



Getting Started with Exercise and Fitness

Contents

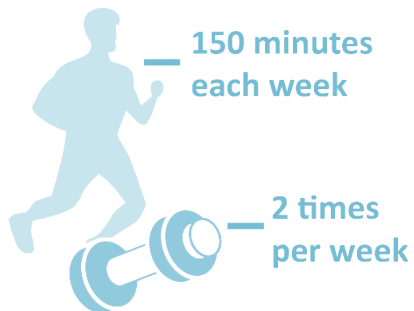
Introduction	4
The Value of Exercise	5
Immediate Benefits	5
Long-term Benefits	5
Common Reasons People Don't Exercise	6
Barriers and Solutions to Internal Challenges	6
Problem 1: Not Enough Energy	6
Problem 2: Lack of Motivation	6
Problem 3: Disliking Exercise	7
Problem 4: Not Enough Time.....	7
Problem 5: Fear of Being Judged	8
Problem 6: Lack of Support	8
Problem 7: Inability to Self-manage	8
Barriers and Solutions to External Challenges	9
Problem 1: Lack of Nearby Facilities.....	9
Problem 2: Cost of Gym Membership or Equipment	9
Problem 3: Illness or Injury.....	10
Problem 4: Inadequate Transportation	10
Problem 5: Childcare Concerns.....	10
Problem 6: Inaccessibility of Outdoor Options.....	11
Types of Exercise	12
Aerobic	12
Walking	12
Jogging	12
Biking	13
Dancing	13
Jumping Rope	13
Sports	13
Stretching	14
High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)	15
Calisthenics	15
Boot Camp	16
Resistance Training	16
How to Build an Exercise Routine	17
Step 1: Consult Your Physician	17
Step 2: Start Small	17
Step 3: Pick Exercises You Can Succeed At	18
Step 4: Be Prepared for Soreness	18
Step 5: Build Habits	18
Summary	19

Appendix20

- Shape Up with Strength Training21**
- 3 Parts of an Exercise Program22**
- Take the 20-minute Fitness Challenge23**
- 6 Tips for Adding Walking to Your Routine24**

Introduction

Regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your health. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), exercise can boost brain health, reduce the risk of disease, strengthen bones and muscles, and help you manage weight.



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recommends that adults engage in moderate-intensity aerobic activity for at least **150 minutes each week** and muscle-strengthening activities **two times per week**.

Yet, despite the benefits of regular exercise, many Americans don't get sufficient exercise or any at all. A recent study by fitness equipment wholesaler Gymless found that 39.4% of Americans never work out. For many Americans, this problem is exacerbated by work. Research published by PubMed Central showed that more than 80% of jobs in the U.S. involve mostly sedentary activities, such as sitting and typing. Although sitting is a natural position, too much sitting has been shown to increase the risk of obesity, high cholesterol, stroke and heart disease.

Getting insufficient exercise is a vicious cycle that can be challenging to break. The more inactive you are, the less physical activity you'll be able to do, which can decrease your confidence and increase your fear of being judged when you do exercise. Falling into a cycle of inactivity also makes exercise physically more challenging when you begin again, increasing your chances of hitting a wall or giving up. If you're new to exercise, you may have experienced how difficult it can be to create and stick to an exercise plan. Many adults struggle to get new exercise routines off the ground, particularly if physical activity is new to them.

Fortunately, it's never too late to start an exercise routine that can dramatically improve your mental and physical health. This guide provides tips on how to overcome reasons not to exercise, select exercise options that you'll want to keep doing and build a routine. The purpose of this guide is strictly informational. Individuals should discuss any exercise routine with their primary care doctor before getting started.

The Value of Exercise

Few lifestyle choices have as much impact on your overall well-being as physical exercise. The amount of physical activity you get directly impacts your brain, body and mood. Most of the benefits accumulate over the long term (e.g., the prevention of disease or improved balance). However, some benefits can be felt immediately. This section explains the significant impacts exercise has on your health.

Immediate Benefits

Even if you dislike exercise in the moment, you may reap quick benefits from the activity. According to the CDC, physical activity can immediately impact your mood and cognition. A session of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity can reduce short-term feelings of anxiety, lower blood pressure and improve your quality of sleep. Research published in the National Library of Medicine also supports the theory that exercise boosts the brain's production of serotonin, which can improve mood, memory and cognitive functions.

While these benefits may significantly improve your day, the true value of exercise has more significant long-term impacts, especially for people who work out regularly.

Long-term Benefits

Routine physical activity can greatly improve both your mental and physical health. It also increases your chances of living longer. A study in the medical journal JAMA Internal Medicine, which is published by the American Medical Association, found that approximately 110,000 deaths per year could be prevented if U.S. adults aged 40 to 85 years or older increased their amount of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity by 10 minutes each day. That's roughly the amount of time it takes to fold the laundry or make an appointment.

If a longer life doesn't motivate you, here are additional long-term benefits of regular exercise:

- Reduced risk of depression
- Decreased risk of dementia
- Improved heart health
- Lowered risk of chronic conditions (e.g., obesity, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease)
- Increased bone strength
- Enhanced balance and coordination, reducing the risk of falls
- Decreased risk of certain cancers (e.g., lung, kidney, stomach, bladder and breast)
- Lowered risk of weight gain
- Reduced pain and better quality of life for individuals with chronic diseases (e.g., arthritis)
- Improved control of blood sugar levels and reduced risk of nerve damage and heart disease for individuals with Type 2 diabetes
- Increased ability to live independently and perform daily living activities among individuals with disabilities

Furthermore, the CDC reports that regular physical activity may also help boost immune function, which can help your body heal faster, fight infections and reduce fatigue, among other benefits.

Now that you understand the positive impact exercise can have on your life, it's time to talk about why so many people don't do it.

Common Reasons People Don't Exercise

Despite numerous health benefits, most Americans aren't getting enough physical activity. A 2023 study published by the CDC analyzing data from more than 30,000 responses in its 2020 National Health Interview Survey found that less than one-third (28%) of Americans meet HHS recommendations for physical activity. If you're one of these people, don't worry; it's never too late to begin reaping the benefits of exercise.

Typically, an individual's reasons for not exercising are either external or internal. These reasons are often legitimate (e.g., lack of time or poor health). However, with proper planning and effort, these barriers can often be overcome. This section addresses common barriers to exercise and how to get past them to start a fitness routine.

Barriers and Solutions to Internal Challenges

An internal barrier is something that exists inside your mind (e.g., attitudes or preferences) that prevents you from starting or maintaining an exercise routine. Psychological barriers to exercise are extremely common. However, you can challenge yourself to get past them by remembering the numerous health benefits of exercise.

Here are some common internal barriers and how to overcome them:



Problem 1: Not Enough Energy

It can be hard to convince yourself you want to get physical activity if you're already feeling tired or low energy. You're not alone if the last thing you want to do after a long day of work is exercise or if you feel like you don't have the physical strength to get physical activity.

The Solution

Although physical activity may make your muscles more tired, it can also cause you to feel more energized. This is because exercise increases blood flow to your brain and body and promotes the release of neurotransmitters (e.g., serotonin and dopamine) that make you feel better and more energized. Remember that you won't regret your workout once it's over.

If lack of energy is a consistent problem, try working out when you have the most energy (e.g., before work or on your lunch break), exercising with a friend for additional motivation or beginning with low- or moderate-intensity exercise, such as walking or yoga. You can also try splitting up your workouts into mini sessions throughout the day. Start by trying to add one or two 10-minute sessions of physical activity to your day (e.g., a short walk during lunch or a bike ride around the block) and increase the frequency and duration slowly.



Problem 2: Lack of Motivation

There's no way around it: Exercise is work. It can be extremely challenging to motivate yourself for physical activity if you feel tired, drained or stressed. Many people struggle to exercise around their work schedules, or they don't want to "waste" their remaining energy on exercise when they could be

doing something they find more relaxing and enjoyable, such as watching TV or trying a new local restaurant.

The Solution

Long-term goals, such as losing weight and improving health, may not be enough to motivate you in the short term. People tend to prefer activities that have an immediate payoff over activities with long-term positive effects. If this is the case, find ways to add extra incentives to exercise. For example, you can use a fitness tracking app or reward yourself for meeting certain fitness goals (e.g., a manicure or a new laptop). Be careful not to reward yourself with unhealthy food, such as candy or ice cream. This can be a slippery slope that may ultimately reduce the positive impact exercise has on your life.

You can also consider hiring a personal trainer. In addition to holding you accountable, a trainer can help you develop a fitness program unique to your needs and goals, which can increase your motivation. Although there are costs associated with this investment, the benefits may be well worth it.



Problem 3: Disliking Exercise

People naturally avoid things they dislike. So if you don't like exercise, understanding the numerous health benefits of working out might not be enough to make getting the recommended amount of physical activity feel worth it. Rather, exercising may feel like a chore that's easily pushed off or avoided.

The Solution

If you don't enjoy the workouts you've done in the past, try something new to make it more enjoyable. Search for activities you enjoy, such as pickleball, volleyball and other sports. To make working out more fun, you can also listen to podcasts or music or watch TV while on stationary exercise machines. If you find yourself at a loss for physical activity you might enjoy, make a list of exercises you dislike and those you'd be willing to try. Work your way down the list of activities you have the potential to enjoy until you find one you don't mind doing. You can also boost your enjoyment by finding ways to make physical activity social.



Problem 4: Not Enough Time

It's common to feel like there aren't enough hours in the day to do everything you want. If you feel pressed for time, between work, family and other responsibilities, you may feel like beginning a new exercise routine is impossible or even selfish.

The Solution

Not having enough time to exercise is one of the most common barriers to starting and maintaining an exercise routine. However, you can overcome this barrier by making time for exercise in your schedule or working exercise into your family activities. Try waking up 30 minutes early to exercise or reserving time on your calendar for physical activity. You can also make time by substituting exercise for sedentary activities (e.g., watching TV) or adding physical activities to your plans, such as suggesting a walk with a friend instead of going out to dinner.

It's okay to get all or most of your exercise on Saturdays and Sundays, especially when you're just starting. Try to get 150 minutes of exercise during the weekend to help you avoid a sedentary lifestyle. You can find ways to incorporate activity into your daily life slowly.



Problem 5: Fear of Being Judged

If you're new to exercise, out of shape or unfamiliar with physical activity, social judgment may be a primary concern. Nobody wants to be bad at something or feel out of place. You may find yourself avoiding the gym, fitness centers or other physical activities (e.g., recreational sports leagues or pick-up soccer matches) because you're afraid of being singled out for not knowing what to do.

The Solution

People naturally avoid things they don't feel comfortable doing or fear they'll be bad at. Unfortunately, people often feel uncomfortable trying new things, which makes it harder for them to get better at them. This can be problematic when it begins to affect your overall health by preventing you from getting adequate physical activity. The trick to starting something new and potentially intimidating is to take small steps. Start by walking or biking with friends or joining a fitness class to familiarize yourself with the equipment before joining a gym.

You may also want to consider hiring a personal trainer. Although this costs money, a personal trainer can help you find a workout routine that fits your goals and body, which may help you get started.



Problem 6: Lack of Support

Starting an exercise routine can be difficult if you have nobody to go with. Sometimes you need a friend or family member to pump you up and hold you accountable for your goals.

The Solution

If you can't motivate yourself to work out alone, ask a friend or family member to join you. Finding a partner to work out with can increase your motivation and the likelihood that you'll stick to your exercise plan. If you're having a hard time finding someone to work out with, consider joining a fitness group, such as Zogsports.com or Meetup, or looking for local classes.



Problem 7: Inability to Self-manage

Beginning an exercise routine takes determination, perseverance and self-regulation. Taking responsibility for your own well-being, even when it comes to tasks you dislike or don't want to do, such as exercise, isn't easy. In fact, it can make beginning or keeping up with an exercise routine nearly impossible.

The Solution

Maintaining an exercise routine takes self-discipline. If this isn't something that comes naturally, you can benefit from starting small (e.g., adding 10 minutes of exercise a day or walking around your home while you talk on the phone). You can also benefit from challenging your mindset. If you struggle to perform tasks you don't enjoy or persevere when things get tough, you may have inaccurate opinions about what you can accomplish. Confront your notions of what you think you can do. You may even surprise yourself.

Barriers and Solutions to External Challenges

As the name suggests, external barriers are outside factors that are negatively impacting your ability to get physical activity. If you can't afford fitness centers or there aren't enough in your area, getting enough exercise may seem impossible. These are external barriers, and fortunately, they can be overcome just like internal ones. The following list contains common external obstacles to exercise and lists possible solutions.



Problem 1: Lack of Nearby Facilities

Unfortunately, people don't have equal access to exercise facilities. In some parts of the country, exercise facilities may be few and far between or inaccessible for a variety of reasons. According to the results of the CDC's National Health Interview Survey, just 16% of people in rural areas meet benchmarks for aerobic and muscle-strengthening activities, compared with 28% of people living in large metropolitan areas. This may be because there are fewer gyms and exercise facilities in more remote locations. If you live in an area that lacks gyms, fitness centers and local classes, you may feel discouraged on your exercise journey, which could cause you to give up altogether.

The Solution

Adaptability is a crucial part of any successful exercise plan, whether you live near a gym or not. If you live in an area with limited exercise facilities, search for physical activities that you can do outdoors. This may include finding nearby walking, hiking or biking paths or joining a recreational sports league at a local park. You can also find ways to exercise within the comfort of your home. This may include purchasing equipment you can use at your house (e.g., stationary bike or weights), but it could also include downloading a fitness app, watching YouTube videos on home workouts or researching exercises that require no equipment, such as planks and push-ups.



Problem 2: Cost of Gym Membership or Equipment

According to the health care company GoodRx, the average gym membership costs between \$40 and \$70 per month, but premium gym facilities can be more expensive. Workout equipment can also be expensive. Although there are relatively inexpensive options, such as resistance bands, dumbbells and workout mats, the cost of purchasing large at-home equipment, such as a treadmill or stationary bike, can cost upwards of \$1,000 or more. Many households have been impacted by high inflation, and prices are rising along with it. You may be unable to spare the money for a gym membership or at-home exercise equipment.

The Solution

Although the average cost of a gym membership is between \$40 and \$70, many exercise facilities are much less expensive. There are a variety of large gym chains that offer membership for less than \$15 a month, including Planet Fitness, Crunch Fitness and YouFit gyms. However, if the gyms near you are too expensive, you can search for inexpensive or free options, such as walking groups, workplace wellness groups, and parks and recreation programs. Additionally, you can plan workouts that require no equipment (e.g., calisthenics) or search for inexpensive but effective workout equipment, such as jump ropes.



Problem 3: Illness or Injury

A study by One Poll on behalf of wellness and fitness services company Reboot found that 46% of Americans get nervous working out because they don't want to injure themselves. Consequently, 6 in 10 survey respondents said they refrain from trying new routines due to fear of injury. If you're new to exercise, have taken time off due to injury or illness, or are out of shape, beginning a new exercise program can be mentally and physically challenging. It's normal to worry about injuring yourself or feel discouraged by the amount of physical fitness you've lost if you had to take an extended break due to sickness or injury.

The Solution

If you've been sick, it's essential to listen to your body and start slow. Beginning too fast puts you at risk of burning out and getting injured, which can lead you to quit your exercise routine soon after starting. To get back into shape, it's best to begin with moderate exercises, such as walking, before engaging in more vigorous activities (e.g., running, boxing or intense hiking). Fortunately, even if you have been injured, you can still work out as long as you don't stress the injured body part. For example, if you sprain your wrist, swap your push-ups for the stationary bike or treadmill. Discuss your exercise plan with your primary care physician or personal trainer before beginning a new exercise after illness or injury.



Problem 4: Inadequate Transportation

It doesn't matter how close you live to a fitness center if you can't get to it. Inadequate transportation prevents many people from exercising, and it comes in many forms (e.g., you don't have a car, you live in an area with poor public transportation or you share your vehicle with family).

The Solution

If you can't get to nearby gyms or recreational facilities, look for exercise options near your house. This may include biking at a local park or walking around your neighborhood. Additionally, there are a wide variety of fitness options that may be available to you within your home. Look for free online fitness programs or apps that can help you get the exercise you need without leaving the house.



Problem 5: Childcare Concerns

Whether you co-parent with a spouse, share children with an ex-partner or are a single parent, there's no denying that taking care of children takes a lot of your time. Although rewarding, childcare is an enormous and time-consuming responsibility that prevents many adults from getting the exercise they need to be healthy.

The Solution

If you struggle to find time to exercise around parenting responsibilities, you may want to consider bringing your kids with you while you exercise. Push your toddler in a stroller while you walk or invite your children to bike alongside you while you run. Older children may even want to join in activities with you. This has the added benefit of exposing your children to healthy activities while helping you find time for your workouts. You can also search for gyms that have childcare, join your kids during playtime

(e.g., soccer and tag) or plan your exercise around your kid's schedule. For example, you can work out while your child is at school or having a playdate at another house.



Problem 6: Inaccessibility of Outdoor Options

Outdoor exercise is an excellent solution for anyone looking for inexpensive exercise options. Unfortunately, working out outdoors isn't an option for anyone. If you live on a busy road, in an area with no sidewalks or a far distance from any nearby walking or biking paths, outdoor exercise may not be an option. Furthermore, you may live in an area with bad weather some or part of the year (e.g., cold and snowy winters), making regular exercise challenging in certain seasons.

The Solution

Don't let a lack of outdoor options hold you back from physical activity. In addition to researching local gyms, fitness and community centers and local recreational sports leagues, there are a variety of ways you can be active within your home. Certain exercises (e.g., yoga and calisthenics) don't require much space and can be done in a house, condo, apartment or other living spaces. You can also search for online or in-person classes (e.g., spinning or high-interval intensity training) or look online for local groups that carpool to nearby hiking, walking or biking trails.



Types of Exercise

Exercise often evokes images of complicated gym machinery, but at its core, exercise involves engaging in physical activity that elevates your heart rate above normal levels. This creates boundless opportunities for you to get exercise throughout your day. Although it may not seem like it right now, there are a wide variety of beginner-friendly activities for you to try. Many of these exercises are simple and can be done at home. This section provides an overview of common exercises you can try to achieve your workout goals.

Aerobic

Aerobic exercise describes a broad range of physical activities that involve repetitive and rhythmic movements, engaging your body's large muscle groups. This exercise can improve your cardiovascular endurance, which allows your body to pump blood more efficiently to increase the amount of oxygen in your blood cells. According to the Cleveland Clinic, the benefits of cardiovascular endurance include the following:

- Help you live longer
- Strengthen your heart and lungs
- Reduce your risk of many diseases (e.g., heart conditions)
- Improve your cholesterol
- Boost brain function
- Contribute to feelings of emotional well-being
- Improve your quality of life
- Assist with everyday tasks (e.g., climbing stairs)
- Improve blood pressure levels



Exercises that improve your cardiovascular endurance increase your heart rate and make you breathe harder. This encompasses a wide range of beginner-friendly activities, such as walking, jogging, biking, jumping rope and dancing.

Walking

According to the Mayo Clinic, walking can boost your cardiovascular fitness, improve your mood, cognition and sleep, increase energy, improve balance and coordination, help you maintain a healthy weight, help with weight loss, strengthen your immune system, and reduce stress and tension. Furthermore, walking is a low-cost activity that can be done year-round. You can make walking a social activity by joining local walking groups or inviting family and friends to join you, or take advantage of walking for some alone time and listen to your favorite music, podcasts or audiobooks.

For maximum benefits, walk fast, frequently and far, but be sure to warm up and cool down properly to avoid injury. Additionally, investing in a good pair of walking shoes can help you avoid injury and increase comfort and enjoyment during the walk.

Jogging

According to health care information website WebMD, running is one of the best cardio exercises you can do. Just 10 minutes a day can significantly reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease. Jogging also improves knee and back health, sleep quality and memory. Furthermore, it can boost mood and energy and improve your immune system.

If you're new to jogging, it's important to start slow. Begin with a walking warm-up before jogging for a few minutes at a time, with walk breaks in between. This will help you build your strength and stamina slowly, reducing the risk of injury. To ensure your shoes are the right type and fit, you may want to consider buying shoes in-person at a store that offers professional fitting or gait analysis.

Biking

Biking is an excellent place to begin your workout journey. Riding a bike is a low-impact exercise, which means it's easy on your joints and bones. As a result, people with joint pain or other mobility issues often find biking to be enjoyable and pain-free. You can also bike indoors with stationary bikes or spin classes when the weather is poor. There are a variety of online spin courses and in-person classes you can try. An added bonus of in-person spin classes is that they're often social, which may motivate you to attend them.

Dancing

Dancing is a way to stay fit for people of all ages and sizes. It can boost your aerobic fitness; reduce the risk of osteoporosis; improve balance, physical confidence and spatial awareness; and improve your mental health by boosting mood and improving self-esteem. Dancing is also a social activity that can help you make friends and increase your motivation to attend classes. There are many forms of dance for you to try, such as swing, salsa, ballroom and disco.

Jumping Rope

Jumping rope is a full-body workout that can help you build muscles and strength. It's also fun, and something you can do with your kids if you struggle to find time to exercise around childcare duties.

Experiment with new tricks, such as single-leg jumps and double unders, to make your workouts more interesting. You can also increase the intensity of your workout by buying a weighted rope. An added benefit of jumping rope is that it's cheap and easy to do anywhere you have space. Furthermore, it's a great way to speed up your heart rate. If you have only 10 spare minutes, you can pull out a jump rope for a quick heart-pumping exercise.

Sports

One of the biggest advantages of sports is that they're fun, so you may not notice how much exercise you're getting. Finding a sport you look forward to playing can boost your fitness and manage your weight. Additionally, sports are an opportunity to make new friends and find a community of individuals who share your interests. Fitness-boosting sports include the following:



Soccer



Basketball



Golf



Pickleball



Baseball



Cycling
(e.g., road or mountain)



Tennis



Kayaking,
paddle-
boarding
or surfing



Volleyball

While some of these sports require equipment, others merely require a willingness to show up and participate. Search for used sports equipment to save money.

Stretching

Stretching is a crucial aspect of beginning any exercise program. It can improve your flexibility, expand your range of motion and reduce your risk of injury. As a result, it may improve your ability to perform daily activities and boost your physical performance. However, it's important to understand the basics of stretching correctly before beginning. Otherwise, you could do more harm than good. The Mayo Clinic provides the following tips for safe stretching:

- Warm up before stretching.
- Focus on having equal flexibility on both sides.
- Prioritize major muscle groups (e.g., thighs, hips and back).
- Don't bounce while stretching.
- Maintain positions for 30 to 60 seconds.
- Aim for tension not pain.
- Stretch regularly.
- Combine stretching with movement.

Yoga is a popular way to incorporate movement into stretching. It's widely popular, meaning there's a good chance there are beginner-friendly classes nearby. All you need is a mat to practice beginner exercises at home. You can find online courses, apps or in-person classes, depending on your preferences. Other options for movement-based stretching include tai chi and Pilates.



High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT)

HIIT exercise involves alternating short periods of explosive anaerobic exercise with brief recovery periods to the point of exhaustion. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, HIIT exercises can help you increase strength and endurance, lose body fat and improve positive health outcomes (e.g., reduced risk of heart disease).

The primary appeal of HIIT workouts is that they allow you to achieve similar fitness and health benefits of other workouts in a shorter duration. If you struggle to find time to exercise, HIIT could be right for you. The following are examples of beginner HIIT exercises you could include in your workout:

- High knees
- Mountain climbers
- Burpees
- Jumping jacks
- Jumping lunges
- Sprints
- Push-ups
- Russian twists
- Tuck jumps

To begin, select an exercise that you feel comfortable with and perform it for 30 to 40 seconds, with 20 seconds of rest in between. Repeat the exercise three or four times. Due to the intensity of these exercises, you may feel sore after a HIIT workout. That's perfectly normal. It's recommended that you wait 48 hours between HIIT workouts, which should give you time to recover. The Cleveland Health Clinic recommends performing HIIT workouts no more than two or three times a week.

Calisthenics

Calisthenics can produce similar cardio benefits to jogging or sprinting on the treadmill. According to the Cleveland Clinic, these exercises can boost mobility, strength, balance, coordination and flexibility. They can also improve your posture and help you manage or lose weight.

Calisthenic exercises typically do not require gym equipment. Instead, they rely on your body weight for a workout. This means you can do calisthenics anywhere you have space, such as at home or at a park, making it an excellent exercise for anyone who doesn't want to go to the gym. The following are examples of calisthenics exercises:

- Lunges
- Squats
- Pull-ups
- Push-ups
- Sit-ups
- Planks
- Burpees

If you have balance, mobility or range of motion issues, it's imperative that you speak with your doctor before beginning a calisthenics workout. They can help you determine if this exercise is right for you.

Boot Camp

These exercises are typically time-based and comprise high-intensity circuits that combine aerobic and strength results. Boot camp exercises are typically led by an instructor, whether in-person or online. Similar to other types of HIIT training, boot camp involves short bursts of high-intensity exercises followed by brief recovery cycles. These workouts can help you manage or lose weight, gain strength, improve heart health, and lower blood pressure and cholesterol.

An added benefit of in-person boot camps is that they're social and beginner-friendly. Your instructor can show you how to do unfamiliar moves and let you go at your own pace to get familiar with the workouts. These exercises can also be done at home in an open space if you're looking for an inexpensive option or struggle with reliable transportation to and from classes.



Resistance Training

Resistance training, also called strength training or weight lifting, involves physical exercises that are designed to build strength and endurance. The CDC recommends two days of strength training every week as part of a healthy fitness routine. It can help you build muscle, boost your metabolism and improve your quality of life.

People commonly associate this activity with lifting weights. Although that is a form of resistance training, it's not the only one. Resistance training can also involve various training techniques, such as plyometrics, isometrics and bodyweight exercises.

- **Plyometrics** are exercises that require you to exert maximum force in short intervals (e.g., jumping rope, skipping or clap push-ups).
- **Isometrics** are exercises that involve using your body to act against itself or an object (e.g., planks or leg lifts).
- **Weight lifting** refers to the activity of lifting weights (e.g., dumbbells or barbells).

How to Build an Exercise Routine

Now that you know your fitness options, it's time to talk about creating a routine. With the right motivation and proper planning, the exercise routine you build today could help you increase your fitness for years to come. This section provides guidance on creating an exercise routine you'll want to keep doing.

Step 1: Consult Your Physician

Before beginning a new exercise program, you should speak with your health care provider. If you've been sedentary for a long time, are out of shape or have underlying health conditions (e.g., heart disease and asthma), your doctor will be able to provide you with guidance on how to get started. In addition to making sure it's physically safe to begin exercising, your physician can help you determine which activities are best for you.

The [Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire](#), which is endorsed by the American College of Sports Medicine, can help you determine if you need to consult a doctor before beginning a new exercise program. This questionnaire includes questions such as the following:

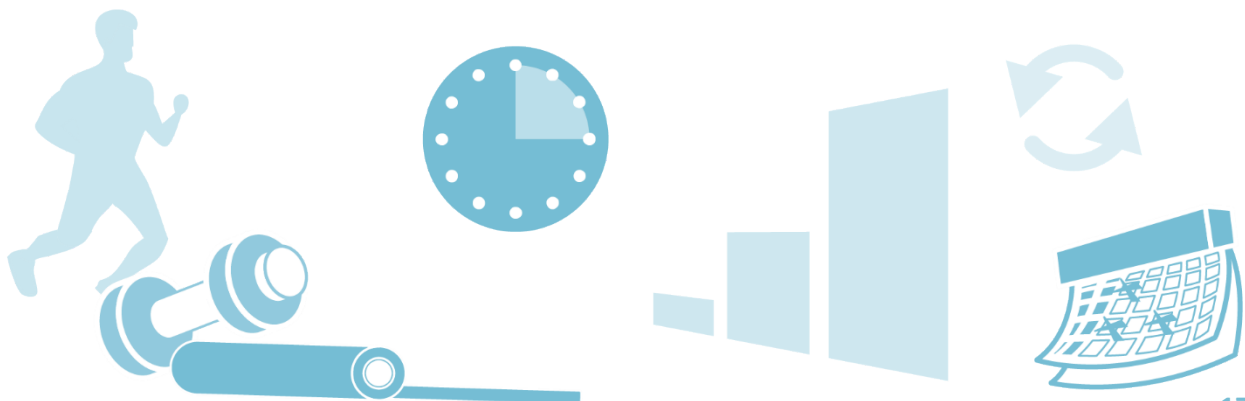
- Has your doctor ever said you have a heart condition and should only do physical activity recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest when you do physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?

Step 2: Start Small

If you're extremely out of shape or haven't exercised for a long time, it's important to start slow. Remember, even a small step is better than nothing. Additionally, starting too fast can result in burnout, increased stress and even injury. It can be frustrating if your fitness goals seem far out of reach, so it's important to stay disciplined and remember that you won't gain fitness overnight. Getting in shape is a long-term process that takes commitment and determination.

According to the Livestrong Foundation, the following tips can help you ease into a fitness plan:

- Walk 5 to 10 minutes a day.
- Get a fitness tracker phone app to measure your steps and try to add more each day.
- Slowly pick up the pace.
- Warm up with dynamic stretches (e.g., rotating joints and reaching side to side).
- Try a beginner's yoga class.



Step 3: Pick Exercises You Can Succeed At

Starting a new exercise routine can be challenging, both physically and mentally. If you've been sedentary for a long time, you might not want to begin by running a 5k. The risk of injury or pain is higher among individuals who are new to exercise or overweight. New York Presbyterian Hospital recommends the following low-impact exercises for individuals to begin exercising in moderation:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Strength training

Step 4: Be Prepared for Soreness

Some soreness is healthy and to be expected after a workout, especially if the exercise is new to your muscles. However, if you haven't exercised in a while, it may be difficult to know the difference between healthy soreness and pain from injuries. According to The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, muscle soreness shouldn't last more than five days. Consider the following general tips to relieve workout-related soreness:



Use cold therapy

(e.g., ice packs and ice baths).



Use hot therapy

(e.g., heating pad, sauna and hot bath).



Rest and focus on quality sleep.



Get a massage or use self-massage tools

(e.g., foam roller and massage gun).



Prioritize stretching.

Consult a medical health care professional if pain persists for a week following an exercise, the injured area feels numb, or you have trouble walking or standing.

Warming up and cooling down before and after a workout can help prevent injuries and reduce soreness and stiffness in the following days. It's also crucial that you listen to your body, especially when you're first starting out. Feeling dizzy or ill is your body's way of telling you that you're working too hard. If this happens, take a break or stop your workout for the day. Remember that it's okay to skip workouts if you're unwell. Take care of your body and return to your exercise routine when you're feeling better.

Another essential aspect of caring for your body before, during and after exercise is hydration. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids throughout the day to improve your overall health and exercise performance.

Step 5: Build Habits

Once you've decided which exercises to try, you can focus on turning one-off workouts into healthy fitness habits. Sustaining your exercise routine is one of the most challenging and vital parts of working

out. Turning exercise into a routine will allow you to reap the numerous mental and physical benefits of exercise. According to the Washington Post, you can make exercise a habit with the following steps:

- **Create specific goals.** A good goal is measurable, relevant and achievable. If your goal is merely to “exercise more,” it will be easy to slack off or give up. Instead, set a goal of exercising three times a week for 20 minutes or more every week for the next six months.
- **Find your motivation.** Exercise is about helping you achieve your long-term goals. This can make the motivation for a specific workout challenging. That’s why it’s essential you know what you’re doing this for (e.g., to lose weight, to be healthy or to increase mobility). Write down your reasons for exercising and look at them when you feel your motivation waning.
- **Put your workouts on your calendar.** Commit to your exercise by scheduling time on your calendar as you would for any other appointment. If something comes up, reschedule the workout right away.
- **Build exercise into your work routine.** Walking or biking to work is an excellent way to fit exercise into your schedule. If the distance is unrealistic, consider alternative ways to take extra steps during the day (e.g., parking your vehicle far from the office or taking a lunchtime walk).
- **Avoid all-or-nothing thinking.** If you’re rigid in your thinking, it may be more difficult to create healthy habits. For example, if you rely on the gym for exercise, you might find it easier to stop exercising if your gym is closed or your transportation becomes unreliable. To build sustainable habits, it’s best to be flexible in your thinking. Understand that exercise comes in many forms and have backup plans ready if your original plan falls through.
- **Combine your exercise with something fun.** You can make exercise more fun if you combine it with activities you enjoy. For example, save a TV show you’re excited to watch for when you’re at the gym to make yourself look forward to going. The more you enjoy your workouts, the more likely you are to keep up the habit.
- **Give it time.** It may take you more time to form a habit than your friends, or vice versa. Regardless, you should understand that building a habit takes time and commitment. Remember that every time you exercise, you’re getting closer to forming a habit, even if it doesn’t feel like it’s getting easier.

Summary

Getting regular exercise has numerous mental and physical health benefits. It can help you prevent disease, lose weight, reduce pain and even live longer. Yet, most Americans don’t meet government recommendations for physical activity.

Overcoming barriers to exercising and committing to a fitness routine can help you live a more healthful life. However, it’s important to remember that fitness doesn’t happen overnight. It takes discipline, time and commitment to reap the long-term benefits of exercising.

Use this guide for tips and practices to help you incorporate physical activity into your daily life, overcome excuses and start a regular fitness routine. For more information, talk to your primary care provider about getting started with an exercise routine.



Appendix

This appendix contains printable resources that employers can distribute to their employees. Included in this section are sample documents to help employees incorporate new fitness activities into their routine.

Shape Up with Strength Training

Strength training doesn't just strengthen your muscles—it strengthens your heart, brain and your overall fitness level. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends strength training at least twice a week.

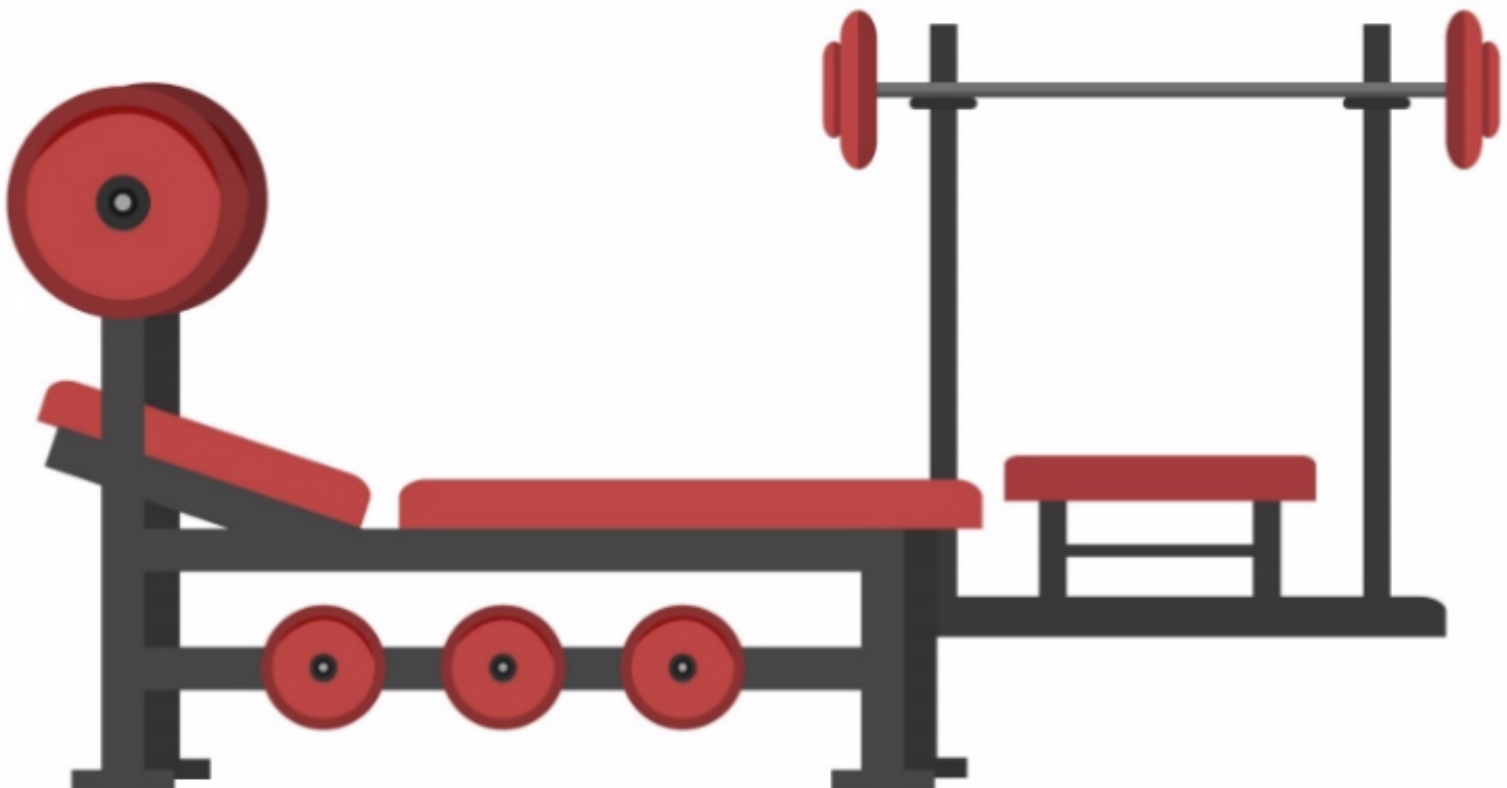
What should my workout look like?

For a complete workout, do eight to 10 different types of exercises. The ACSM recommends the following:

Beginners: 1-3 sets of 8-12 repetitions of each exercise

Experienced lifters: 2-6 sets of 1-8 repetitions of each exercise

Between each set should be a rest period of 2-3 minutes for higher intensity exercises that use heavier loads or 1-2 minutes between the lower intensity exercises with light loads.



3 Parts of an Exercise Program

There are three main components to a well-balanced exercise program:

1

Aerobic exercise

Try to get 20 minutes of aerobic training a day, three to five times a week. Aerobic activity includes walking, running, biking and swimming.



2

Strength training

Try to strength train twice a week. For the purposes of general training, focus on two to three upper body and lower body exercises. Abdominal exercises are an important part of strength training as well.



3

Flexibility training

Flexibility training is an important but frequently neglected element of exercise programs. Stretching is safest with sustained gradual movements lasting a minimum of 15 seconds per stretch. At a minimum, strive to stretch every day.



Take the 20-minute Fitness Challenge

Did you know getting at least 20 minutes of exercise a day could greatly improve your overall fitness? In fact, 20 minutes of exercise can help control your weight and lower your risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This is good news for anyone who finds it hard to exercise between home and work responsibilities.

Just do a few five-minute workouts during the day to reach the 20-minutes-a-day goal. It's that easy!

Simple Exercises Add Up Quick

There are a variety of simple exercises you can do at your desk or on your way into work that can add up to the 20-minutes-a-day goal. Doing a few of these workouts for just five minutes each is all you need.

- Park farther away from work so you walk longer.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Walk around during your break instead of sitting.
- Lift and hold your legs up for 30 seconds while sitting.
- Squeeze a stress ball.
- Stretch to help get blood flowing and prevent muscle fatigue.

Get started on your fitness today!



6 Tips for Adding Walking to Your Routine



Working a remote or in-person office job that requires you to sit for long periods can affect your health and well-being. Further, going to the gym daily can be challenging, and many people do not have the time to do so consistently.

Walking throughout the day can improve not only your physical health, but your mental health as well. Luckily, walking is a feasible way to add exercise for most, and it can be implemented into a routine relatively easily.



Make small goals.

Create small goals, such as taking a 10-minute walk at lunch each day. Creating small goals like this makes you more likely to maintain a new walking habit successfully.



Set reminders.

Decide when you want to walk during the day and set reminders to do so. It's easy to forget to take a break when you get into your work, so setting reminders can motivate you to step away and get moving.



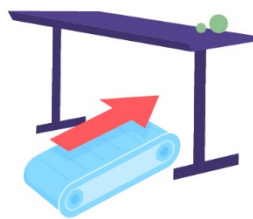
Change up your routine.

Diversify your walking routes to keep yourself from becoming bored. You may also consider moving at different speeds throughout your walk to keep things interesting.



Walk with friends.

Invite friends to join you on your walks. This encourages you to keep the habit because you know others are relying on you to show up, and it also keeps the walks from becoming monotonous.



Get a walking pad.

A walking pad—also known as a folding floor treadmill—is a small pad that fits under most standing desks. If you cannot make time to walk during the workday, consider getting a walking pad. This allows you to walk at a standing desk anytime during the day.



Listen to your body.

Don't be afraid to take time off or modify your routine. It is important to pay attention to your body's signals and take care of yourself so that your new routine is one that you can maintain.

To learn more about creating or modifying a physical activity routine, talk to your primary care provider and discuss what works best for you.