

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

Exercising With a Health Challenge

People facing various health challenges are not precluded from the benefits of exercise. In fact, physical activity can help increase energy, strength, balance and coordination, as well as ease pain for these individuals.

It is not uncommon, however, for individuals who are recovering from, or dealing with, a medical condition to avoid physical activity out of concern over finding the best form of exercise and proper guidelines. Communication is the key.

Start With Your Healthcare Practitioner

Whether you want to begin exercising as a result of your physician's recommendation or your own initiative, talk with your practitioner before you start. Ask for specific programming recommendations.

Many physicians or physical therapists provide instructions for exercises unique to specific conditions (e.g., back exercises for low-back pain). Inquire about special limitations that you should be aware of, and ask your physician if he or she can refer you to a fitness professional who has experience training clients with your condition.

Certified Fitness Professionals Make a Difference

You may benefit from working with a certified fitness professional who is qualified to work with you. Again, communication is important.

Do they have experience working with your condition?

Would they feel comfortable training you? If not, could they refer you to someone with experience?

Do they provide knowledgeable answers to your questions?

Don't hesitate to ask what you can expect to achieve with an exercise program, and be sure to discuss your goals.

Expect to tell the fitness professional about your general health, your specific illness or injury, and your physical activity history. They

Conditions That May Require Special Exercise Guidelines

Exercise programs are modified so you receive the benefits of exercise while minimizing the risk of aggravating your health condition. A number of health conditions require exercise-program modifications. This list is not exhaustive, so speak with your health practitioner regarding exercise-program modifications or limitations specific to your condition.

Cardiovascular disease and risk factors:

- hypertension
- elevated blood cholesterol
- diabetes
- angina
- post-heart attack or post-bypass
- heart valve disease
- peripheral circulatory disease

Breathing conditions:

- asthma
- emphysema

Bone or joint conditions:

- low-back pain
- osteoporosis
- post-surgical/rehabilitation
- arthritis

Other conditions:

- neuromuscular (stroke, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, fibromyalgia)
- vision or hearing impairments
- pregnancy
- psychological disorders
- mental handicaps

may perform evaluations, such as a range-of-motion test for a certain joint or cardiorespiratory testing to measure heart rate during aerobic exercise.

The fitness professional will use this information to establish realistic goals and design a safe, effective exercise program. If you feel the fitness professional does not want to become familiar with your condition, talk with another professional who will.

Sometimes Health and Fitness Professionals Need to Talk

Your fitness professional may feel it's necessary to speak with your healthcare professional before working with you. The trainer or instructor may require specific guidance on a safe range of motion for your joints, or a proper approach if you have risk factors for heart disease.

The fitness professional also may need to clarify physical activity program goals even if you were referred by a physician. These discussions may take time, but be patient—thoroughness is in your best interest.

Progression

Regardless of whether you exercise in a group or one-on-one, training should progress from an initial, easy effort level to one that's more challenging. A group instructor should provide modifications, if necessary, specific to your condition. A personal trainer also should offer exercises performed at appropriate ranges of motion and intensities.

Both types of fitness professionals should be able to explain why they recommend certain exercises, and provide you with a plan that details the progress you can expect.

Exercise can be an important, fulfilling part of coping with a chronic disease or recovering from injury. Coordinate with your healthcare provider and fitness professional to make the most of your exercise experience, and to improve your ability to function throughout your life.

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