

How to Improve Your Physical Fitness

What is fitness?

Fitness is being able to perform your “daily” tasks as efficiently and effectively as possible. For you, this means being able to perform daily tasks each day along with your responsibilities to family, friends, work and other interests. All of this requires an exceptional level of physical readiness and needs to be addressed year round.

Components of Physical Fitness

Muscular and bone strength: The amount of tension that can be created by a muscle when it contracts; or in the case of bones, tendons, and ligaments it is the amount of tension that can be withstood before an injury occurs.

Cardio-respiratory endurance: The ability of the heart and lungs to provide oxygen and nutrients to the working muscles during intense exercise in an efficient manner.

Nutrition: Eating nutrient dense foods that will aid in repair of the bodies many cells as well as fuel an active lifestyle.

Flexibility: The range of motion around a specific joint as well as the surrounding muscles and connective tissue.

Rest: The need for the body need to recover from hard work.

The level of fitness that is attained is directly linked to the effort you put into your training for ALL areas mentioned above.

A high level of physical fitness can be attained by performing as little as 10-15 minutes of PURPOSEFUL exercise each day. The key is to perform each exercise or activity to the best of your ability then try to improve upon that next time! The goal is to find the minimum amount of exercise needed to obtain maximum fitness. Doing more just to do “more” is counterproductive.

At each training session it is required that you:

- ❖ Be prepared both physically and mentally
 - ❖ Work hard
 - ❖ Train with a purpose
 - ❖ Enjoy yourself
- ❖ Leave your workout in the gym

Strength Training Guidelines

Perform a total body workout 2-3 times each week focusing on the muscles of the hips – legs – chest – back – shoulders – arms and midsection.

Emphasize the strengthening of injury prone areas such as the hamstrings, inner thighs, calves, lower back, wrist, and shoulders.

Always lift in a slow and controlled fashion – do not bounce the weights or slam them down. Momentum does not build strength, it inhibits it.

Raise and lower each repetition through its full range of motion – all the way up and all the way down with a pause in the contracted position.

Perform 20-30 repetitions or higher for the lower body and 15-20 repetitions for the upper body. Please note these are just guidelines – lower repetition ranges can be used but only when you have been training for a significant amount of time. Note: Low reps don't build bulk, high reps do not make you "tone" and lifting fast does not make you fast – training very hard makes you stronger and faster regardless of the repetitions used!

Each workout you should try to increase either the number of repetitions performed or the amount of weight lifted. Regardless of the target reps, always train to momentary muscular fatigue.

Stay focused when performing each exercise. NEVER talk while performing the exercise, change body positions or turn your head. REMEMBER the goal is to perform PURPOSEFUL exercise.

Never perform an exercise if it causes you joint or muscular pain. An exercise is only beneficial if it works for YOU!

Strength Training Misconceptions

- ❖ I shouldn't strength train all the time
- ❖ Girls can't or shouldn't get strong or develop muscles
 - ❖ Weight training will make me big and bulky
 - ❖ I run a lot, therefore my legs are strong
 - ❖ I should only use machines
 - ❖ Just doing the exercise is "good enough"
 - ❖ Workouts have to be long
 - ❖ Strength training will make me slower
 - ❖ Lifting fast will make me fast

Cardio-Respiratory Guidelines

When possible, try to perform “recreational” activities a few times per week (bike, swim, surf, hike, walk, jog etc.). This is especially important for those who participate in seasonal sports or activities because this gives your body a little break from the pounding it’s taken when emphasizing a particular activity.

Prior to resuming your activity full time (which would be approximately 6-8 weeks before you start your activity full time) **slowly** progress up to 3-5 days each week over the course of several weeks. **DO NOT GO OUT “FULL THROTTLE” EVERYDAY RIGHT FROM THE START** – this can cause overuse injuries that can linger and do more harm than good.

Vary the intensity and duration of your workouts. It is important to “mix things up”. For example on Monday perform an interval workout, and on Thursday perform a long run or bike ride. Additional activities can also be applied that involve the elliptical, stationary bike, stair climbers, etc. but I recommend outdoor activity whenever possible.

Perform an activity for 15-40 minutes, with the understanding that the shorter the amount of time for that activity, the harder that activity should be worked. “Harder” means a more intense effort is put forth to perform your chosen activity so you may do 10 or 12 all out sprints with 30 seconds rest between bouts. The key to a successful conditioning program is to vary your activities so you can stimulate the different energy systems and help prevent overuse injuries and boredom.

Cardio-Respiratory Misconceptions

- ❖ I have to do some type of cardiovascular work every day for at least an hour
 - ❖ Cardiovascular conditioning is all I need to be in good shape
 - ❖ I need to train in my “zone” for my cardio to be effective
 - ❖ All I need to do is run and I will be in condition for my activity

Nutrition Guidelines

Eat from a variety of food groups, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, meats, and small amounts of dairy. Find what foods work best for you.

Eat a balanced diet: 40% carbohydrates / 30% protein / 30% good fats

Eat at least 3 “balanced” meals and 2 - 3 snacks each day. A balanced meal is one which includes a protein, carbohydrate, and a fruit or vegetable and a snack can be a piece of fruit, some raw nuts or a couple hard boiled eggs.

Eat a nutrient dense breakfast every day. Break the fast by eating a good healthy serving of protein and complex carbohydrate.

Drink at least 10 – 12, 8ounce glasses of water each day.

Try to limit the amount of sugar you eat, especially from candy, soda, ice cream, pastries, and cookies.

Try to limit the amount of saturated fats in your diet that are present in many fast foods as well as whole milk products, and fatty cuts of meat.

Try to limit the amount of deep fried foods you eat. French fries, potato chips, fried chicken, etc.

Do not be obsessed with calories. It is important to eat enough wholesome calories to support your active lifestyle. A good guideline is to multiply your bodyweight by 14, this is a good indicator of your daily caloric needs. You need to “feed the machine”.

Complex carbohydrates: potatoes, yams, brown rice, oatmeal, veggies, fruits

Protein: eggs, turkey, chicken, lean cuts of beef, fish

Fats: raw nuts and seeds (pumpkin, walnut, almond, Brazil, cashew), salmon, fish oil, flax oil, avocado

Nutrition Misconceptions

- ❖ Carbohydrates are bad
- ❖ Flavored water is the same as regular water
- ❖ Skipping meals will help me lose weight
- ❖ If I eat fats I will get fat

Flexibility Guidelines

Use a program that emphasizes stretching the major muscle groups.

DO NOT over stretch a muscle or joint.

NEVER perform a stretch that causes undue stress on other joints or muscle groups. For example, the “sit and reach” and “hurdlers stretch” are dangerous movements that strain the joints and soft tissue (joint capsules, tendons, ligaments) of the knee, lower back and hip area.

Do all lower body stretches on your back. This reduces the strain on the lumbar (lower back) and allows the muscle and joints to be stretched safely.

Relax when you perform your stretches.

Stretch every day after your body is warmed up.

NEVER force your body into a stretched position that it won't achieve naturally.

NEVER have an unqualified person help you stretch.

Flexibility training helps improve the elasticity of the soft tissue and helps in reducing the risk of injury. It also helps eliminate soreness and stiffness and can aid in athletic performance.

Flexibility Misconceptions

- ❖ A stretch needs to be held for a certain amount of time
- ❖ You should force your body into stretch – that's the only way it will become flexible
 - ❖ You can touch your toes already so you don't need to stretch
 - ❖ You should stretch prior to warming up

Rest / Recovery Guidelines

Take time to rest at least 1 – 2 days per week to allow your body to recover.

Take “mini vacations” when needed. Take 3 – 4 consecutive days off when you feel your body is dragging.

Try to get 8 hours of uninterrupted sleep every night.

Try to grab a nap or some quiet time whenever you can and let your body and mind relax.

Learn to meditate to quiet the mind and body.

Listen to your body. If you are scheduled to workout but your body doesn't feel fully recovered, take an extra day or two of rest and come back stronger.

Exercise without the proper amount of rest can lead to poor performance and can increase the chance of injury.

Every once in a while take a full week off. Perform some light activity and flexibility work but nothing too strenuous and then ease back into your program.

Perform “active rest” when possible.

Rest / Recovery Misconceptions

- ❖ If I take a day off, I'm being lazy
- ❖ Resting means sitting around like a couch potato
- ❖ Quiet / alone time isn't resting or beneficial for recovery
- ❖ If I take some time off I'll become weaker

Fitness Tips

Make a habit: it takes 21 consecutive days to make a habit, either good or bad.

Set a schedule and stick to it.

Relax when you can. The body is not a machine and it needs rest to rebuild from all your hard work.

It is about improving YOUR fitness, don't worry about what others might be doing or not doing.

Play as many recreational games as you can and count that as your cardiovascular conditioning workout.

Find a friend to workout with, as long as they are as motivated as you are.

Fitness is about striving to improve upon where you are now.

One focused effort on 1 exercise is worth more than 20 half hearted attempts.

Be consistent and gradually improve – an effort to make steady, continuous improvement is much better than an all out effort followed by a month of inactivity.

Keep your workout efficient – 15-20 minutes is plenty, providing the effort is there.

Appreciate all of your accomplishments. Being able to perform 6 push-ups when you could only perform 4 is a big deal. Small increases on a continuous basis make for long lasting gains.

Recommended reading:

“A Practical Approach to Strength Training” by Matt Brzycki

“The Diet Cure” by Julia Ross

“The Stark Reality of Stretching” by Dr. Steven Stark

“TRAIN WITH A PURPOSE”

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