

Enjoy

Starting an Exercise Program

According to a report from the U.S. Surgeon General, more than 60% of adult Americans don't exercise regularly, and 25% don't exercise at all. Yet the benefits of keeping fit through regular exercise are well known.

Physical activity promotes good health by:

- Building and maintaining healthy bones, muscles, and joints.
- Controlling weight.
- Reducing fat and building lean muscle.
- Reducing the risk of premature death caused by coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, colon cancer, and diabetes.

In addition, experts believe that regular exercise can help reduce anxiety and depression and improve a person's ability to complete daily tasks.

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The Elements of Fitness

What does it take to be physically fit? That depends on age, sex, heredity, diet, and personal habits, including exercise. Physical fitness has four main elements — cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, and flexibility. Exercise helps develop each of these.

Getting Started

There are no hard-and-fast rules for designing an exercise program. The amount of exercise, the type of activity, and the effort expended are all individual choices. Someone who is training to run a marathon, for example, will have a very different exercise routine than someone who simply wants to stay in good shape.

An exercise program also should be based on age, current health and fitness levels, and desired goals. People who smoke, are older than 35, have been inactive for years, or have a medical condition (for example, high blood pressure, heart trouble, or a family history of stroke or heart attack) should talk with their doctors before beginning an exercise program.



Fitness Goals

Here are the personal exercise guidelines developed by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. They're for an average healthy adult committed to maintaining his or her physical fitness.

Warmup — before each exercise session, do five to ten minutes of easy exercise such as walking or slow jogging.

Muscular Strength Exercise — two or more 20-minute sessions a week to build the strength of major muscle groups through weightlifting or similar exercises.

Muscular Endurance Exercise — three or more 30-minute sessions a week of exercises such as calisthenics, push-ups, and sit-ups.

Cardiorespiratory Endurance Exercise — three or more 20-minute sessions a week of continuous aerobic exercises such as swimming, jogging, brisk walking, cycling, cross-country skiing, and rope jumping, that require using oxygen.

Flexibility Exercise — 10 to 12 minutes of stretching exercises daily. These are done slowly without bouncing motion.

Cool-down Routine — after each exercise session, five to ten minutes of low-level exercise, such as walking slowly and stretching.

Two Important Guidelines

Making exercise effective requires maintaining a regular schedule of at least three balanced workouts a week. It's a good idea to try to exercise at the same time of day, such as before the evening meal or early in the morning.

In addition, to increase fitness, the body must be pushed above resting level. For example, to increase cardiovascular fitness, the heart rate must be raised to a certain level for at least 20 minutes. See your doctor or fitness trainer to determine the target heart rate appropriate for you. Gradually building up the frequency, intensity, and length of the activities improves fitness.

This material is intended for general educational purposes only.

