



New Year's Resolution: Get Fit

Resolved to exercise and get in shape? Here's how to actually do it.

Perhaps you are like many that indulged over the holidays. Research studies indicate that about a third of New Year's resolvers make weight loss their primary goal, and about 15% aim to begin an exercise program. Set yourself up for success by giving yourself time to ease into an active lifestyle if you haven't been physically active in a while.

For the average person, a good fitness program consists of exercises that work out the whole body. A cardio workout improves the function and health of the heart, lungs, and blood vessels. Weight-bearing exercises enhance the function and health of the bones, muscles, joints, and connective tissues. As good an exercise regimen as that sounds, many of us know all too well, it's not that easy to start a fitness routine, particularly for the out-of-shape and the inconsistent.

How does one go about choosing an appropriate fitness program? To avoid overwhelming yourself, set realistic expectations, stick to one small physical activity goal and to one small nutrition goal, and keep a reserve list of objectives. Once you have accomplished your primary goals, move on to the next set. Different things work for different people. Fortunately, there are more than enough options.

Starting to Make Healthy Choices

When fitness clients ask, "Which machine is the best for cardiovascular training?" Jonathan Ross, ACE, NSCA, a personal trainer usually answers, "The one that you hate the least."

Exercise does not have to be dull. Yet as people grow up, they lose the connection between fun and movement. Think about what you like to do. Some people may enjoy the gym atmosphere or group exercise. Others prefer to play team sports. Still others favor jogging or walking around the neighborhood.

"It really doesn't matter what you do, if it's running up and down the stairs in your house, if it's sitting up and down in a chair 20 times, or running around the yard, or running around the treadmill, all (cardiovascular) exercise has to be something that increases the demand for oxygen," says Ross. "If you are asking your body to use oxygen more rapidly, that is by very definition, cardiovascular training."

Some activities can even double as weight-bearing exercise, the other component of an ideal fitness program. This type of exercise involves anything that uses body weight against gravity. Examples include walking, jogging, playing basketball, yoga, martial arts, push-ups, weight training, and free weights.

Remember to start slow and gradually progress to avoid a New Year's resolution injury. Some people are so gung-ho about getting fit that they are too aggressive at the beginning of their fitness program. As a result, they may become injured, feel a lot of soreness, or think of exercise as an unpleasant experience. Many of us forget that we didn't become deconditioned and out of shape overnight. We shouldn't expect to become well-conditioned overnight."

If you do get hurt, don't work through it. Don't think your whole fitness routine is out the door either. An injured shoulder does not prevent you from working out your lower body, and a sprained ankle does not mean you can't exercise your upper body.

Indeed, it is possible to begin a fitness program and stick with it. If you do, perhaps you can scratch off that resolution next year and have the satisfaction of knowing you have accomplished something very important.

Source: WebMD, Brunilda Nazario, MD, article adapted and edited for decreased content
www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/new-years-resolution-get-fit#1

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