

Ready, Set, Exercise

It is no secret that exercise is a crucial component for overall health and well being—for adults and children alike.

Adults (including seniors) need exercise to help maintain healthy weight, build strong muscles and bone mass, manage stress, and stave off problems associated with aging. Children need physical activity to build strong bodies, to burn off energy, and to increase their dexterity, coordination, and learning capacity. When children and teenagers exercise, they are more apt to be healthier and in better physical shape throughout their entire lives. There are several considerations to keep in mind to ensure you work out safely:

- **Consult your doctor.** Exercise sometimes can lead to injuries. That is why it is always recommended that individuals consult a doctor first. This is most important if you have had a heart attack or joint replacement surgery; if you have asthma, diabetes, arthritis, or osteoporosis; if you have lung, heart, liver, or kidney disease; or if you are pregnant. Older adults will most likely require a bone density test and a fitness assessment prior to beginning an exercise program. Exercise only when you feel well. If you miss more than two weeks, re-start slowly.
- **Be sensible and flexible.** It is best to exercise at a sensible pace and allow time for your body to rest and recover in between sessions. Give yourself time to warm up and cool down with easy walking and gentle stretching. Always stay hydrated and watch for signs of being overheated (dry/sticky mouth, headache, cramps, dizziness).
- **Check your fitness score.** At the start of any program, take some simple “tests” such as timing a one-mile walk (and checking your heart rate), doing push-ups for 60 seconds, or measuring your body mass index (BMI)—formulas can be found online. Re-check your score after the first six weeks and then again every three-to-six months.
- **Create a plan.** For optimal results, most adults should plan for five hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (or 2.5 hours of vigorous activity) each week, along with two or more days of strength training. Keep in mind that exercise can be done all at once or in small time increments throughout the day. Wear athletic shoes designed for the activity you have in mind.
- **Steady at the start.** Begin your new regimen slowly to avoid injury and prevent soreness. Do not overdo any activity. If you feel pain, shortness of breath, dizziness, or nausea, take a break.

The best part of staying physically fit is that you have more energy to enjoy your life. Exercise gets people moving, gets them outdoors, challenges them, allows them to try new things and reach new heights. Families become closer when they play or do physical activities together (from bike rides to yard work—it all counts). Older adults are more able to enjoy their independence and quality of life for as long as possible.

Most people agree that the keys to maintaining exercise in your schedule are to find activities you truly enjoy and vary your routine. So what are you waiting for? Go find the perfect activity to keep you moving! 