
Exercise programs

Summary

- A customised exercise program developed by an Australian registered exercise professional (AusREP) is a great way to stay fit and will bring you a wide range of physical and mental benefits.
 - Before starting with an exercise program, if you haven't exercised for a while, use the adult pre-exercise screening tool and consult your doctor for a check-up if required.
 - Consider your fitness goals. Are you starting a fitness program to help you lose weight or for some other reason?
 - Start slowly, build up gradually and monitor your progress.
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About exercise programs

Exercise programs are popular. There are gyms and other fitness providers with many different types of classes, exercise routines and equipment, catering to a wide range of people.

If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging. Talk to an **Australian registered exercise professional (AusREP)** to find out about the many options available.

Health benefits of exercise programs

An exercise program that is tailored specifically to your needs is a great way to stay physically and mentally fit. It also provides additional benefits such as:

- 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 energy levels
- improved immunity
- increased physical confidence
- reduced risk of chronic disease (such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease)
- improved sleep
- improved brain function and health
- improved general and psychological wellbeing
- greater self-confidence and self-esteem
- improved social life.

Before starting your exercise program

Before you get started, if you are new to exercise or are coming back from a long period of inactivity, it will help if you:

- Complete the adult pre-exercise screening tool questionnaire developed by Fitness Australia, Exercise and Sports Science Australia and Sports Medicine Australia.
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- If you answer yes to some of the questions in the screening tool, see your doctor or allied health professional.
- Assess your current fitness level using the following information, or make an appointment with an exercise professional for a fitness assessment.

Assessing your fitness level for an exercise program

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. It's valuable to assess your progress on a regular basis, for example each month. Remembering progression with some goals may be achieved in shorter or longer periods of time.

Before you start your new exercise program, record:

- your pulse rate (heart rate) before and after a walk
- how long you take to walk a certain distance
- how many bench push-ups or squats you can do in 30 seconds
- your waist circumference (measured midway between the top of your hip bone and bottom of your ribs).
- your body mass index (BMI). This is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres, squared. If you would like this accurately assessed, visit your local registered allied health or exercise professional.

(Note: Some medications affect your heart rate. If you are taking any medications that do so, consult a health professional and consider another way of measuring your exertion levels, such as the **Borg scale**.)

The adult pre-exercise screening tool contains exercise intensity guidelines, including exertion and other descriptive measures.

Consult an exercise or health professional to help you interpret this information or to do a fitness assessment for you, and work out what sort of program is best for you.

Designing your fitness program

Consulting an exercise professional when designing your fitness program can help you reduce injury and customise your program to your needs, especially if you are new to exercise or you haven't done any physical activity for a while. Points to keep in mind when designing your program include:

- 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 will 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. By varying your activities (cross-training), you can avoid exercise boredom.
- Allow time for recovery after exercising and make sure you have an adequate healthy diet.
- Put it on paper. A written plan can encourage you to stay on track.

Assemble your exercise clothing and equipment

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

Getting started on your exercise program

When you are ready to start getting active:

- Start with low intensity activities such as walking with a friend or family member.
- Over time, build up to the amount of physical activity recommended by **Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines**:
 - Be active on most (preferably all) days every week.
 - Accumulate 2½ to 5 hours of moderate intensity physical activity or 1¼ to 2½ hours of vigorous

physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both moderate and vigorous activities, each week.

- Do muscle strengthening activities on at least two days each week.

If you are unsure about any of the above, seek help from an exercise professional. Recognised industry associations such as Fitness Australia hold a directory of **Australian registered exercise professionals**, where you can search for an exercise professional based on their:

- level of experience working in the industry
- delivery, knowledge and skills
- location.

Remember to:

- Start slowly and build up gradually.
- Break activities up if you have to.
- Be creative – include other activities such as walking, cycling, swimming 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.

For more information, visit our fact sheet **Physical activity – how to get started**.

Monitoring progress on your exercise program

Assess your progress six weeks after you start your program (by measuring the same parameters as you did to record your baseline fitness) and then every eight to 12 weeks. You may need to adjust the time, intensity and type of exercise you do 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 start to 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
- **Registered Exercise Professional**
- **Fitness Australia** Tel. **1300 211 311**

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