

## **Seven Steps to a Safe and Successful Exercise Program**

### **Why Exercise**

Starting an exercise program may be one of the best things you can do for your health. Physical activity can reduce your risk of chronic diseases, improve balance and coordination, and help you lose weight. Physical fitness consists of four components. These components are cardio-respiratory endurance (the body's ability to deliver oxygen and nutrients to tissues and remove wastes), muscle strength (the ability of a muscle to exert force), muscle endurance (the ability of a muscle to repeatedly exert force), and flexibility (the ability to move muscle and joints through their full range of motion). Your exercise program will help you to show improvement in each of these categories.

### **Step 1: Assess Your Fitness Level**

If you are over 35 years of age and have been inactive for more than 1 year, you should consult your physician before starting an exercise program.

If you have ever been told that you have any of the following medical conditions or you have a family history of the following medical conditions you should consult with a physician prior to beginning an exercise program: high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack, stroke, feel dizzy with exertion, shortness of breath with exertion, arthritis or back pain.

You should exercise in comfortable shoes that are breathable and have a flexible sole. Be sure to pick shoes designed for the activity you have in mind.

If you plan on using exercise equipment, choose something that is practical and easy to use. You may want to try out certain pieces of equipment before committing to a purchase. You may also consider using no equipment at all and simply walking or taking an exercise class.

### **Step 2: Choose A Time of Day**

Getting started can be the most difficult part of any exercise routine. Scheduling exercise into your day will increase your chances for success the best time of day to exercise is the time of day you are most likely to do it. Be sure to schedule time for yourself. Be realistic and include the time it will take to get ready, warm up, perform the activity and cool down, this way it is purposeful and not rushed.

### **Step 3: Design Your Fitness Program**

There is no scientific answer to which activity is best, pick something you enjoy! Physical activity 3 to 5 times per week for 30 to 60 minutes at a time is proven to be the most beneficial to cardiovascular health. The activity should involve large muscle groups (i.e. walking, running,

dancing, cycling and swimming). Walking is one of the best moderate intensity physical activities. Walking can be done both indoors and outdoors and can be done anytime of the day.

#### **Step 4: Start Slowly**

Give yourself plenty of time to warm up and cool down. To warm up, perform a gradual slower paced activity. This is recommended for 5 minutes prior to engaging in moderate intensity activity. Slow walking, knee lifts, arm circles or rotations at the waist are all warm up exercises. If you need to, start with just 10 to 15 minutes of cardiovascular exercise daily. Each week try to add 5 minutes to your exercise routine until you reach 30 minutes of moderate intensity 5 times per week. You do not have to do all your exercise at one time; short more frequent sessions have been proven to have cardiovascular benefit. If you can do 15 minutes of exercise 2 times per day and it fits into your schedule better, do it! Thirty minutes is the recommendation for an average healthy adult to maintain health and reduce the risk of chronic diseases but 60 to 90 minutes should be your goal to lose weight or maintain weight loss. Cooling down should be a minimum of 5 minutes of slow waling or low level exercise combined with stretching to minimize soreness and injuries.

#### **Step 5: Incorporate Strength Training**

Try to do 10 to 12 repetitions of a resistance exercise 2 times per week. Resistance exercises can be done with dumbbells, bands, household items or your own body weight. Some exercises you may want to try are arm curls, arm raises, chair sits, calf raises, and squats. If you are unsure of how to perform these exercises seek the advice of a healthcare professional.

#### **Step 6: Listen to your body**

If you feel pain, shortness of breath, are dizzy, nauseous or have chest pain slow down or stop the activity. These are sign you may be pushing too hard. The “no pain, no gain” philosophy does not pertain to a new fitness program. The rule is, if it hurts, do not do it. If any of these symptoms do not resolve with rest and symptoms persist call your physician or 911.

#### **Step 7: Monitor Your Progress**

You should increase the intensity, frequency or duration of your activity over periods of time in order to improve. Track how many minutes a day you are exercising and how many days a week you are engaging in physical activity. If you lose motivation, set new goals or try a new activity. Exercise is good medicine. By planning carefully and pacing yourself, you can establish a healthy habit that lasts a lifetime.