to sports participation or physical activity programs may decrease or even completely stop. Every possible effort should be undertaken to maintain women's adherence to physical activity throughout all their lives.



# UNDERSTANDING WOMEN

## WHO ARE THEY?

As explained before women of all ages should be involved in sport and exercise

There are some “sensible phases” and groups to monitor:

- **Late adolescence:** The habit of including sport in our daily routine can be an acquired habit that can be taught throughout our school years, when the curb of learning and memorizing new skills is of easier and powerful form. In other words, if a person decides to start a physical activity in her school period, she may be more prone to continue that aspect in her adulthood. However, researches show that too many girls are dropping out of sport and physical activity during teenage years and developing deep-rooted negative attitudes towards it, which act as barriers throughout life.
- **Post pregnancy:** An effort needs to be made to allow new mothers to continue to take care of their body and to discharge the typical stress and depression of post-partum period.
- **Menopause:** Many women are unprepared for how debilitating the symptoms may be; moreover, physical activity and exercise can be crucial during this period as it counteracts some of the metabolic changes due to menopause as well as the effects on women's physical and mental health.
- **Breast cancer and other cancers/ chronic diseases:** To accept and reconnect with their bodies, build new self-confidence, enhance self-expression, address feelings of isolation, depression, anger and fear and strengthen personal resources and above all, to do a physical activity necessary for their well-being
- **Disabilities:** Women with disabilities face “double discrimination” in sport and organized physical activity: one for being disabled and one for being a woman.

Don't forget the Hard to Reach Population:

- low income women;
- migrants/refugees women;
- other underprivileged women.

## WHAT WOMEN THINK ABOUT SPORT?

- Most women know that sport and physical activity is a good thing to do, but don't feel they can easily get round to it for a whole raft of reasons.
- There is some motivation but often there are perceived and real barriers to making it happen.
- Sport and exercise is generally not perceived as directly relevant to what goes on in everyday life for women. It rarely appeals to women's core values or reflects what is important to them.
- For many women, sport is competitive, difficult, unfeminine, aggressive and not aspirational...

# WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS FOR WOMEN ?

## Contextual

- Lack of time is often given as the main reason preventing women from taking part in sports and exercise.
- Lack of information is another significant barrier, particularly compounded by lack of time to find the information.
- Costs.
- Lack of programs or facilities.

## Personal Barriers

- Absence of “self-permission” – While women may realize that they should be doing more for themselves and their health, internalized societal and cultural expectations make them feel they do not have permission to do so; taking time for themselves appears selfish or indulgent to them. A middle-aged woman typically puts herself at the bottom of her as she feels as having the responsibility to put her family’s welfare above her own. In the case of mums in particular, spending time on exercise might be perceived as neglecting her domestic and maternal duties.
- Fear of being judged. Judgement can come from all angles: from close friends and family (afraid of not living up to their expectations); from other women (not matching up to accepted standards) and from men (dismissive of their ability to exercise and participate in sports).
- Worries about appearance, which can be a general unhappiness with having to reveal their body, as well as being put off by what you look like once you do exercise (no make-up, hot, sweaty etc.).
- Lack of social support. Women often are intimidated by the idea of engaging in physical activity on their own because they do not feel supported by society.
- Concerns about ability/performance for those who have worries that they won’t fit in – ‘it’s not for me’. Even women who have been previously very physically active may worry about ability and possible failure to live up to expectations.
- Concerns about danger for those with injuries or health conditions. for example but even women who have been previously very sporty can worry about ability and failure to live up to expectations in terms of performance.
- Lack of motivation, predicted lack of enjoyment.




# TIPS & TRICKS


## WHAT TO DO

1. Offer a wide choice of time slots to allow women to find the right activity at the right time: before/after work, weekend mornings, later evening after children's bedtimes, during lunch break...
  2. Offer family fun sessions or ways to exercise with children.
  3. Offer parallel courses (at the same time) mother/children.
  4. Set up a kindergarden or a room for homework in the sport facility.
  5. Offer corporate wellness courses.
  6. Create group training with fixed participants to encourage the socialization and motivation.
  7. Re-think sport and exercise to incorporate a social element.
  8. Arrange "bring a friend (or carer)" discounts encourage women to overcome the fear of exercising alone.
  9. Develop feelings of "sisterhood" to overcome personal barriers such as lack of time and children care.
  10. Take advantage of the technology by offering training (individual/group) at distance but with an online trainer.
  11. Arrange taster and drop-in sessions which allow women to participate without concerns of spending too much time.
  12. Offer sessions tailored to different ability levels, especially for beginners, those lacking confidence, as well as for the more advanced.
  13. Age-targeted activities (at both ends of the spectrum) can appeal to younger and older generations and offer 'bankers' (activities whose popularity is well established, e.g. fitness and dance-based classes such as Zumba).
  14. Women-only sessions are particularly important to some communities and need to be organized and delivered appropriately. For example, male staff cannot walk into sessions to repair equipment.
  15. For disabled women, activities need to be accessible making it easier to integrate within mainstream offerings.
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## AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE

1. Use words that resonate physical exercise not as another duty, but as fun, freedom, exploration.
  2. Reframe activities as quality time to spend with friends / family.
  3. Provide detailed information, not just the basics on timings and venues, but also what sort of clothing is required, if changing facilities are available, onsite childcare etc.
  4. Assume a positive, motivational tone of communication rather than patronizing or authoritative.
  5. Recruit well prepared, friendly female instructors, who have been trained in softer skills and understand the importance of boosting a woman's confidence.
  6. Myth-busting messages: make it clear that one does not have to be super fit to participate and that others will be beginners as well.
  7. For those that relish a challenge, setting goals and encouraging progress towards them will be important.
  8. Provide a personal touch in communications (e.g. text message reminders about upcoming sessions or to offer encouragement after missed sessions).
  9. Ask for feedback and input in decision-making.
  10. Show women in sports clothing exercising and sweating but still looking comfortable and happy. Engage testimonials.
  11. Use real life case studies/models demonstrating everyday women participating in sports to whom others will easily relate.
  12. Communicate to women that by exercising they will be a good role model for their daughters as well as for others around them.
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- When asked, millions of European women say they would like to participate more in sport and physical activity. But many of these women are NOT currently active.
  - There is no magic formula, but a set of practical and emotional changes behind a woman's decision to undertake physical activity.
  - Attitudes and behaviours may vary from a target audience to another.
  - Throughout this Manifesto we want to emphasize the key learnings which apply at a high level to most women.
  - It is the responsibility of the sports and physical activity deliverers to ensure that they build on this by understanding the specifics of their target groups.
  - However, WOMEN'S HURDLES team expects that this Manifesto can be used as a starting point and a reference for considering how to introduce new offers or change existing ones, aiming in better engagement of women in physical activity.

To know more about the project please visit  
[www.womenshurdles.eu](http://www.womenshurdles.eu)



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