

Things You Should Know Before Starting Your Exercise Program

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Starting a fitness program could be the best thing you can do for your health. With your doctor's permission to exercise, physical activity can reduce your risk of chronic disease, improve your balance and coordination, help you lose weight and even improve your sleep habits and self-esteem. Beginning an exercise program can be very overwhelming and painful if you are not careful. Warming up and stretching prior to exercise is essential for a successful workout, as well as allowing you to enjoy the workout more.

Warming and stretching raises the temperature in your body and muscles, as well as increasing blood circulation. This prepares your cardiovascular, respiratory, and nervous systems for the demands of exercise. Pre-exercise warm up allows connective tissue that has not been stretched recently to handle the increased physical demands brought on during exercise. This significantly reduces your chances for injury. Connective tissue is similar to hard plastic; if you do not warm-up plastic it will not be flexible, and is much more likely to “break.” Proper warm up and stretching also helps reduce post exercise soreness. This enhances blood flow and oxygen to the muscles and gets rid of the waste products and metabolic acids contributing to soreness. Increased blood flow also helps bring more fuel to your body, resulting in better performance.

Warm up with a low impact exercise, such as biking, an elliptical machine, walking, or rowing. These exercises allow your body to warm up with minimal stress to your joints. Another reason for soreness is trying to do too much too soon. Do not try to make up for lost time. Start out with a few exercises and slowly progress. Your body will gradually adapt to the increased stress. If you are starting resistance training for the first time, I highly recommend “Body For Life” by Bill Phillips. This is like having a personal trainer in a book. It is easy to follow and understand, with pictures of the equipment and illustrations on how to safely perform the exercises.

If you are a beginner to aerobic training, start out with something like walking that raises your heart rate a little bit, nothing that will get you too out of breath. Try doing this for 10 minutes the first few times you exercise, slowly progressing the duration of the workout. If you have increased the time to a point where you can handle 30 minutes at that pace, start out building a little more intensity. For example, you could attempt 2 or 3 days of 30 minutes at that pace, and then start building a little more intensity. Another area of frustration for the beginner is energy level.

Most people expect to exercise the first few weeks and experience a shot of energy. In actuality, the opposite often occurs. Your body is not used to the added stress, which can cause you to feel

fatigued and even drained, especially if you overdo it. Do not get discouraged; it is natural to feel this way until your body adapts. As your body acclimates itself, your cardiovascular system will become more conditioned, causing you to have more energy and focus throughout the day. Your efforts will pay off. Overexertion will trigger stiffness and soreness, causing many people to give up on exercise completely. If you overdo it, there are a few things you can do to feel better.

Exercise actually breaks your muscles down—sleep, nutrition, and hydration play a vital role in their recovery. Proper rest, refueling your body with healthy food, and drinking plenty of water will help you recover much more quickly. Thirty minutes in the infrared sauna will also do the trick. Infrared heat is actually FDA approved for acute and chronic pain. In the days that follow, doing a low impact exercise at a low to moderate intensity and stretching will deliver more oxygen and blood to help clean out the waste and bring more nutrients to your muscles. Your body loses a large quantity of water when you work out, so it is very important to drink more water as you exercise. Active people should drink at least 10-12 eight-ounce cups a day, throughout the day.