



Fitness Facts

It's Never Too Late To Start Getting Fit

(NAPSA)—Think you're too out of shape to get fit? Or too old? If so, you're wrong. No matter your fitness level or age, it's never too late to get in better shape. Studies show that physical activity benefits everyone, so even if you've never exercised before, you can still reap the rewards of a regular fitness routine.

Before beginning any exercise program, see your doctor, especially if you have chronic health problems or are at risk for any, such as heart disease or diabetes.

Next, determine your fitness goals. "Even a modest fitness program can help you lose weight, improve your strength or muscle tone or simply increase your energy level," said John L. Honcharuk, ATC/L, CSCS, manager of Sports Enhancement & Performance for Chicago-based AthletiCo Ltd. "It's important to set realistic objectives, so you don't immediately handicap your efforts with unattainable goals."

Getting some professional advice on tailoring your fitness program to meet your objectives is a good idea. Many health clubs have personal trainers or fitness professionals who can help design a regimen for you. To find a health club near you, visit www.healthclubs.com.

If you plan to work out at home, check out reputable references, such as the "Smart Exercise Guide" from exercise equipment manufacturer Life Fitness (downloadable at www.lifefitness.com/hom_edu_main.asp) or the Get Fit section of the American Council on Exercise's Web site



(<http://www.acefitness.org/getfit/in dex.cfm>). You can also consult fitness books by credible experts such as *Fitness for Dummies* by Liz Neporent and Suzanne Schlosberg.

An effective fitness program includes cardiovascular activities—such as bicycling, running or swimming—as well as strength training and flexibility exercises.

Set up an exercise schedule that's realistic given your current activity level and time commitments. If you've never had a regular workout routine, begin slowly so your body can adjust and you won't feel overwhelmed. Don't try to hit the gym or tennis court for an hour every day; starting with 20 minutes a day, three days a week, might be more manageable. Also, you may want to begin with cardio and stretching and add strength training later. Whatever physical activities or exercises you

choose, take it slow and increase the intensity or duration over time.

Vary your routine so you don't get bored and so your body doesn't become too accustomed to the same exercise. Run on a treadmill one day, strength train the next day and go swimming the day after that. Don't forget that even everyday activities such as gardening or walking the dog provide myriad opportunities for burning calories and improving strength and muscle tone.

Staying motivated to exercise regularly isn't always easy, even for dedicated fitness enthusiasts.

"Choosing physical activities you enjoy is one of the easiest ways to keep motivated and stick with a routine," Honcharuk said.

Another way to stay motivated is to keep track of your progress. Record your workout stats in an informal exercise diary. Over time, notice how much you've increased your cardio machine's intensity level, how much more weight you can lift or how many more repetitions you can do. Remember that results take time, so don't get discouraged if you're not seeing big advances immediately.

Finally, treat yourself periodically for your efforts with healthy rewards, such as new exercise apparel, a new CD or a post-workout massage.

Embarking on a regular fitness routine is a healthy decision—and one that can reward you for a lifetime—no matter when you get started.