



GET MOVING

wellnews

August 2012

Getting fit with a low-impact workout

Fitness and daily exercise are key to being, and staying, at your healthiest. Even if you're currently out of shape, overweight, and/or have a health condition, you can still meet the American Heart Association's recommended 30+ minutes of moderate exercise five days a week, and enjoy substantial benefits to your health.

Low-impact cardio exercise is the answer. A low-impact workout provides you the necessary benefits of aerobic physical activity without any impact on your joints and feet. Regular aerobic exercise plays a role in preventing heart disease, can reduce blood pressure, and can help control diabetes, cholesterol levels, and obesity. Several different effective workouts qualify as low impact. Here are just a few complete workouts to get you started. Consult your doctor before beginning any new exercise routine beyond walking, particularly if you have existing health concerns.

Walking

Walking doesn't require special equipment and can be done just about anywhere. If walking outside isn't an option, you can walk on a treadmill indoors, or even at a shopping mall. If you're new to walking, try starting out with short distances, and gradually increasing the length of your walks. Walk fast enough to increase your heart rate, then slow your pace for the last few minutes.

Yoga

Yoga is generally considered safe for people of all abilities, even if you use a wheelchair or are severely overweight. Hatha yoga is great for beginners, because its slower pace and movement is easier to practice. Yoga poses are designed to increase strength and flexibility, ranging from lying on the floor while completely relaxed to more challenging postures. Benefits include improved balance, flexibility, range of motion, and strength.

Swimming and water exercise

Swimming is an excellent choice for people who are overweight or have arthritis and other joint problems, and works most of the major muscle groups. In addition

to swimming laps, you can also work on your arms, legs, or abdominal muscles in the pool with the help of a variety of different accessories. Look for classes at the local gym, community pool, or recreational center.

Low-impact aerobics

During low-impact aerobics, participants perform dance-type moves set to music while keeping one foot on the ground at all times. Low-impact aerobics allow you to reap the benefits of an aerobic workout without worsening or causing joint problems. Women who are pregnant or people who are elderly or overweight can also benefit from low-impact aerobics.

Tai chi

A gentle exercise originally from China, tai chi is practiced in many areas of the world. Based on martial arts movements, tai chi features slow, flowing motion and breathing techniques, but doesn't involve the high-impact moves or jumping usually associated with martial arts. And tai chi benefits both your mental and physical state.

Resources

National Institutes of Health

Useful tips to help you get active

Weight Control Information Network

Helpful information on fitting in everyday physical activity

National Center on Physical Activity and Disability

Free personalized, 14-day online physical activity and nutrition program for people with mobility limitations, chronic health conditions, and physical disabilities