



# *Exercise: Getting Started and Staying With It*

## ***Introduction***

Deciding to make exercise a part of your life is one of the healthiest decisions you can make. When you are fit, your risk of disease decreases, and your ability increases to face the challenges of the day.

Physical activity is at the heart of any fitness program. When you are physically active with the goal of improving or maintaining physical fitness, you are exercising. Any physical activity, such as walking the stairs, can be part of your exercise routine.

You can develop the skills to make exercise a part of your day in a healthy, safe and inexpensive way. If you have a chronic medical condition, talk with your physician about what might work best for you.

This information is intended to provide practical ways to approach your exercise commitment and enjoy the benefits of good health and fitness.

### ***Some benefits of becoming more active***

- Strengthened muscles and joints
- Controlled weight
- Reduced risk of heart disease and stroke
- Increased bone mass or decreased bone loss
- Increased energy and stamina
- Improved flexibility and balance
- Reduced stress and increased self-confidence
- Relieved chronic pain
- Improved sleep and mood
- Lowered blood sugar
- Lowered blood pressure

## *Small Steps to Great Benefits*

Setting goals is essential to creating an exercise program. Goals organize and direct you toward change. They help you move in a positive direction, provide a sense of purpose and enable accomplishments that build your self-esteem and confidence. To develop short-term and long-term goals for increased activity, use the “SMART” acronym below to achieve the changes you desire. A “SMART” goal is:

**Specific:** Write each goal as specifically as possible.

**Measurable:** Focus on specific, measurable actions.

**Attainable:** Ask yourself if each goal is possible to attain.

**Realistic:** Ask yourself if each goal is realistic.

**Trackable:** Decide how to track your progress.

My long-term goal:

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*Example: I will walk 30 minutes per day most days of the week to increase my energy level.*

My short-term goals:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Example: I will walk 10 minutes during my lunch break three days each week of this month. I will add five minutes each week until I am walking 30 minutes each time.*

Do not try to accomplish too much too quickly. You are the expert on your life and the best judge of what works for you. Motivation to exercise does not come first; first you do something, then you become motivated to do more. Succeed in small steps and enjoy building on your successes.



## *Exercise to Increase Physical Fitness*

Regular exercise is planned physical activity performed to increase physical fitness. Such activity should be performed for 30 minutes most days of the week. If you cannot do everything in one session, try three 10-minute sessions. Even short sessions yield health benefits.

### *A quick tip*

An exercise plan includes four types of exercise: aerobic, strengthening, flexibility (stretching) and balance. Setting goals for each area will help ensure a well-rounded exercise program and improved health and fitness.

### **Aerobic exercises**

Also known as endurance or cardiovascular exercise, these activities increase your breathing and heart rate for an extended period of time. Endurance exercise benefits the health of your heart, lungs and circulatory system and will improve your stamina for daily activities.

### **Strengthening exercises**

These exercises are intended to strengthen the muscles and increase metabolism. With stronger muscles you can maintain your weight and keep your blood sugar within a normal range. Strengthening exercises are sometimes called strength training, resistance training or weight training. To become stronger, your muscles must push or pull against an opposing force, such as weight or gravity. Resistance can be achieved by moving or pushing your own body weight, pulling on an elastic band or lifting weights.

A subset of strengthening exercises is core stability exercises. These strengthen and stabilize the abdominal and low back muscles. Building strength in these muscles supports your spine, improves posture, promotes better sports performance and may help prevent back injury. Examples of core stability exercises include fitness ball exercises and Pilates mat exercises.

A sampling of strengthening exercises follow. Relax and breathe normally as you do these exercises.

### *Chair Squat (strengthens thigh and hip muscles)*

If necessary, hold onto a stable surface for balance (see figure 2). Lower your buttocks as if preparing to sit in a chair (do not sit). Keep your back straight. Pause. Repeat. Inhale as you lower your body and exhale as you return to standing. Or, continue relaxed breathing as you hold the bottom position. Keep abdominal muscles contracted.

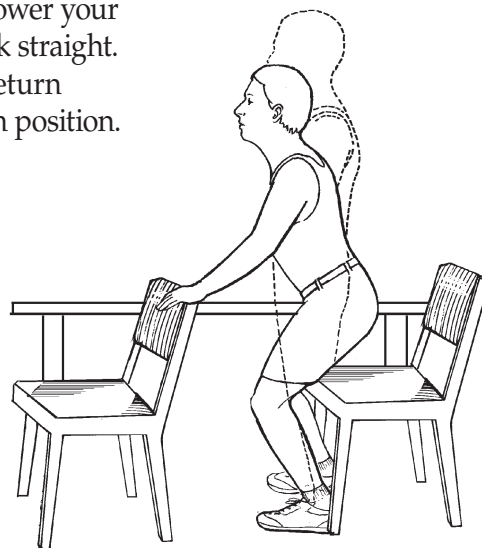


Figure 2. Chair squat

***Bridging (strengthens leg, hip and low back muscles)***

Lie flat on the floor or a mat with your palms facing the ceiling (see figure 3). Bend your knees and keep your feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips until your hips and lower back are off the floor. Your head and neck should remain relaxed on the floor. Hold the position until fatigued or unable to comfortably keep your knees and hips in a straight line. Continue relaxed breathing as you hold the position. To increase difficulty, extend and hold one leg straight out from your hip. Keep abdominal muscles contracted.

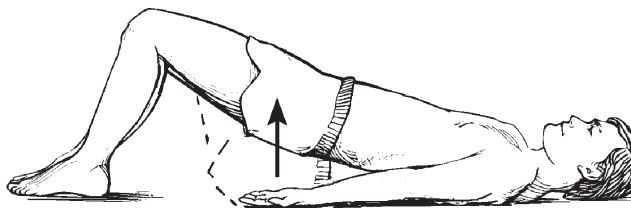


Figure 3. Bridging

***Curl-ups (strengthens abdominal muscles)***

Lie on your back with your arms folded across your chest (see figure 4). Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor. Exhale while slowly lifting your head, neck and shoulders (if you are able) off the floor. Pause in this position. Inhale as you lower yourself to the mat. Keep abdominal muscles contracted.

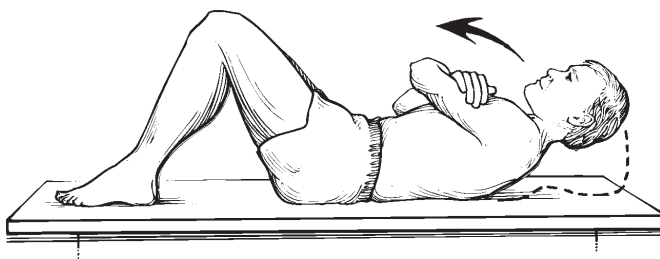


Figure 4. Curl-ups

### *Single arm row (strengthens back and shoulders muscles)*

Facing a bench with your knees slightly bent, lean forward from your hips and support yourself with your left hand and knee (see figure 5). With the weight in your right hand, exhale as you pull the weight upward toward your hips. Keeping your elbow close to your body, inhale as you lower your arm. Return to the starting position. Repeat the exercise with your other arm. Keep abdominal muscles contracted.

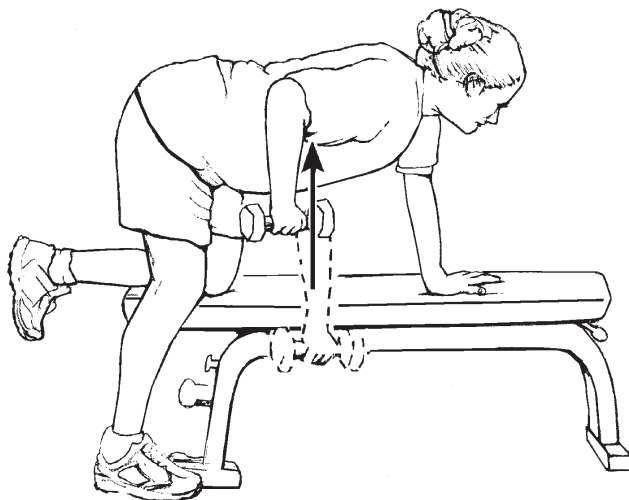


Figure 5. Single arm row

### **Flexibility (stretching) exercises**

These exercises increase range of motion, make muscles more limber and may help reduce the risk of injury. They may also improve your posture, reduce low back pain, and help your body recover from vigorous activity or exercise sessions. Activities which improve flexibility range from simple stretching exercises to yoga.

A sampling of flexibility exercises follow. Relax and breathe normally as you do these exercises.

### *Neck and shoulder stretch (to the side)*

Sit in a comfortable position and grasp the seat of the chair with your left hand (see figure 6). With your chin slightly tucked, slowly lean your head to the right until you feel a gentle stretch.

Maintain a constant, gentle stretch. If the stretch lessens, continue to gently lean your head to the right until you feel the stretch again. Repeat the stretch to the left side (grasp the seat of the chair with your right hand). Maintain relaxed breathing while stretching.

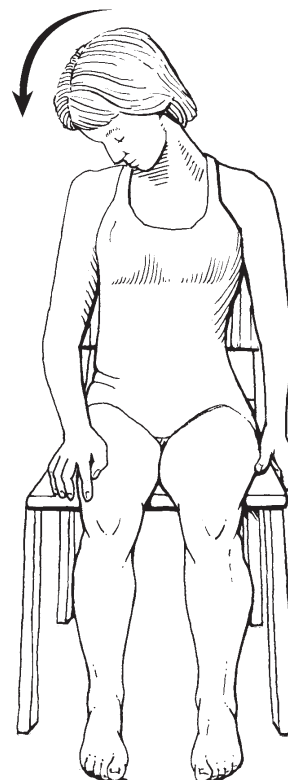


Figure 6. Neck and shoulder stretch

### *Hamstring stretch (seated on floor)*

This stretch can be done while sitting on the floor (see figure 7), on a chair, or standing. If done while sitting on the floor, extend your left leg straight ahead with your toes pointing toward the ceiling. Bend your right knee and place the sole of your right foot on your inner left thigh. Keep your chest up and lean forward from your hips. Slowly move both hands down your left leg until you feel the back of your thigh muscles (hamstrings) stretch. Repeat with your right leg extended. Maintain relaxed breathing while stretching.



Figure 7. Hamstring stretch on the floor

### *Quadriceps and hip flexor stretch*

Stand and place your left hand on a wall or a sturdy piece of furniture for balance (see figure 8). Grasp your right foot or ankle with your right hand. Tighten your abdominal muscles. Slowly pull your right leg/thigh backward until you feel the muscles stretch in the front of your right thigh and hip. Repeat using your left leg. Maintain relaxed breathing while stretching.

The alternative is to pull the cuff of your pants, as shown. Or, pull on a towel that is wrapped around your ankle.

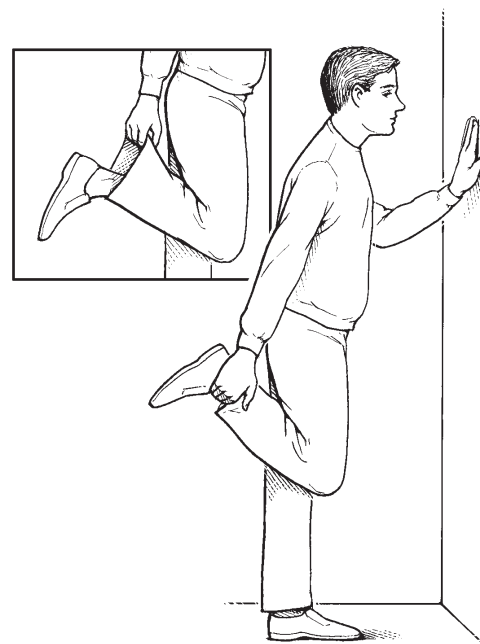


Figure 8. Quadriceps and hip flexor stretch

## *Low back stretch*

While sitting in a chair, tuck your chin toward your chest and slowly bend forward from your waist toward your thighs until you feel a mild stretch in your back (see figure 9). Maintain relaxed breathing while stretching.

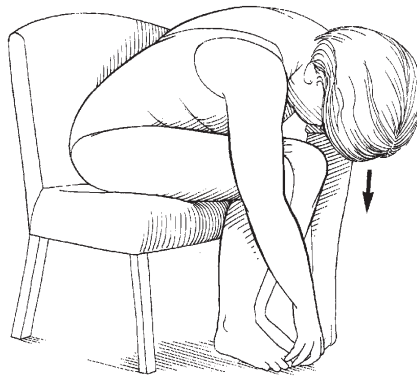


Figure 9. Low back stretch

### **Balance exercises**

These exercises help you maintain your balance and reduce your risk of falls and injury. Activities include tai chi, yoga, weight shift and single-leg balance exercises.

## *Staying Fit for Life*

### **Staying motivated**

Starting an exercise program takes initiative. Maintaining it takes commitment. In just a few weeks you should begin to see results. Look at each day that you perform your program as a success. You will feel invigorated and your stamina will increase. The good news about motivation is that people who stick with a new behavior for six months usually maintain that behavior long-term. The more days you have been following your exercise program, the easier it will be to stay with it.

Here are some ways to help sustain your success:

**Work exercise into your daily routine.** Look for opportunities throughout the day to exercise. If possible, establish a consistent time daily for exercise, making it part of your schedule.

**Involve your family and friends.** You can support one another and do your family members a favor by helping them develop a healthy behavior. Exercise with a friend or make new friends by taking an exercise class together. You may be more likely to follow through on your plan to exercise if you know that someone else is counting on you to show up.

**Track your progress.** Record your exercise activity, including what you did, how long you did it, and how you felt before and after your exercise. You will be encouraged by your progress and may find an exercise log helpful.

**Reward yourself.** After each exercise session, sit down and relax for a few minutes. Savor the feelings of accomplishment, improved self-esteem and confidence. Treat yourself to a massage or new workout clothes.



**Challenge yourself.** Over time, you will find that your body adapts to your routine. If you lose motivation, change the intensity or duration of your workouts. This will add to your feelings of achievement and help improve your fitness level.

**Be flexible.** If you feel sick, take off a day or two. If you have an especially busy day, modify your routine.

***A quick tip***

Use self-monitoring tools, including heart rate monitors and pedometers (a device you wear that counts steps), to provide feedback, help you set new goals and keep you interested and motivated.

**Keep moving**

Exercise lends itself to almost any environment and schedule. With the right attitude and willingness to plan, you will be able to maintain your commitment to fitness. Here are a few ideas to help you incorporate exercise into your life:

***At home***

- Wake up 30 minutes earlier.
- Schedule exercise as you would any other appointment.
- Try circuit training for 30 minutes by alternating strength exercises with aerobic activities.
- Use a cordless phone and walk around the house while you talk.

***With the family***

- Make family time exercise time.
- Map a few walking routes and establish a family challenge to walk the farthest.
- Walk with another parent while your children are at sports practices.
- Take your dog for at least two quick walks per day.

***With friends***

- Sign up for a group exercise class or join a softball, soccer or volleyball team.
- Go with a friend to a health club or gym.
- Plan an active outing with friends by visiting your local chamber of commerce for ideas about walking and biking trails, parks and other fitness opportunities.

***At work***

- Walk, skate or bike to work.
- Take fitness breaks instead of coffee breaks.
- Use the stairs rather than the elevator; start by walking down the stairs.
- Keep a pair of walking shoes or in-line skates in your office or car.
- Join a nearby health club and workout before or after work, or mid-day.
- Plan walking meetings when possible.
- Use time while talking on a speakerphone to get up and walk.
- Start a lunchtime walking group.
- If you ride a bus home, get off a few stops early.

***While traveling***

- Choose a hotel with a fitness room or a nearby fitness facility.
- If you are a health club member, ask if a visit to a sister club can be arranged at your destination.
- Pack a jump rope, light hand or ankle weights, elastic bands or an exercise video.
- Walk around your hotel, take the stairs and chart a route around the neighborhood.
- Ask the concierge about restaurants within walking distance.
- In the airport, take a walk instead of sitting until your flight departs.

***In bad weather***

- Plan ahead.
- Dress in layers.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Purchase exercise equipment for home use.
- Join a health club.
- Walk at a mall.
- Walk in the snow.

## **Facing setbacks**

Slipping back into old habits is not uncommon when changing your lifestyle to become healthier. No one is exempt from disruptions, low points and discouragement. It is part of making change. Often factors, perhaps outside of your control, short-circuit your exercise routine. Stopping, for whatever reason, does not mean failure.

If you go back to an old behavior, recognize it and spend some time problem-solving. Review why it was important for you to change to the new behavior, identify why you went back to the old habit, and create solutions so you can avoid repeating this behavior in the future. Most often, setbacks are caused by real barriers that can be addressed. If you feel as if you are facing failure, take these steps to jump-start your exercise routine:

**Revise your fitness plan.** Most likely your fitness plan needs fixing, not you. Be certain that your goals include things that you can do and are within your control. You may have set goals that are too high. Set smaller, more realistic goals. When the time is right, you can change your plan and move up to the next goal.

**Recall your past success.** If your confidence in your ability to change is shaken, remind yourself of past accomplishments and of the assets or skills that have helped you change. Remember what helped you start in the first place and begin again.

**Remember that anything you do counts.** Is there anything keeping you from resuming exercise today? Maybe you can walk for 15 minutes instead of 30. Begin again.

**Talk with a professional.** If you feel discouraged or have fallen into a slump, consult a fitness specialist, your health care provider, or a psychologist who specializes in behavior change who can help you determine your next steps.

## **Remember your problem-solving skills**

Problem-solving skills will help you create an alternative exercise plan when time, illness, injury, family or work demands or other legitimate reasons make it difficult for you to maintain your regular exercise regimen. When developing a new behavior, people commonly will take a step forward, fall back into old habits, and then move forward again. Even the most committed people falter. Lapses are part of change; they happen to everyone.

Be kind to yourself. Your response to relapse is important and will determine what happens next. Surround yourself with supportive family and friends who will help you stay focused on your progress and on maintaining your fitness level. You are the expert in your life. You know what will work for you. Most importantly, get back on track as soon as you can.

Being aware of the possible obstacles also will help you problem-solve when difficulties arise. If exercise has become unpleasant, boring, less of a priority or if you feel it is not productive, review these common obstacles and identify solutions:

## **Tips to overcome obstacles**

### ***Bored?***

- Work out with friends and family.
- Use a heart rate monitor or pedometer.
- Listen to music or watch television while exercising.

### ***No time?***

- Break exercise into short periods.
- Plan exercise into your daily schedule.
- Count daily activities, such as walking the stairs, among your exercise regimen.

### ***Inconvenient?***

- Work out at home rather than at a health club.
- Create reminders that help you remember to work out. (Keep your exercise clothes and shoes in sight.)
- Build exercise into your life (walk briskly, weed the garden, walk to work).

### ***Discouraged?***

- Call a friend to exercise with you.
- Recall your past successes.
- Focus on achievement with each step, rather than on the final result.

### ***Injured?***

- Start back slowly.
- Choose low-risk activities.
- Ask your health care provider what you can do.

### ***Sick?***

- Avoid strenuous exercise.
- As a general guideline, if symptoms are above the neck — a stuffy or runny nose, sneezing or sore throat — then moderate exercise is generally safe.
- Do not exercise if you have a fever, chest pain, generalized muscle aches, a hacking cough, vomiting, extreme fatigue, chills or swollen lymph glands.

### ***Bad weather?***

- Do an alternative indoor activity, such as swimming, cycling or walking in a mall.

### ***Traveling?***

- Call ahead to identify fitness facilities.
- Walk around the airport.
- Work out in the hotel room.

**Ready, set, exercise**

By reading this information and considering how best to apply it, you have taken an important step toward initiating and maintaining a lifetime of being fit. Remember to include the four basic elements of fitness — aerobic training, strengthening exercises, flexibility (stretching), and balance. Always maintain a healthy posture to protect your spine from injury.

Safe, steady progress is the key to success. Exercise challenges your body and your mind. Keeping your routine fresh will enable your mind and body to reach your goals. Soon, exercise will become a regular part of your life and you will experience the benefits of being fit. Congratulate yourself for your progress and enjoy the healthy way exercise makes you function, look and feel.

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