

12 Beginners' Questions About Exercise

"Every US adult should accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week."

Surgeon General, 1996 Report on Physical Activity



ALL-
SPORT
HANDOUT

1. What is Fitness

Exercise fitness is a combination of cardiovascular (aerobic) fitness, strength (muscular) fitness, and flexibility. All three components are important.

Aerobic fitness is most associated with improving general health.

2. Which is the Best Exercise?

The best exercise is that activity which you will enjoy and pursue regularly.

Four great exercises are bicycling, swimming, brisk/race walking, and running.

Rowing and cross-country skiing, which require special environments, are also excellent.

Although golf is a relatively inefficient exercise, it gets people out and moving. Tennis is good; handball or racquetball may be better because play is often more vigorous.

Weight lifting increases muscular strength, but is relatively poor at conditioning the cardiovascular system. Yoga and other stretching activities have roles to play in improving fitness, but also do not condition the cardiovascular system.

3. Is Exercise Safe?

There are risks associated with exercise. There may be more risks, however, in *not* exercising.

There can be problems. Running is hard on the knees. Aerobics is frequently associated with strains of ankles and knees. Cyclists can fall. One must also consider the risk of exertion in provoking a heart attack.

However, not exercising may be more dangerous. Overall, the benefits outweigh the risks for most people.

4. Do I Need Medical Clearance?

If you begin slowly, and only gradually increase the amount and intensity of your physical activity, you probably don't need to check with a doctor before starting.

However, if you are over the age of 50, or have medical problems, it may be safer to check with your doctor first.

5. How Often? How Much?

The usual magic numbers are at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes. The 30 minutes includes 5 minutes of warm-up and 5 minutes of cool-down.

If you can't get all your exercise at one time, it's okay to break it up into two 15-minute sessions.

Less than that and the benefits to increasing strength and heart tone are hard to achieve and maintain.

If you can exercise most days of the week, that is better.

Exercising for more than 5 hours per week, unless you are training as an athlete, is not time efficient for most people, and is associated with diminishing returns.

6. How Hard?

Exercising at moderate intensity—at a pulse rate of 65% to 80% of your maximum heart rate, provides cardiovascular benefit. The effort should be hard enough to require deep breathing, but you shouldn't be gasping for breath. You'll probably be able to talk comfortably, but not in long sentences.

So-called age-predicted maximum heart rate is 220 minus your age in years. It may be wildly inaccurate for you as an individual.

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7. Where Do I Find the Time?

Probably, you don't find it. You *make* it. You can find 30 minutes 3 times a week if you want to find it and *plan*.

8. How Do I Start?

Just start.

Don't overdo it. Build up gradually. Develop confidence.

Don't go and ride your new bicycle 50 miles the first day. Take it around the block a couple of times.

Don't try and run a marathon your first time out. Start with a brisk walking program.

Increase your speed and distance slowly, but steadily.

9. How Can I Improve?

Set goals for the number of workouts and your training plans.

Keep a training diary and note your progress. This helps chart you progress and improves motivation.

People often want to improve after they've been on a steady program. There are usually two ways: (1) go longer or (2) go harder.

Interval training is one way to get stronger. No extra time is needed—you simply work harder, performing a more intense workout for a set distance or time period. For example, during one of your workout sessions per week, you might perform 3 to 5 minutes of hard work at a time, with perhaps half dozen such intense repetitions.

10. How Do I Cure My _____?

Specific problems may need a specific medical examination and therapy. *Injury prevention* involves not doing too much too soon.

11. Should I Eat Special Foods?

For general health, eat a balanced diet. Many take an inexpensive daily multivitamin/multimineral. Women generally need to maintain bone health with calcium-rich foods or supplements.

Most people do not need to make dietary changes, eat special food, or take extra vitamins because of exercise.

Do not exercise strenuously directly after eating a big meal, and avoid dehydration.

Keep up with caloric use by consuming 300 calories per hour of exercise. Drink 16 to 32 ounces of fluids per hour of exercise depending upon heat and humidity, and exercise intensity.

12. When Does it Become Fun?

For some, the fun is not the exercise activity itself, but the increased sense of well-being it brings.

For others, the weight loss, better control of blood pressure, friendships with others who are exercising, improved self-image, or the help exercise may bring in coping with stress, may be some of the rewards of exercise activity.

For others, it is just not fun. If exercise is not much fun, watching it on TV is not a solution. Switch your sport. **AB**