

Exercise for Good Health

Exercise can improve your quality of life, and may even lengthen it. Proper exercise protects against heart disease and stroke, diabetes, cancer, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. It can also make you feel better about yourself and your life.

How Do I Start?

Before Starting

Ask your doctor if you have any general health problems, such as diabetes or risk factors for heart disease, which may be affected by exercise.

If so, you may need a heart test before you exercise. Your doctor may also want you to work on specific parts of your body first, such as joints or muscle groups.



Set Goals

Set goals for yourself that will help you slowly improve your strength, flexibility, and endurance. For instance, you may start with 10 minutes a day and then increase that time as your strength and endurance improve.

Look for exercises that add to your function and to your enjoyment of life. Try a number of different exercises to find the ones that are right for you.

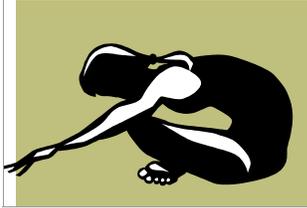
Start Gradually

To avoid injuries, start with light exercises for short times. Then gradually, over weeks and months, increase the intensity and length of your exercise activities.

Keep At It!

Before you start, know that you will have to keep at it if you are going to see improvement. If you do not use your body regularly, you will lose the ability to do things for yourself.

How Do I Stretch Tight Muscles and Joints?



Stretch your tight muscles and joints to improve your flexibility. You may need to take more time with the most painful joints and muscles.

1. Move each body part to the point of a little resistance or discomfort (for example, lift your arm).
2. Hold it there for a slow count to 10.
3. Repeat this 4 to 10 times.

All major muscle groups and joints will benefit from this work. If you have a particular problem with a joint or limb, talk to your doctor or therapist about how much stretching is safe for you.

How Do I Increase Muscle Strength?

Two types of muscle work will help increase your strength.

Isometric

Isometric muscle contractions tighten muscles without moving the joints. This type of exercise is a good way to start if your muscles are weak and activity is painful. Joints do not move, so they are less affected by isometric exercise.

Example: Sit in a chair near and facing a wall and straighten your leg by “pushing” the wall away with your foot. The wall will not move, but your leg muscles will get a workout.

You can strengthen all muscles with isometric exercise.

1. Start at the top of your body and work to the bottom.
2. Gently contract, or squeeze, each muscle one at a time. Hold each contraction as you count to 5.
3. Each week add 1 set of exercises and 1 contraction, with a goal of 6 times a day and 10 contractions for each muscle.

How Do I Increase Muscle Strength? continued

Isotonic

With isotonic strengthening, the body part moves with the muscle while exercising.

Most daily activities will do this for you. You might also try lifting weights or stretching with elastic bands. The bands come in different strengths and can be used at home.

Start with light resistance, and repeat 4 to 6 times for each muscle group. Do this no more than twice a week.

Types of Exercise

The following list gives examples of some of the exercises you may want to consider:

- Stretching
- Chair exercises
- Weight training
- Elastic band resistance
- Walking
- Treadmill (in front of the TV, at the gym)
- Tai Chi
- Yoga
- Dancing
- Stairs
- Low impact aerobics
- Sports (cycling, swimming, golf)



What If the Exercise Hurts?

Do not give up if pain or health problems block your first efforts to exercise. Talk to your doctor or therapist about how to get around the problem you find.

He or she may recommend acetaminophen or other pain medicine to help you exercise more comfortably. For sore muscles, try a massage, heat, and/or cold, depending on your doctor's recommendations.

Tips for Exercising



- Exercise daily to start
- Carry a cell phone
- Stretch all your muscles before and after
- A warm shower or bath will help loosen you up before starting
- Exercise with a friend
- Join a gym or exercise group
- Start low (intensity and duration) and slowly increase activity
- Work hard enough to sweat but still be able to carry on a conversation
- Do not overdo it. Too much exercise can cause injury

Resources

Organization

The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports (PCPFS)

Department W

200 Independence Ave., SW

Room 738-H

Washington, D.C. 20201-0004

Phone: (202) 690-9000

Fax: (202) 690-5211

Web site: www.fitness.gov

Web Sites

www.50plus.org

The Fifty-Plus Lifelong Fitness (formerly Fifty-Plus Fitness Association) mission is to promote an active lifestyle for older people. Fifty-Plus publishes a newsletter, distributes books and videos, and sponsors physical activity events for mid-life and older adults.

Resources, continued

Web Sites, continued

www.medlineplus.gov

Up-to-date, quality health care information. Go to Health Topics, “Exercise for Physical Fitness” and “Exercise for Seniors.”

www.niapublications.org/engagepages/exercise.asp

Exercise: Fit for Life, a National Institute on Aging “Age Page.” The NIA offers additional information on exercise for older adults, including an exercise video. Go to www.nia.nih.gov and click on “Publications.”