

Steps for a Successful Exercise Program

Going to the gym and starting an exercise program is a very difficult and daunting task to approach. Sometimes it's difficult to learn how to use the machines, or to find your way around the gym if it's busy, or to even know where to start! The logistics that surround exercising are more difficult than the actual activities!

Exercising can be easy, but most importantly it should be fun. If it isn't fun, most people probably won't stick with it! Any increase in activity is beneficial, and that is where the beginner should start. For someone that has never really exercised before, it is important to get started doing simple activities to see how you respond. After a couple of weeks doing simple activities (walking, jogging, bike riding, swimming, etc.) progressing to higher levels of activity can be warranted as long as you have not suffered any deleterious effects from your initial days of exercise.

Where a lot of individuals go wrong is that they do too much, too soon. An example would be the individual who has not ever exercised, or who has not exercised for an extended period of time, and the first day they go out and try and run 3 miles. This person is ambitious, but setting themselves up for potential failure. It is crucial to take starting exercise slowly and methodically. Exercise causes many beneficial adaptations in our body's functioning. These can include: increased flexibility, increased strength, increased muscular endurance, decreased resting blood pressure, increased glucose sensitivity, increased heart stroke volume (more blood pumped with each beat), and increased energy. Exercise can help us lead healthier and more productive and active lives. Starting out, it is important to give yourself boundaries, such as walking for 20 minutes three or four times a week, and see how you feel after each day. Then each week add 5 minutes onto your daily walk. Then when you feel ready (no significant muscle fatigue or soreness after activity) you could start jogging for 10-15 minutes every other day.

Progression is the key to successful exercise programs that you can stick with and see results, from weight loss to more energy. Lifting weights follows the same concept. If you are working out on machines at a gym, it is important to start very light and only work on one body part per day (legs, arms, chest, back, shoulders) in order to reduce the chance of overuse injuries or excessive muscle soreness. Muscle soreness is not uncommon after new physical activity. It is common to see some soreness 24-48 hours after an exercise bout with individuals starting exercise programs. This is called Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS), it is seen when muscles are not accustomed to a certain activity, and the body is not yet used to dealing with these new chemicals that result from exercise. With consistent and properly progressed exercise, DOMS should be minimal and your body will adapt and be able to handle the increase in chemicals related to exercise.

The take home message is "Listen to your body." If you experience abnormal or increasing discomfort with an activity, that activity should be stopped. You should not begin an exercise regimen unless you have been cleared for athletic activity by a physician. This is crucial to determine that there is no underlying medical condition that may exacerbate with activity.

The benefits of exercise are numerous, but don't be surprised it may take a couple of weeks before you start feeling them. The effects of exercise are cumulative, the longer and more consistent you are with it, the faster and larger the improvements you will

experience. Exercise can be a great psychological release from the stresses of our daily lives. Daily exercise is a great way to feel better physically and mentally!