

Young people feel there are fewer opportunities for them to get involved in sports

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New year, new you, or so everyone says. Will 2020 be your year thanks to a change in diet or maybe a new exercise regimen?

For [young women](#) this may not be the case, with a number of barriers including [body image](#) and environment meaning many females don't partake in regular physical activity, whether that be at school, university, or in their local community.

In fact men are more active than women in virtually every age group. Sport England's "This Girl Can" campaign was created in response to research that revealed that there are two million fewer active women than men in the UK.

We asked Loughborough Lightning Cricket Head Coach Salliann Briggs for her thoughts on why young women should make sure they're exercising regularly. With advice spanning a number of different areas, she emphasized jumping in head first.

"Confidence is key—let go and put yourself out there—as soon as you experience that feeling you'll really know the benefits in terms of what sport can give you. Whether that's simply feeling involved, being included in [different environments](#), meeting new friends or just generally feeling better about yourself.

"The amount of self-worth you get through sport is incredible and ultimately everybody wants to be fit and healthy."

For women of all shapes and sizes how they look and feel can be a big problem, with body image having a profound effect on confidence and willingness to partake.

"I think body image and stereotypes have definitely taken a shift over the last five years and one of the key things people are realizing is that there isn't such a thing as a perfect or normal body. There are so many beautiful women of all different body types who are healthy and living a great, [active lifestyle](#); being engaged in physical activity is making them

feel really good about themselves.

"If you're feeling good about yourself you're going to change the mindset of other people making these opinions about body image. The perfect [body](#) isn't out there."

Alongside eating and sleeping well, exercise is one of the key elements when it comes to getting or staying fit and healthy.

"Obviously anything to do with creating a [healthy lifestyle](#) is something we all need to get on board with. The key thing for me is to work out what you enjoy and focus on that, as that's what's going to get you physically active. Then set yourself some goals. It's important to have goals in all areas of your life as when you achieve them you'll feel good about yourself and you'll want to carry on, and maybe even attack new areas."

That being said, there are plenty of barriers for young women wanting to play sports, however Briggs believes most of these are just perceived barriers as opposed to literal things getting in the way.

"Some environments, whether that's a gym or a team, can be a little bit intimidating at first, as you can have to join a new group of people who you don't really know. However I think it's far from that, as I think most facilities and teams are very inclusive and are screaming out for people to get involved, join them, and make something really special."

Time is another barrier (or excuse) that people use.

"Everyone has a busy lifestyle so you've got to make sure your physical activity fits into your lifestyle, as you can't just do it on a whim. Find out what's out there, get organized, and then set those alarms if you're training early and get out there. If you're training after work make sure

you've got all your kit packed the night before, as once you get organized things become a lot easier."

Still not feeling it having given it a try?

"Everyone needs a pat on the back now and then, and some positive reinforcement to keep going. Women are really good at this and if you go to an all-[women](#)'s session there is always someone there patting you on the back and willing to support you. Some of these people you meet through sport turn out to be friends for life and that's one of the best things about it."

"But for me the main thing that sport gives you is that it takes you to a place where you probably haven't imagined, and you achieve things that you have probably never achieved."

More information: Rachel Sandford et al. Navigating complex social landscapes: examining care experienced young people's engagements with sport and physical activity, *Sport, Education and Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2019.1699523](https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2019.1699523)

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