

Make A Plan: Organizing a Personal Exercise Program

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Introduction

Deciding to start exercising regularly is an important step to improving health. Many exercise options exist. For those new to exercise, knowing how to start can be confusing. How do you make sure you are doing the right type and amount of exercise?

Types of Exercise

Understanding the different types of exercise can help determine a plan. Exercise is generally grouped into four categories:

1. Aerobic or cardiovascular exercise
2. Strength training or resistance training exercises
3. Flexibility exercises
4. Balance exercises

Aerobic or cardiovascular exercises increase heart rate and breathing. Examples of these activities include walking, jogging, swimming, riding a bike, dancing and playing tennis or basketball. Aerobic exercise is usually measured by duration, the number of minutes the activity is performed. At least 150 weekly minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity is recommended for healthy adults. The recommended 150 minutes is a total for the week and can be divided into shorter bouts of exercise. Those new to exercise should consult a health care provider and start an exercise regimen appropriate for their individual fitness level.

Strength training exercises are usually performed using free weights or weight machines. Other types of equipment used can include resistance tubes or bands. Some exercises use your own body weight for resistance and do not require equipment. Strength training exercises target specific muscle groups to increase muscle strength and endurance. Examples of strength training exercises include biceps curls, pushups, squats and overhead presses. Strength training is usually measured by counting the number of times a weight is lifted (repetitions and sets) and the amount of weight or resistance used. Adults should do strength training targeting major muscle groups at least twice weekly.

Body weight exercises may be a good starting point for beginners. Common body weight exercises include pushups, squats, lunges and planking. There are many variations for each exercise.

Flexibility exercise is often called stretching. Flexibility exercises lengthen muscle tissue and increase joint mobility. These exercises can also help reduce muscle soreness and make it easier to do everyday activities, such as reaching overhead. Flexibility exercises target a specific muscle or area and are usually held for a set length of time (generally 10 to 30 seconds). These activities are important for overall fitness and include the calf stretch, hamstring stretch and chest and arm stretches. Flexibility exercises can be performed daily and are often included following strength training or aerobic activities. Perform flexibility activities after the body is sufficiently warmed up.

Balance exercises help improve stability and prevent falls. Muscle strengthening activities targeting the back, abdomen and legs can help improve balance. Examples of balance exercises include walking heel-to-toe and moving from a seated to standing position. Activities like dancing, yoga and tai chi can help improve balance. Balance exercises may benefit all age groups, but are recommended at least 3 days per week for older adults.

Intensity

Intensity refers to how hard a person exercises or the level of effort exerted. Intensity of aerobic exercise is measured using heart rate monitoring or Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE). Intensity of exercise will vary between people depending on individual fitness levels.

Heart rate monitoring is the primary way to measure intensity during aerobic (cardiovascular) exercise. This requires a little math before you start exercising.

Determining Your Target Heart Rate

1. Calculate your maximum heart rate (MHR) by subtracting your age from 220.

$$220 - \text{_____ (your age)} = \text{_____ (MHR)}$$

2. Figure your target heart rate.

Beginning exercisers: Your target heart rate (THR) is 50-70% of your MHR.

$$\text{_____ (Your MHR)} \times 0.5 = \text{_____ (this is the bottom of your THR range)}$$

$$\text{_____ (Your MHR)} \times 0.7 = \text{_____ (this is the top of your THR range)}$$

Advanced exercisers: Your target heart rate is 70-85% of your MHR.

$$\text{_____ (Your MHR)} \times 0.7 = \text{_____ (this is the bottom of your THR range)}$$

$$\text{_____ (Your MHR)} \times 0.85 = \text{_____ (this is the top of your THR range)}$$

My Target Heart Rate is: _____ - _____ beats per minute (bpm).

Beginning exercisers may be new to exercise, have been primarily sedentary or have recently started exercising on a regular basis. Beginning exercisers may need to build endurance, strength and aerobic capacity before progressing to exercise at higher intensity levels.

Advanced exercisers generally have a well-established exercise routine and have been exercising long enough to experience improved endurance, strength and aerobic capacity. Advanced exercisers may not feel challenged when working at beginner-level intensity.

Example: The MHR for a 40-year-old person is 180. A beginner would exercise at a THR of 90–126 beats per minute (bpm). Beats per minute is the number of times the heart beats in one minute. An advanced exerciser would shoot for a THR of 126 bpm–153 bpm.

Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) is another way to measure exercise intensity. The Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE) scale is helpful for those on medications that may affect heart rate when exercising, like beta-blockers. Perceived intensity is a subjective evaluation of how a person feels while exercising. Those who have been sedentary a long time should start with light activity and aim to work up to moderate activity or a level that feels somewhat hard.

When exercising, rate your perception of your total feelings of exertion. Combine all sensations of physical stress and choose the number on the RPE Scale that best describes how you are feeling.

RPE Scale Rating of Perceived Exertion	
1	Very Light Activity Anything other than complete rest
2-3	Light Activity Exercise could be maintained for hours, easy to breathe and talk
4-5	Moderate Activity Exercise could be maintained a long time, able to talk and have short conversations
6-7	Vigorous Activity On the verge of becoming uncomfortable, short of breath, can speak a sentence
8-9	Very Hard Difficult to maintain exercise intensity, hard to speak more than one word
10	Very, Very Hard - Maximum Effort Feels impossible to continue, out of breath, cannot talk

Using the FITT Principle

The FITT Principle can help you organize an exercise program.

FITT is an acronym for **F**requency, **I**ntensity, **T**ime, and **T**ype.

Frequency is how often a person exercises. How many days per week can you make time for physical activity?

Intensity refers to how hard a person exercises or the level of effort exerted.

Measure aerobic exercise intensity by monitoring your heart rate or using the Rating of Perceived Exertion (RPE). Most healthy people should aim for an RPE that feels somewhat hard, or an RPE of 5, 6 or 7. Exercisers should be able to talk but not sing during peak aerobic activity.

Intensity in strength training has three parts:

1. Amount of weight lifted
2. Number of repetitions performed
3. Length of time it takes to complete one set

Increase strength training intensity by changing only one of the three parts listed above at a time. Intensity can be increased by lifting heavier weights, doing more repetitions or more sets, and by increasing the time it takes to complete one set (i.e., slowing the speed of each lift).

Repetition: The number of times a specific exercise is performed; the number of times a weight is lifted; one complete motion of an exercise. Repetitions are often called “reps.”

Set: A group or series of consecutive repetitions.

Time

Time is how long you exercise. Exercise duration depends on your personal goals, fitness level, health status, the time available and other factors. The type of exercise performed influences length of the exercise session. For example, a person who exercises on a lunch break may be limited to 30 minutes. Walking outdoors may provide a good aerobic option, or one may opt to perform a strength training circuit to make the most of the time available. A person aiming to accumulate aerobic activity throughout the day may choose several bouts of 10-minute or 15-minute intervals. A person aiming to increase endurance may aim for a longer session. Regardless of the time spent exercising, all physical activity contributes to good health.

Type

Type is the specific kind of exercise performed.

People have different goals and progress at different rates. Use the FITT Principle Chart to help plan an exercise routine suitable for you. The chart below shows FITT applied to both moderate and vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise and includes strength training.

	FITT Principle Chart (Example)				
	MODERATE		OR	VIGOROUS	
	Cardio	Strengthening		Cardio	Strengthening
Frequency	5 times per week	2+ days per week		3+ days per week	2+ days per week
Intensity	Moderate	Moderate to high	Vigorous	Moderate to high	
Time	30 minutes	Major Muscle Groups	25 minutes	Major Muscle Groups	
Type	Aerobic	Strengthening	Aerobic	Strengthening	

Draft your own exercise plan by filling in the chart below. General examples are provided for each item. Your plan will depend on your fitness level and goals. Create your own plan and customize the chart to fit your needs.

My FITT Plan

	Aerobic	Strength Training	Flexibility	Balance
Frequency <i>How often?</i>	<i>3 days/week</i>	<i>2 days/week</i>	<i>Daily</i>	<i>3 days/week</i>
Intensity <i>How hard?</i>	<i>RPE = 6</i>	<i>Weight I can lift 10x</i>	<i>NA</i>	<i>NA</i>
Time <i>How long?</i> <i>How many reps/sets?</i>	<i>30 minutes</i>	<i>2 sets of 10 reps</i>	<i>Hold 20 sec., 2x</i>	<i>20 minutes</i>
Type <i>What will you do?</i>	<i>Walking</i>	<i>1 exercise for each muscle group; dumbbells and body weight exercises</i>	<i>Upper & Lower body; 1 stretch for each muscle group</i>	<i>Yoga</i>



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