

Getting Started with an Exercise Program



1. Visit your personal physician

It is recommended that you obtain a physician's clearance prior to beginning an exercise program. He or she can screen you for cardiovascular disease and other conditions which may make exercise unsafe for you to perform. It's best to start training knowing that your body can handle the work.

2. Obtain proper footwear for training

Proper shoes and socks are necessary for keeping your feet healthy throughout your training program. Improper fitting footwear can lead to skin irritation, overuse injuries, knee and back pain, and can put an early end to your training program. Seek out good footwear from a walking or running specialty shoe store. Your feet and your body will thank you for it.

3. Start slowly

The most important training tip is to remember to start your exercise program slowly. Set achievable goals for yourself which require moderate effort to meet. If you are sedentary, try walking for 10-15 minutes 3 days per week. If your fitness level is higher, you can start with a little more. However, if you start your training program by doing too much too fast, you may end up injured and set your fitness routine back even more.

4. Monitor intensity level

Keeping track of your exercise intensity is vital. Measuring your heart rate is a simple way in which you can judge your exercise intensity. You can pick up a heart rate monitor at a sports store, or you can take your pulse during and after exercise. By monitoring your heart rate, you can see how your body responds to certain exercises, giving you an idea of how much you can push yourself.

5. Track progress

Documenting your progress on a calendar, in a log book, or even online, can help keep you focused on your training program. By logging in your miles, steps, heart rate, etc., on the days you exercise, you can begin to see gradual improvement over time. Seeing this feedback provides great motivation to continue training and may give insight to your rate of exercise progression.

6. Progress gradually

To prevent soreness, injury, and overtraining, it is best to progress your exercise routine gradually. **The F.I.T.T. Principle of Exercise** states that there are 4 components to designing an exercise program. **Frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type.** Frequency is how often you exercise (3-5 days is recommended). Intensity is how difficult the exercise is (measured in Heart Rate or Rating of Exertion). Time is the duration of the exercise session (measured in minutes). Type is the mode or type of exercise activity performed (walking, biking, swimming, weights, etc.).

For Example:

To begin a walking program, it is recommended that you begin a program of moderate intensity walking for 20-30 minutes per day with a frequency of 3 days per week.

If you are successful at this for 2-3 weeks you may gradually increase the duration or time of each walk by 5 minutes, or the frequency of days per week to 4.

If you are able to perform this new level of activity you can continue to progress in the frequency, time, and eventually, intensity, by walking faster, walking uphill, climbing stairs*, or even beginning a jogging program.

7. Find sources of motivation

Sticking with an exercise program for the long-term can be challenging. If you find activities that you enjoy or can participate in with others, you are one step closer to making regular physical activity a part of your life. Other sources of motivation include: listening to music and/or watching television/movies during your exercise, exercising with a partner or trainer, taking a class, exercising outdoors, training for an event like a 5k walk or stair climb*.

8. Listen to your body

Your body is built to inform you when it's tired, injured, or sore; also when it is energized, and ready to be active. Listen to your body. If it is telling you to rest, then rest. If it's telling you that you have energy, take advantage of that feeling and go be active. Being aware of when you are tired or energized can give you an idea of when to structure your exercise sessions. If you are sore or injured, take time to rest and recover before pushing yourself. Contact a physician or physical therapist if your injury does not improve.

9. Stretch and relax

Last, but not least, remember to stretch and relax after your workout. Exerting yourself physically exposes your body to stress. One of the best ways to relieve stress or tension in the body is to perform gentle stretching exercises. Forget those warm-ups that you did in high school football practice. These stretches consist of gradual and static holds for 20-30 seconds for each body part or area to be stretched. Make sure to stretch out your low back, hamstrings, quadriceps, and calves. See this link from the Mayo Clinic for more information on stretching:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stretching/HQ01447>