
Exercise programs

Exercise programs are becoming more popular. There are gyms with many different types of aerobics classes and exercise equipment catering to a range of people.

Starting an exercise program can be like taking a step into another world if you are unfamiliar with what's involved. Talk to a gym supervisor to find out about the many options available.

Health benefits

A customised exercise program is a great way to stay fit and it provides a wide range of physical and mental benefits, including:

- Improved condition of the heart and lungs
- Increased muscular strength, endurance and motor fitness
- Increased aerobic fitness
- Improved muscle tone and strength
- Weight management
- Better coordination, agility and flexibility
- Improved balance and spatial awareness
- Increased physical confidence
- Reduced risk of chronic disease
- Improved sleep
- Improved general and psychological wellbeing
- Greater self-confidence and self-esteem.

Getting started

Before you get started, it will help if you:

- Assess your fitness level
- Design your fitness program
- Assemble your equipment.

Assess your fitness level

You probably have some idea of how fit you are. However, assessing and recording baseline (starting) fitness scores can give you benchmarks (points of comparison) against which to measure your progress. Check:

- Your pulse rate before and after a walk
- How long it takes to walk a certain distance
- How many push-ups you can do at a time
- Your waist circumference at the level of your navel
- Your body mass index (BMI). This is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by the square of your height in metres.

Design your fitness program

When you design your fitness program, keep these points in mind:

- Consider your goals. Are you starting a fitness program to lose weight or for some other reason?
- Think about your likes and dislikes. Choose activities you'll enjoy.
- Plan a logical progression of activity. If you're just beginning to exercise, start cautiously and progress slowly.
- Build activity into your daily routine. Schedule time to exercise as you would any other appointment.
- Think variety. Varying your activities (cross-training) can keep exercise boredom at bay.
- Allow time for recovery.
- Put it on paper. A written plan may encourage you to stay on track.

Assemble your equipment

Be sure to pick shoes designed for the activity you have in mind, as well as your foot type. If you're planning to invest in gym equipment, choose something that's practical, enjoyable and easy to use.

Getting started

Remember to:

- Start slowly and build up gradually.
- Break things up if you have to.
- Be creative. Include other activities such as walking, bicycling, rowing or dancing in your routine.
- Listen to your body. Don't push yourself too hard.
- Be flexible. If you're not feeling good, give yourself permission to take a day or two off.

Monitor your progress

Assess your progress at six weeks after you start your program and then again every three to six months. You may need to increase the amount of time you exercise in order to continue improving. On the other hand, you may be pleasantly surprised to find that you're exercising just the right amount to meet your fitness goals.

If you lose motivation, set new goals or try a new activity. Exercising with a friend or taking a class at a local fitness centre may help.

Where to get help

- Your local council
- Local gymnasium
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

Things to remember

- A customised exercise program is a great way to stay fit and it will bring a wide range of physical and mental benefits.
- Start slowly and build up gradually and monitor your progress.
- See your doctor for a check-up and assess your fitness level.
- Consider your fitness goals. Are you starting a fitness program to help lose weight or for some other reason?

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Smartplay

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.