

Design Your Own Fitness Plan

If exercise is so good for us then why do we find it so hard to exercise regularly? It wasn't always that way. In grade school, you probably couldn't wait for recess. It was a time to walk, run, jump, and be outside. You were exercising and enjoying every minute of it. Now it's more of a chore. But it doesn't have to be that way if you focus on activities you enjoy and a routine that's tailored to your needs.

So how do you create such an exercise routine? Find a blend of activities you enjoy and a schedule you can stick with over the long haul. Start out gradually, set realistic goals, and reward yourself for accomplishments along the way. In short, your fitness plan should give you recess without the bell.

Plentiful and well-established science supports the benefits of aerobic and strength training, as well as balance training for older adults. Flexibility and relaxation exercises are also important components of an enjoyable and effective fitness plan.

Aerobic Exercise

Often called cardio or endurance activities, aerobic activities are great for burning calories and paring down unwanted fat. They consist of activities that require large muscles to repeatedly contract and relax: think of walking, biking, running, and swimming, for example. This temporarily boosts your heart rate and breathing, allowing more oxygen to reach your muscles and tuning up cardiovascular endurance. These are activities that are associated with lower risk for many diseases and lengthening lifespan. Make aerobic exercise the centerpiece of your fitness program, since the bulk of research on disease-quelling benefits of exercise revolves around cardiovascular activity.

Current Guidelines:	
150 minutes /week of <i>moderate</i> intensity aerobic activity OR 75 minutes / week of <i>vigorous</i> aerobic activity	
(A single exercise session should last at least 10 minutes)	
Examples:	
Walking	Biking
Running	Swimming
Dancing	Skating
Yard Work	Skiing

Strength Training

Strength or resistance training, which typically employs equipment such as weight machines, free weights, and resistance bands or tubing, protects against bone loss and builds muscle. It also improves your body's ratio of lean muscle mass to fat. It, too, deserves an important place in your exercise routine.

Technically, strength or resistance training takes place any time your muscles face a stronger-than-usual counterforce, such as pushing against a wall or lifting a dumbbell. Using progressively heavier weights or increasing resistance makes muscles stronger. Aside from toning you, strength training provides the functional strength you need to do everyday activities—lifting groceries, climbing stairs, rising from a chair, rushing for the bus—with ease.

Current Guidelines:	
Train 2 or more times weekly One set of 8-12 repetitions per exercise	
(Your body needs at least 48 hours of recovery between strength training sessions)	
Major Muscle Groups:	
Legs	Hips
Back	Chest
Abdomen	Shoulders
Arms	



Flexibility

Flexibility exercises like stretching, yoga, and Pilates gently reverse the shortening and tightening of muscles that typically occur with disuse and age. Shorter, stiffer muscle fibers may make you vulnerable to injuries and contribute to back pain and balance problems.

Frequently performing exercises that isolate and stretch elastic fibers surrounding muscles and tendons helps counteract this. A well-stretched muscle more easily achieves its full range of motion. This improves athletic performance—imagine an easier, less restricted golf swing or tennis serve—and functional abilities, such as reaching, bending, or stooping during daily tasks.

At one time, experts prescribed stretching before exercise to help avoid injuries, but newer research suggests this does little good. (Instead, experts recommend starting off your exercise with a warm-up, such as a light jog or a sport-specific routine such as serving some tennis balls and practicing ground strokes before a match.) Stretch when muscles are warm and pliable—so, before stretching, walk for five to 10 minutes, dance to a few songs, or take a warm shower. Or, even better, do your flexibility exercises as your post-workout cool-down. Stretching between exercises may be fine, too, and possibly helps boost flexibility.

To achieve lasting effects, stretch daily or at least several times a week. This is easier than you might think. Activities such as yoga and Pilates combine stretching and relaxation and also improve balance, a wonderful combination.

Balance Exercises

Our sense of balance typically worsens as we age. It can be further compromised by medical conditions like neuropathy (a complication of diabetes) and certain chemotherapy drugs and other medications; uncorrected vision problems; or lack of flexibility. Poor balance often leads to falls, which can cause head injuries and temporarily or permanently disabling injuries to the bones and nervous system. Hip fractures, particularly, can lead to serious health complications and can impair independence.

Current Guidelines:
Do after aerobic or strength activities OR At least twice a week
Examples:
Yoga Pilates Static Stretching (stationary) Passive Stretching (partner assists)

Current Guidelines:
3 times a week OR Daily
Examples:
Heel-to-Toe Walk: Place one foot in front of the other, touching heel to toe and walk 20 steps Advanced = walk backwards
Single-Leg Stance: Stand on one leg without the assistance of the upper extremities. Try to maintain balance for up to 30 seconds. Switch legs. Advanced = close eyes



