

THREE THINGS EVERY EXERCISE PROGRAM SHOULD HAVE

A complete, safe and effective fitness program must include aerobic exercise, muscular strength and endurance conditioning, and flexibility exercise.

Aerobic exercise does good things for your cardiovascular system and is an important part of weight management. Muscular conditioning can improve strength and posture, reduce the risk of low-back injury and is an important component of a weight-management program. Flexibility exercise is needed to maintain joint range of motion and reduce the risk of injury and muscle soreness.

1. Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise can be as simple as walking. Walking, jogging, jumping rope and dance-exercise are good forms of weightbearing aerobic exercise, which is any activity that uses large muscle groups in a continuous, rhythmic fashion for sustained periods of time and during which the individual's body is not supported in some fashion.

There are also non-weightbearing aerobic exercises, such as bicycling, stationary cycling, swimming and rowing.

Keep the pace comfortable. A very important aspect of your exercise program is the intensity. You should exercise at a comfortable pace. You can measure your exercise heart rate to check the intensity of your exercising, or you can take the "talk test."

To measure your heart rate, take your pulse as soon as you stop exercising. Count your heartbeat for 10 seconds, then multiply by six to convert it to a one-minute heart rate. If you keep your exercise heart rate within a range of 55 to 90% of an estimated maximum heart rate (220 minus your age), you're doing well.

The talk test is even easier to use. Just exercise at a pace that allows you to carry on a conversation while you're exercising.

How often should you exercise? Three to five days of aerobic activity is fine for general health maintenance. If you're trying to lose weight, aim for five to six days a week, being sure you take off at least one day a week.

How long should you exercise? Work up to 30 or more minutes per session (or three 10-minute sessions per day) for general health maintenance. For weight loss, gradually work up to 45 minutes or longer at low to moderate intensities in a low- or non-impact activity.

2. Strength Conditioning

Pick calisthenics, free weights or machines. Just be sure that your strength training includes exercises for every major muscle group, including the muscles of the arms, chest, back, stomach, hips and legs.

Start with a weight that's comfortable to handle and perform eight repetitions. Gradually add more repetitions until you can complete 12 repetitions. For greater strength conditioning, add more weight and/or more repetitions, in sets of eight to 12, when the exercise becomes easy.

3. Stretching for Flexibility

Proper stretching involves holding a mild stretch for 15 to 30 seconds while you breathe normally. Always warm up before you stretch. Like strength conditioning, flexibility exercises should include stretching for all of the major muscle groups.

One Last Thing to Remember . . .

Always check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program, especially if you're a man over 45, a woman over 55, or have cardiovascular risk factors, such as smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or a family history of heart disease.

Additional Resources

About.com: www.exercise.about.com/cs/exbeginners/l/blimplement.htm

About.com: www.exercise.about.com/cs/exbeginners/a/exbasics_2.htm

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™



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