

Although people begin an exercise program for different reasons, with different goals and different ideas about how to achieve their goals, one thing remains fundamentally true:

- ***All human bodies respond to exercise according to certain physiological facts and these facts, like gravity, are constantly influencing your outcomes, whether you're aware of them or not.***

The basic knowledge you need to succeed with any fitness program isn't that complex and it really isn't necessary to understand **how** things work. So regardless of what program you choose to follow, your gender, or how old you are, here are a few helpful hints to keep in mind.

The 7 Basics of Exercise

A. First and foremost, if it's been more than a year since you've been physically active, you need to see your doctor, have a check-up and find out if there are any restrictions you need to be aware of as you construct your exercise program. If there are none, start slowly and build a little every week. If there are restrictions, I recommend you ask a **certified personal trainer** to help you design a program based on your doctor's advice.

B. A well rounded exercise program has 4 fitness components:

1. Weight bearing or resistance exercises to increase strength and muscle tone.

Weight bearing or resistance exercises can be performed in a number of ways. Some examples of weighted resistance would be: your own body weight, rubber tubing, medicine balls, free weights or machines. Muscle is live tissue whereas fat is just a form of stored energy/calories. Since it takes energy/calories to maintain muscle, trading a 2-3lb muscle gain for a 2-3lb fat loss will perk up your metabolism and help you burn more calories throughout the day.

2. Some type of aerobic exercise to increase cardiovascular fitness and oxygen exchange between the lungs and the body. The human heart is a muscle and just like the rest of the muscles in your body, it can be conditioned with aerobic exercise. The muscles you use for breathing can be strengthened as well. Aerobic means "with oxygen" and aerobic activities like walking, jogging, hiking, jumping rope, swimming, bicycling, spinning, step classes etc. all help to improve your body's ability to absorb oxygen. A major cause of premature cell death (read aging) is caused by inefficient oxygen exchange at the cellular level.

3. A good stretching routine. Fluid movement patterns and a full range of motion decrease stress on the body. Improved flexibility and mobility will help you exercise efficiently, with less fatigue. Chronic long term muscle imbalance, especially around your joints, can cause them to wear out prematurely. Daily stretching can slow the onset or prevent the condition altogether.

4. A brain fitness activity to maintain neural connections (synapses). The latest research shows the loss of brain mass that accompanies the aging process is due to a loss of synapses. Just as you challenge your muscles to maintain body fitness, you've got to challenge your brain by creating and maintaining new neural connections. Initially the '**Fat Losers**' program will provide that mental stimulus for you. As you reach your 12 week goals, your brain will evolve and adapt. To continue using **mental toughness** with new neural challenges, think about activities you might enjoy that will require mental focus similar to the focus you needed when you started your program, or when you learned to drive. (e.g. learn a new dance, or a new language, or learn how to use a new software program)

C. Start your exercise program with a new pair of quality sneakers. Don't skimp here. Your sneakers are your first line of defense against the forces created by walking, jogging, jumping etc. which can be as great as seven times your body weight. A 200lb individual will break their sneakers down faster than a 150lb individual.

- ***New sneakers' ability to absorb shock will break down at about 450 miles or between 3—6 months of consistent use; whichever comes first. Waiting too long can make you susceptible to back, hip, knee or ankle pain and possibly injury.***
- ***Always buy two pairs. Alternating pairs every other day gives sneakers time to dry out thoroughly. Also, use your workout sneakers exclusively for fitness activity. They will last much longer if you don't wear them all day.***

D. Stay well hydrated all day and especially while working out. The number 1 cause of fatigue during exercise is failure to drink enough water (read dehydration). Take a few swallows every 10-15 mins while you exercise. If you want to be more precise, multiply .5 times your body weight and try drinking that amount of water throughout the day (e.g. .5 X 180lbs = 90oz/day). Also, stay away from sports drinks unless you are exercising for more than 60 mins. Up until then plain old water will do just fine and besides that, many sports drinks are laced with hidden sugars which add empty calories (read no nutritional value) to your total daily intake.

E. Even if you've been gaining weight for the last 5, 10 or even 20 years, or if you're not exercising, or if you're not making smart decisions about your food intake, or if you have a sedentary job and lifestyle; it's never too late to make changes. If any of the above is true for you... then those are your reasons to get going, not your excuses for staying the same.

- ***The body responds to changes in it's environment through a number of incredibly complex systems and processes but they can all be summed up in one word: ADAPTATION***

The way you look and feel at this moment represents your body's adaptation to the daily choices you've made over the last 5, 10 or 20 years. When you look at your current creation in the mirror it may be hard to imagine, but it is an absolute fact that your body will respond to new stimulus at any age! If you are faithful to your new daily program, within the first 4-6 weeks of exercising, with **mental toughness**, you'll initiate different adaptive responses and you will see and feel the changes your new daily choices are creating!

F. Get enough rest. You do not get stronger during exercise! Your exercise sessions will provide the stimulus for change but **the actual changes themselves** (e.g. increased strength, tone, endurance etc.) **occur during your rest and recovery time.** By making better (read nutritious) food choices and getting enough rest your body will rebuild itself to match the new level of daily challenges you've presented.

G. As you continually adapt to your exercise program you'll find that your progress seems to slow down or reach a plateau. It happens to both genders at all ages.

This is caused by the reactions and interactions of the nerves, and muscles and the body's complex hormonal systems, but again the solution can be summed up in one simple word: Variety!

Exercise variables like type of resistance, order of exercises, tempo, exercise volume, exercise intensity, duration, force and power can all be manipulated into an almost limitless combination of possibilities. Whether you use your own imagination and intuition or rely on a certified trainer, mix it up!

People frequently ask me, what's the best exercise program for _____? (fill in the blank) The best exercise program for attaining your goal is the one that you'll follow consistently. "There's more than one way to skin a cat," as the saying goes and there's more than one way to exercise to help you reach your goals. Find exercise activities that you enjoy or at least don't mind doing. Do what works for you and if it stops working move on, keep going and keep challenging yourself.

Good Luck & Be Well!

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