

Hit the
GYM



Why Being Active Is Important

Exercise is most closely associated with being physically fit, but its advantages extend far beyond bigger muscles or marathon medals.

Engaging in regular physical activity can lead to improved general health, better moods and decreased stress levels. These days, finding time to visit the gym can be challenging, but exercising is an important form of self-care.

HOW TO GET GOING

If you have settled into a more inactive lifestyle, ease your way into a new exercise routine. Don't risk overexerting yourself or injury. There will be a natural adjustment period as you establish a schedule that works for you. Continue to calibrate the duration and intensity of your workouts as you get stronger. Pushing yourself too hard at the beginning may lead to feeling overwhelmed. Some people even give up entirely. Any plan should make accommodations for other commitments. Start with short bursts of exercise, working your way up to a full hour of exercise each day or more. Gradually increasing your workout time in this way creates a smoother transition, helping to prevent burnout for those who are new to the gym.

OVERLOOKED BENEFITS

Aim to exercise three to five times a week to maximize these benefits. Daily

exercise goals can always be divided into smaller segments, making it easier to stay committed while taking care of other responsibilities. Some choose an individual program while others prefer a more structured regimen at the local gym. Either way, regular workouts help you unwind, elevate your mood, and alleviate mild feelings of depression. Exercising fosters opportunities for mindfulness and problem-solving while triggering the release of endorphins, the neurotransmitters that enhance our mood. Just be sure to allocate time for recovery.

LONG-TERM GOALS

The American Heart Association suggests aiming for approximately 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each week. It's a target that can be easily met with the right approach. In time, you'll notice that regular physical activity has led to reduced stress, a boost in self-confidence and improved cardiovascular health. Consider it a form of movement-based meditation: Visiting the gym visit allows you to momentarily escape all the day's distractions and irritations while providing an opportunity to set and accomplish consistent goals.



Timeless Workout Classics

You don't have to climb on board the latest trend to achieve new fitness goals.

In fact, many of the best exercises can be done either at home or in a gym setting, using weights or just your body weight. They can be tailored to match your individual fitness level.

GETTING STARTED

Before beginning any new exercise program, consult with a healthcare professional. Discuss your goals, limitations and personal fitness. If you are uncertain about your technique, consider scheduling a session or two with a personal trainer. They'll help you learn more about proper form. Always pay attention to your body. Reduce intensity or stop exercising entirely if you experience any discomfort.

SQUATS

Squats are an excellent initial exercise regimen. This movement primarily targets the glutes and thighs, while also engaging the calves, hamstrings and abdominal muscles. They enhance your workout efficiency by toning muscles and burning calories. You can perform squats using just your body weight or by incorporating a barbell or free weights. Just make sure your back remains straight and that your knees do not extend past your toes.

PUSHUPS

Depending on which variation you choose, pushups can effectively engage the biceps, pectorals, triceps, abs, deltoids and glutes. They're all key muscle groups for those who hope to firm their upper torso and arms – and they make for a nice fashion showcase, too. Maintain a straight back and ensure your hips

align with your spine. Lower your body until your arms form a 90-degree angle.

DEADLIFTS

Deadlifts require some form of heavy object, typically barbells or free weights. The resulting exercise engages your entire body, but with a particular focus on your back, legs and glutes. As with any

form of weightlifting, proper form is crucial: Stand with your feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Keep your knees relaxed as you lower the weights to the ground while maintaining a straight back then lift them back to your body.

PLANKS

This exercise involves being

still – but it's by no means easy. Assume a push-up position, which can involve either your elbows or hands on the floor. Keep your feet or knees hip-width apart and your spine straight. Then hold this position for a pre-determined amount of time. You can increase the difficulty by extending this timeframe or lifting one limb.



Tips for Group Exercising

Group fitness classes can be inspiring and fun. Instructors or classmates are there with details on a new routine or to provide an encouraging word.

Sharing a common goal tends to make it easier to maintain motivation levels. If you're new to this setting, you'll need to be aware of the best practices and thoughtful etiquette required to succeed.

MINDING MANNERS

In general, the same principles of etiquette that govern everyday interactions apply in the gym. This includes familiar concepts like punctuality, respecting others' personal space, minimizing distractions from your mobile phone and cleaning up after yourself. Try to avoid leaving early but if you must, position yourself toward the back of the space to minimize any distraction. Adopting these habits will help foster positive relationships with your peers and the instructor — and that's always important when you're the new person.

CLOTHING CHOICES

This isn't about style so much as substance. Appropriate workout attire is crucial for comfort but also to maintain the flow of the class. Arrive suitably dressed for specific activities to avoid interruptions while you make adjustments to



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your outfit or footwear. Apply antiperspirant but avoid heavy fragrances, as strong scents may bother other classmates. They might even affect the ability to breathe deeply during intense moments. Reserve conversations for after class so everyone can maintain focus. It's also a sign of respect

for the teacher.

SHARED SPACES

In general, talking during class is seen as inconsiderate, as others are concentrating on their workouts. Don't attempt to showcase your own skills or outshine the instructor. However, if you are injured or

otherwise unable to perform a specific exercise, it's always acceptable to employ a modified version of the routine.

Focus on staying aligned with the group — and be aware that some classes may require time to master. Don't ridicule those who are still learning. Instead, offer them assistance

or your own words of encouragement. Remember that a series of group fitness classes may be scheduled consecutively. Be considerate and wait for the previous class to finish before entering the workout space — and then exit promptly after collecting your belongings.

Managing Your Recovery

You've established a dedicated fitness routine. Now it's time to talk about what happens next: Your fatigued muscles need an opportunity to rest and recuperate.

Here are a few effective strategies to guide you through post-exercise recovery.

STAY HYDRATED

Be sure to consume plenty of water before, during and particularly after each round of physical activity. Even simple exercises can leave you dehydrated. If tap water doesn't appeal to you, consider alternatives like sports drinks. In truth, just about any form of hydration will assist in muscle repair and gaining strength for your next session.

PRIORITIZE REST

Sleep plays a crucial role in your body's recovery on an everyday basis, but it's particularly true for muscles engaged during your workout. Strive for seven to eight hours of sleep each night, and consider adding a short afternoon snooze to your schedule as needed. Studies suggest that taking a 20-minute nap a few hours after exercising can refresh your muscles without interfering with nighttime sleep.

EAT UP!

A balanced diet that's rich



in protein is also essential for muscle recovery. Sources of protein include lean meats, Greek yogurt, eggs, cottage cheese and some vegetables. After your workout, focus on consuming high-protein snacks to support your body and reduce soreness. Combined with a good night's sleep, this sets the stage for comprehensive muscle repair.

REMEMBER TO STRETCH

It's important to stretch both before and after your workouts to minimize the risk of injury. But did you know stretching aids in muscle recovery?

We're encouraged to allow 48 hours between sessions that target the same muscle group. During this period, engage in lower-impact

exercises like stretching to help things along.

IF YOU'RE INJURED

Be proactive in addressing any injuries. Don't allow your workouts to become so strenuous that they cause harm. Maintain proper form during exercises to prevent injuries, prioritizing quality over quantity.

For minor injuries, apply the RICE method: "Rest," "Ice" to reduce swelling, use a "Compression" bandage, and "Elevate" the affected area as much as possible. Most workout-related injuries heal within a few weeks. If pain persists beyond this time-frame, however, or if you experience severe pain, seek medical assistance.



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Considering a Gym Class?

If you find yourself lacking in motivation, taking a fitness class might be just the nudge you need.

They're also perfect for people who thrive in more social situations. Skip the solo reps and achieve the same desired results by taking one of these exciting classes. As you gain more experience, you can always modify the exercises or move up a class level to create new challenges.

STRENGTH TRAINING

There are very specific classes that allow you to concentrate on a single muscle group for a dedicated 30-minute session. On the other hand, total body strength training effectively tones all muscle groups. More gyms are offering this program, which targets every major muscle area. Depending on the specific class and instructor, sessions may focus on dedicated strength training techniques, bars, squats, utilizing free weights and core workouts. These

classes can be particularly beneficial for those who may not feel confident using weights, since instructors are available to assist and discuss proper form. If you prefer a class that integrates weights with cardio exercises, consider enrolling in a boot camp. You'll take part in circuit training inspired by military workouts.

DANCE-BASED CLASSES

Dance-based classes like Zumba create a vibrant atmosphere that can be so fun that you might forget you're exercising. These energetic fitness programs engage several muscle groups while elevating your heart rate. You'll never suffer through the monotony of a rep-based routine. Other options include Batuka, which combines aerobics with dance moves set to lively Latin rhythms to create a comprehensive

workout. Belly dancing is accessible to people at any fitness level, providing both cardiovascular benefits and an excellent core workout.

SPIN CLASS

Spin classes are ideal for those who are new to fitness or those seeking an alternative to a more rigorous workout routine.

You'll be aboard a stationary bike accompanied by uplifting music. This gives riders the opportunity to elevate their heart rate without creating so much stress on joints. The instructor's role is to motivate everyone to push to their limits. That means tackling steep inclines, navigating long stretches and engaging in intense sprints. The result is targeted muscle toning and increased flexibility. Just remember to bring your water bottle and a towel for perspiration.

Women and Weightlifting

Adults are encouraged to take part in resistance training at least two times per week, targeting all muscle groups. But only around 20% of women do.

They're missing out on an activity that improves physiological well-being, particularly for those at risk of osteoporosis. Weightlifting has positive psychological and social effects, according to the National Institutes of Health. Here's a look at what's holding women back, and how to disrupt this pattern.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

Several things work in tandem to discourage women from resistance training, according to several expert studies. Some are universal, like time constraints or motivational issues. There are fewer weightlifting classes just for women and a lack of designated areas in many gyms. At the same time, some women have expressed unfounded concerns about how weightlifting might change their appearance. Awareness campaigns on the benefits of resistance training for women have been suggested to boost participation.

HOW TO BEGIN

Avoid overly complicated



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training programs when you're just getting started. Focus on routines that will make the transition easier. After all, weightlifting often mimics everyday tasks like placing luggage in a plane's overhead compartment or carrying groceries in from your vehicle. Do your due diligence before joining a gym, ensuring

that there are programs, instructors and equipment in place to suit your needs. Begin slowly, with bodyweight exercises like push-ups or squats to build and tone your muscle. That will help guard against injury. Switch to weights as you begin to discover your own hidden potential – but don't overdo it.

BEFORE YOU LIFT

The larger aim will eventually be pushing yourself to a safe personal limit with each workout. Experts suggest weightlifting no more than a few times a week, since muscles need time to recover. Blend in cardiovascular workouts to round out your exercise regimen, doing 150 minutes of

light-to-moderate cardio each week – or 75 minutes of vigorous cardio. Resist the urge to skip right to the resistance bands, slider disks and kettlebells. Each session should start with a warm-up that includes stretching and activities like foam rolling that are meant to relax the muscles. Stop immediately if you feel pain.

If You Get Injured

Nobody wants to get injured, but rushing back to the gym too soon can only lead to more pain.

Your recovery period will likely be lengthened, and you might end up exacerbating the injury. So, when is the right time to go back? Listen to your body. While minor discomfort can usually be managed, anything beyond that level of pain indicates that you may not be ready. Avoid returning to the gym if you are still experiencing significant swelling or pain.

CONSULTING WITH A PRO

The most qualified person to assess things is a personal physician or physical therapist. You may feel eager to get back, but they can provide a more objective evaluation of your progress while outlining any remaining goals you need to achieve before resuming full activity. For example, therapists can guide you through targeted exercises designed to strengthen affected areas. This puts a recovery timeline in clearer view. Doctors can track your history of swelling, while taking advantage of advanced imaging to identify any underlying issues.

GETTING STARTED

Begin gradually. Regardless of your fitness plan, start at a comfortable pace. So, if you previously ran five miles daily



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on the treadmill, consider beginning at 50% or less of your usual intensity. Aim to increase your effort by only 10 to 15% in one- or two-week-long increments, as long as you don't experience any setbacks. Depending on the injury, it may be smart to begin with walking or jogging

instead of running. Pay close attention to any swelling or significant soreness during or after your workouts, as these may indicate the need to slow down or make other adjustments to your workout.

MOVING FORWARD

Consider working with a

professional trainer, since that's one of the most effective strategies to facilitate recovery — and to prevent future injuries. Trainers specialize in creating programs tailored to various health objectives while minimizing the risk of injury. They can work with you if you are recovering from an injury

to design a plan that helps you heal without exacerbating the issue. Your trainer can create specific routines that take into account tandem health conditions such as heart disease, arthritis, diabetes or hypertension, ensuring that exercising doesn't introduce too much stress.