Exercise programs

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A customised exercise program developed by a registered exercise professional 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.

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 a registered exercise professional 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
- 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 beginning 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.
- 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 as set out below, 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.

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 fitness provider.

(Note: Some medications affect your heart rate. If you are taking any medications that do so, consult a health or exercise 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**

**betterhealth.vic.gov.au**
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 1 ¼ to 2 ½ 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 twelve weeks. You may need to adjust the time, intensity and type of exercise you do 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 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

Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off the couch and enjoy getting fit by following these few simple steps.
2. **Embrace your inner child**

What types of activities did you enjoy when you were a kid? Did you participate in an organised team sport or do something less structured? Give them a try again. Take time out to discover what suits your physical, emotional and social needs.

3. **Find an exercise buddy**

Let’s face it, we’re more likely to stick to physical activity if we do it with friends or family. It’s a great way to catch up and a great motivator.
4. Explore the local community

Join a club or community group – it’s a great way to meet new people who may even become lifelong friends. You’ll be surprised how many opportunities are out there – from leisure centres and sports clubs to parks, trails, swimming pools and classes. Local councils and libraries can help you track them down.

5. Be kind to yourself

Make sure you have a medical check up before starting any form of physical activity, especially if you’re over 40, overweight, haven’t exercised for a long time or have a chronic illness. Fill out this pre-exercise self-screening tool for adults.
6. **Start small**

Increase your activity time and intensity gradually. Take extra care if you are new to exercise or haven’t exercised for a while. Start out gently and build your endurance little by little – this way you’ll avoid overdoing it or injuring yourself! It’s a good idea to start with 10 minutes each day at first and then eventually work your way up to 30 minutes or more.

7. **Mix it up**

Not only does a range of activities keep your interest up, they challenge different muscles. If you’re time and budget poor, be creative and look for other alternatives. Walk or cycle to work, take the stairs or leave the car at home when running errands. Buy some exercise equipment for home, such as online exercise videos or DVDs. A stationary bike is fun to ride while watching TV.
8. **Up for a challenge?**

Keep up your interest by trying new activities. You may like to join others and sign up to a local fitness event, such as a fun run that raises money for a good cause. You’ll not only be helping yourself, but others in the process.

9. **Try a mantra**

Replace ‘no pain no gain’ with ‘no fun no future’. If you are not enjoying yourself, you won’t be able to sustain it.

10. **Be realistic**

Set a mixture of short and long-term goals that are achievable and you can measure. When you first begin, mark dates and times in your diary for exercise sessions. Review your progress regularly and focus on what you have achieved.
11. Don’t beat yourself up

If you miss a session that’s okay, even elite athletes need downtime after participating in rigorous activities. If you’re not in the mood, it’s important to focus on how exercise makes you feel – it not only relieves stress but helps fight sadness and depression!

12. Keep a training diary or journal

Take time to recognise these little improvements to your daily quality of life – it can increase your motivation. Reflect on how you feel before, during and after exercise. It’s a great way to track your progress.
Reward yourself

Give yourself a reward each time you reach a fitness goal. It gives you the incentive to keep going. Treat yourself to something you enjoy, but make sure your rewards match your healthy lifestyle. As you make progress, you may find you end up rewarding yourself with something physical, such as a walk by the beach or river after a hard day’s work!

References

- "Fitness programs: 5 steps to getting started," Mayo Clinic, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research.

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Keeping active

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab.

- Keeping active basics
- Getting started
- Staying fit and motivated
- Exercise safety and injury prevention
- Healthy eating and exercise
- Keeping active throughout life
- Health conditions and exercise

Keeping active basics

- Balancing energy in and energy out
  A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance.
- Body mass index (BMI)
  Body mass index or BMI is an approximate measure of your total body fat.
- Energy in food (kilojoules and calories)
  A kilojoule is a unit of measure of energy, in the same way that kilometres measure distance.
- Exercise intensity
  If you can talk but not sing, you’re exercising at the right intensity.
- Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...
- Exercise - the low-down on hydration
  You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise.
- Exercise with a friend
  Exercise is important for your physical and mental health. Working out with a friend means you’re more likely to have fun and stick to your exercise plan.
- Fitness centres – how to choose one
  Do some research before signing up at a fitness centre.
- How to make exercise fun
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...
- Kids and energy needs
  It’s important for kids to eat a wide variety of foods for a healthy, well-balanced diet and to be physically active. Creating healthy habits during childhood helps to ensure lifelong healthy.
- Personal trainers – how to choose one
Make sure your personal trainer is properly qualified before entering into any agreement.

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

- Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

- Physical activity for women
  If you can't make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

- Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy
  Even if you're busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active.

- Physical activity - setting yourself goals
  When you're trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals.

- Physical activity - what's your excuse?
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

- Resistance training - health benefits
  If you do resistance training repeatedly and consistently, your muscles become stronger.

- Secrets to healthy ageing
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- Sports and physical activity
  Around 62 per cent of Australians adults do not meet the recommended physical activity guidelines to gain the health benefits of increased fitness and reduced body fat.

Getting started

- Exercise programs
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

- Exercise - the low-down on hydration
  You need to drink enough and regularly to keep hydrated during exercise.

- Exercise with a friend
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- Gardening for children
  Children can learn new skills, have fun and develop self-confidence when they grow their own plants.

- Gardening for health - starting out
  Gardening is a healthy activity that can be enjoyed by everyone.

- Gardening for older people
  Garden spaces and equipment can be modified or adapted to help older people enjoy gardening.

- Gardening safety
  Gardening is an enjoyable form of exercise, but you need to take care.

- Getting active - tucker talk tips
  The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term.

- How to make exercise fun
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off.

- Physical activity - choosing a provider
  Choosing the right fitness centre or service provider requires some research.

- Physical activity - choosing the one for you
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.
• Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

• Physical activity for women
  If you can't make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

• Physical activity - how to get active when you are busy
  Even if you're busy, you still need to find a way to be physically active.

• Physical activity - how to get started
  If you've been inactive and want to begin physical activity, see a doctor first.

• Physical activity - learn how to swim (video)
  Swimming is a great low-impact exercise for all ages and abilities. Australian marathon swimmer, Tammy Van Wisse shows ex-AFL (Australian Football League) player and coach, Tony Shaw some swimming.

• Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)
  Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses.

• Physical activity - overcoming the barriers
  If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

• Physical activity - setting yourself goals
  When you're trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals.

Staying fit and motivated

• 10 tips to plan your exercise
  Physical activity won't just happen. Most activities require planning – starting and maintaining a physical activity program does too. Here are some tips for getting ready to exercise. Make...

• 10 tips to stay active year round
  Pick an activity you enjoy ..., 10 tips to stay active year round...

• Exercise and mood
  Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise...

• Exercise - everyday activities
  There are lots of everyday activities that provide an opportunity to be active and provide health benefits.

• Exercise in your local surroundings (video)
  Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...

• Exercise programs
  If you are unfamiliar with what is involved, starting an exercise program can be challenging.

• Exercise with a friend
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• How to make exercise fun
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• Pets can make you healthy (video)
  Australians have one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world.

• Physical activity - choosing the one for you
  You are more likely to keep up a healthy lifestyle change if your chosen activity suits you.

• Physical activity for men
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• Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.
Physical activity for women

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Physical activity - overcoming barriers (video)

Former world aerobics champion, Sue Stanley shows us how to overcome common exercise excuses.

Physical activity - overcoming the barriers

If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

Physical activity - staying active during summer (video)

Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer Sherri Bourne gives us some great tips for staying active over the summer months.

Physical activity - staying motivated

Pick an exercise or fitness activity that appeals to you and suits your lifestyle.

Physical activity - what's your excuse?

There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

Stretching exercise in winter (video)

When starting out an exercise program, it's really important to do a warm up and cool down before and after exercise.

Exercise safety and injury prevention

10 tips for safe stretching

Make stretching part of your life... 10 tips for safe stretching...

10 tips to exercise safely

Exercising regularly has wide-ranging physical, emotional and social health benefits. You need to exercise safely to remain healthy and injury-free. If it's safe and painless, you're more...

Aerobics - preventing injury

Aerobics injuries are usually caused by trauma and overuse, but can be prevented by using the right techniques and equipment.

Australian rules football - preventing injury

Australian rules football is a physical contact sport that often results in injuries from tackling, kicking, running and constant competition for the ball.

Basketball - health benefits

Basketball is a sport enjoyed by people of all ages and abilities.

Basketball - preventing injury

Basketball is a fast game with frequent and aggressive body contacts - injuries can and do occur.

Canoeing and kayaking - health benefits

Canoeing and kayaking can be done as a hobby, a competitive sport or as a fun activity on holidays.

Canoeing and kayaking - preventing injury

Careful preparation and the right equipment can help prevent canoeing and kayaking injuries.

Cricket - health benefits

To play cricket you need to be fit and strong and have good hand-eye coordination and ball-handling skills.

Cricket - preventing injury

Cricket is a very popular sport. Injuries are often caused by overuse, being struck by a cricket ball and falls.

Cycling - health benefits

Cycling can help to protect you from serious diseases.

Cycling - preventing injury

You are much more likely to hurt yourself by falling off your bike or hitting a stationary object than colliding with another vehicle.

Dance - health benefits

Dancing can be a fun way to stay fit for people of all ages and abilities.
- Dancing - preventing injury
  Dancing is fun and a great form of exercise, but make sure you avoid injuries...

- Dog walking - the health benefits
  If you are planning to buy a dog, make sure you choose a breed that's appropriate to your lifestyle...

- Exercise safety
  Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries...

- Fishing - preventing injury
  Never go fishing alone? always fish with someone else and, ideally, with two other people...

- Golf - health benefits
  Golf provides a stimulating challenge, combined with a healthy walk in pleasant surroundings...

- Golf - preventing injury
  The average golfer playing an 18-hole game walks about seven kilometres...

- Heat stress and exercise
  Heat stress occurs when sweat can't evaporate fast enough to keep the body sufficiently cool during physical activity...

### Healthy eating and exercise

- Food for sport - tucker talk tips
  Carbohydrate is the most important nutrient for athletes...

- Secrets to healthy ageing
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- Sporting performance and food
  Good nutrition and a healthy diet are essential to improving your sports performance...

- The amount of physical activity you need
  It’s important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn’t have to be...

### Keeping active throughout life

- 10 tips for active seniors
  Stay independent for longer with regular exercise ... 10 tips for active seniors...

- Children - keeping them active
  A young child is naturally active, so build upon their inclinations to use their body...

- Exercise and stretching in the office (video)
  Sitting behind a desk all day doesn't mean you can't exercise...

- Gardens for all - a health activity
  Gardening has many health and therapeutic benefits, and is an activity that most people can enjoy...

- Getting active - tucker talk tips
  The main thing is to choose physical activities that you enjoy and that you can stick to in the long term...

- Healthy active Koori kids - tucker talk tips
  Good nutrition and physical exercise help to keep Koori kids healthy and avoid diseases when they get older...

- Healthy ageing - stay involved
  Reach out to the world around you for fun, a sense of achievement, social contact and mental stimulation...

- Healthy and active ageing
  Being physically active, eating well, socialising and improving your health can help you live a healthy, happy and active life as you get older...

- How to make exercise fun
  Many of us find it difficult to stick to some form of exercise, others don’t know where to start. Experts say the key to taking up or keeping to any form of physical activity is to have fun. Get off...

- How to volunteer and boost your health

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Volunteering is great for our health – it makes us feel good, while helping others in the process.

- Older people in hospital – Get well soon
  Learn about improving and maintaining your health during a hospital stay.

- Parent's guide for active girls
  Physical activity is an important part of health and wellbeing, and girls should remain active as they grow up.

- Physical activity for men
  Many men are only motivated to become more active after they have a health scare.

- Physical activity for seniors
  Physical activity can help older people maintain independence, recover from illness and reduce their risk of disease.

- Physical activity for seniors – staying active during summer (video)
  Physical Activity and Fitness Trainer - Sherri Bourne shares a few easy and low-impact ways for seniors to stay healthy over the summer months.

- Physical activity for women
  If you can't make the time to exercise for yourself, do it for your family.

- Physical activity - what's your excuse?
  There are many excuses we can come up with to avoid being active, but the truth is there is always a way to fit some physical activity into your day.

- Postnatal exercise
  Always consult with your doctor or midwife before starting any postnatal exercise program.

- Pregnancy and exercise
  Unless you have complications, you should be able to exercise throughout your pregnancy.

- Secrets to healthy ageing
  Experts say the key to living well into our 80s and 90s is making a commitment to live healthily. Check out these simple ideas and embrace your senior years!

- Sport and children
  Make sure that some family outings offer opportunities for physical activity, such as playing sport together.

- The amount of physical activity you need
  It’s important for your health that you get enough physical activity every day, and that you limit your sedentary behaviour. But getting the amount of physical activity you need doesn’t have to be difficult.

- Vision loss and sport
  Many sports can be adapted to suit people who are blind or have low vision.

- Walking for good health
  Walking will improve your fitness and reduce your risk of heart disease.

- Walking - the benefits for older people
  Walking is great exercise for older people. It has a range of health and social benefits, and most people can do it.

Health conditions and exercise

- Arthritis and exercise
  Exercise can reduce some of the symptoms of arthritis, and improve joint mobility and strength.

- Asthma and exercise
  Exercise-induced asthma can be prevented with medication and by preparing for exercise and physical activity.

- Breathing problems and exercise
  A little physical activity and some breathing exercises can help people with lung disease.

- Cancer - exercise to help you cope
  People with cancer should be as physically active as their abilities and condition allow.

- Dementia - reducing your risk
  Adopting a ‘brain healthy’ lifestyle may reduce your risk of dementia in later life.

- Diabetes - issues for children and teenagers
  Many parents worry when their child with diabetes starts or returns to school.
• Epilepsy and employment

Many people living with epilepsy are successfully employed across a range of professional fields.

• Epilepsy and exercise

It is rare for a person with epilepsy to have a seizure during physical activity, but you should always take safety precautions when exercising.

• Exercise and mood

Exercise can have an enormous impact on your mood. Not only can exercise help in treating depression, it can also prevent people from becoming depressed again. So it’s important to keep up an exercise plan.

• Exercise in your local surroundings (video)

Want to exercise, but find gyms boring or expensive? Sue Stanley and Shane Bilsborough team up to show you how to exercise indoors and outdoors using your local surroundings - whether it's running up...

• HIV, hepatitis and sport

People with HIV or hepatitis B or C participate in a wide range of sports without restrictions, and the risk of transmission to another player is extremely small.

• Menstruation - athletic amenorrhoea

Women who are athletes or who exercise a lot on a regular basis are at risk of developing athletic amenorrhoea, which is the absence of periods.

• Osteoporosis and exercise

Exercise can reduce the risk of fractures resulting from osteoporosis by both slowing the rate of bone loss, and reducing the person’s risk of falling by building muscle strength and improving balance.

• Sports injuries

A sports injury may be more severe than you think.

• Type 2 diabetes - healthy eating and exercise (video)

People with type 2 diabetes talk about positive lifestyle changes that improve their quality of life.

Related Information

• Physical activity – setting goals

When you're trying to become more physically active, set realistic health and fitness goals.

• Physical activity – overcoming barriers

If you think physical activity is boring, try exercising with a friend.

• Physical activity – staying motivated

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• How to make exercise fun

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• Exercise. Your life needs it!
• Heart Foundation – Walking.

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