

Getting in shape

Dr. Larry Ohlhauser

Professional Speaker and author of the Healthy CEO.

Exercise is good for your health, but what is the best program for you. One that is ideal for your buddy makes no sense to you. You may be starting an exercise program for the first time. So, start by choosing an exercise program by examining your motive. Are you trying to recapture the athletic glory of your youth or lose weight? You may be constrained by health problems like arthritis or heart disease.

As we age, activity generally decreases to fit our limitations, such as avoiding walking up a hill to see a point of interest on vacation. About one in four adults are almost completely sedentary. If this is sounding like you, hang on, it's never too late to start exercising, if you take precautions. Those precautions are not that onerous.

Heart experts suggest that first time exercisers get medical clearance if they are men over 45 or women over 55, but only if they are about to embark on a vigorous program. Physical Activity Guidelines suggest that would-be exercisers should consult a physician if they have such chronic conditions as arthritis, diabetes, osteoporosis, heart disease or symptoms like chest pain, dizziness or shortness of breath.

If you haven't exercised in years, go slow at the start is mandatory. A wise word; don't play to get in shape, get in shape to play." You can start by taking brisk, but short walks on level ground and working up to adding hills in your walking program. Investing in a pedometer, a simple mechanical devise that clips to your belt, measure the number of steps you take. Your target to maintain cardiovascular health is 10,000 steps a day. You may wish to start with 3500 a day, and increasing by 500 steps every week till you reach your step goal. People who wear a pedometer regularly with a 10,000 step daily target, walk well beyond 10,000 steps a day, research has shown. They concentrate on the number of steps and their behaviour reflects that focus. They park at the farthest end of the parking lot at the mall or take the stairs instead of the elevator, just to get their steps in.

So, make your first move and get started. Once you have started, where you go next is up to you. Doing something is better than nothing, and doing more is better than doing less. If you find walking boring, trying biking, joining a gym, enroll in a water aerobics class or join a hiking club.

Do you need a personal trainer? Certified personal trainers can assess your needs, help you devise a program that meets your needs and provide encouragement during your sessions.

You may work with your trainer 2 or 3 times a week, or once you have a program established, find that monitoring your progress every few weeks, checking you for proper body positions during your training is all you need. The key is to find a routine that you can stick with. Most importantly your program should include cardiovascular, strength, flexibility and balance training. Be realistic in setting your goals. Not everyone will get the six pack abs they dream of. Your goals should be health, longevity, reducing stress and feeling more vital.

Stubbornness is the biggest barrier to maintaining your health. So get started, what's stopping you? If you are getting back in shape, even if your days of fast-paced singles tennis is but a fond memory, resuming exercise can restore your fitness. But, don't push too hard, you could hurt yourself. If you are over 50, you probably need six months to get in shape. In your 20's if you start out too hard, you might be sore the next day. Over 50, you could tear cartilage and recovery is slower. You may only be able to do two vigorous workouts a week instead of the three or four you did at 20.

If losing weight is your goal, don't expect to get there by exercise alone. An average sized person walking four miles at a brisk pace, about 8,000 steps on your pedometer, burns off 340 calories in an hour. That equivalent to most snack packs you might enjoy after your workout. Remember the 80-10-10 rule. 80% of your weight loss is a result of proper nutrition, 10% a result of your exercise and 10% a result of your genes. As a rule of thumb, if your overall goal is health, you need to exercise 150 minutes per week. If your goal is weight loss, you need to exercise 300 minutes per week.

If you have a chronic illness here are some exercises that can help. Arthritis: low-impact activities like walking, biking or swimming and don't forget to strengthen and stretch. Diabetes: aerobic and strengthening exercises. Heart disease: aerobic and strengthening exercises. Osteoporosis: low impact activities like walking and strength training. Tai Chi to help improve your balance and help prevent falls. If you are over 50, strength training is at least as important as aerobic exercise.

Exercise should be fun, set your realistic goal and get started, it's your responsibility.

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Dr. Larry Ohlhauser, MD, is an internationally acclaimed health consultant and author living in Edmonton. Reach him through his website at www.thehealthyceo.com.

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