

Tips for Starting an Exercise Program

See your doctor

- Especially if you haven't been active in a long time, or haven't had a checkup recently, it's a good idea to have your doctor identify any concerns before you start a challenging exercise program.

Identify your goals and preferences

- Do you want to lose 10 pounds? Participate in a 5K run? Or simply take up a healthy habit? Your goals can help you decide whether you need a challenging or more moderate exercise program. Be sure to choose an activity you like to do, whether it's walking, swimming, or even dancing; you'll be more likely to stick with the program.

Consider starting with mini-workouts

- A good first goal is to accumulate 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week--the current recommendation for good health. You can realize significant health benefits by squeezing in just five or ten minutes of exercise several times throughout the day. Try parking your car a good distance from the door or getting off the bus a couple of blocks early. Make your office inefficient: put the trash can far away from your desk, and get a cordless phone so you can walk around while you talk. At home, mopping and other active chores count.

Stretch before formal workouts

- Stretch after workouts to prevent soreness and injury and increase flexibility. Hold each stretch for 20-30 seconds. Five to 10 minutes of stretching makes a big difference.

Drink plenty of fluids

- Drink plenty of water before and after you exercise. If it's hot, humid, or you're exercising vigorously, drink a cup of water every 15 minutes during your workout as well. Weigh yourself before and after a workout - if you've lost five percent or more of your body weight, you're dehydrated and need to replenish your fluids.

Wear the right attire

- While you don't need special clothing, do dress comfortably and appropriately for the weather and buy good shoes to prevent injury.

Challenge yourself--but slowly

- Start off walking for 20 to 30 minutes four days a week at a comfortable pace. Begin alternating 2-5 minutes of brisk walking with 2-5 minutes of easy walking, gradually increasing the ratio of brisk to easy. Once you've worked up to 30 minutes of brisk walking, you could add in running if you like. At first, run 30 seconds, then walk 90 seconds, and repeat for 30 minutes. When that's comfortable, move to 45 seconds of running and 75 seconds of walking, then 75 walking/45 running, then 90 running/30 walking, until you're running for 30 minutes. The whole process could take anywhere from eight weeks to four months<listen to your body and don't feel pressured to go too fast.

Strength Train

- Consider adding strength training to your aerobic exercise (like walking and running) if you have time. We recommend doing strengthening exercises with weights for 15 to 20 minutes two to three times a week. For efficiency, do one set of 8 to 12 repetitions for each of the major muscle groups (8 to 10 exercises). Work to muscle fatigue--if you can finish the set easily, use heavier weights.

Source: www.dukehealth.org