

FIT FACTS FOR BUSY BODIES

Fitness Guidance For the Age 50+ Beginner

By Trish Schwartz

QUESTION:

I am a 50 year old female who has never been on a fitness regimen. I am healthy, but over the last ten years my weight has gradually increased to 30 pounds over my ideal adult weight. In addition, I find many activities very uncomfortable and difficult to sustain. I have been avoiding recreational outings with my children and grandchildren because I just can't keep up with them. I am afraid to take on exercise at this stage in my life because I don't want to hurt myself and I am not sure how to go about it. What can I do to become more active and participate in fun activities with my family?

ANSWER:

“If you don't use it, you loose it” is not just a cliché. It is a sad truth for many adults who do not exercise their bodies throughout their adult years. Over time, your body becomes weak and very vulnerable to the stress of physical movement. It is common to have muscle and joint aches and pains that result from poor posture and lack of balance in the major muscles throughout the body.

The solution is simple. Start moving! If you don't exercise you will hurt yourself at some point in time because of your lack of strength and flexibility. Its never too late to start an exercise program, BUT it is very important to get on a program that is suited for a beginner, such as yourself, and take a gentle, gradual, comfortable and realistic approach to getting fit. The best way to get proper guidance is to hire a certified personal trainer (preferably one with experience with the mature, inactive population).

If you cannot get with a trainer, then follow the plan below.

NOTE: Get a physical and approval from your physician before taking on any exercise program.

1. Get a good fitness book with guidance on a total fitness program that includes cardiorespiratory conditioning, muscle toning and stretching. I recommend the following:
 - a. “The Body Bible” by Trish Schwartz. www.fitwise.net Chapter 5 at least.
 - b. “Fitness for Dummies” by Suzanne Schlosberg and Liz Neporent www.dummies.com Chapters 5, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 13 at least.
 - c. “Getting In Shape” by Bob Anderson, Ed Burke and Bill Pearl and “Stretching” by Bob Anderson. 1-800-333-1307. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7 at least.
2. Purchase some resistance dumbbells at your local fitness store. You will need a pair of each of the following weights. Females 3lb., 5lb., 8lb. and 10 lb. Males 8lb., 10lb., 12lb. 15lb.). Use these dumbbells in your muscular strengthening program that you follow from the guide in the fitness book you purchase.

3. Start walking. Get a pair of comfortable and supportive walking shoes and go out and walk around your neighborhood or in a park for 20 minutes, three times a week. Make sure you get your body warmed up first with some slow walking for about five minutes and then thoroughly stretch out your entire body before increasing the pace of the walk. Gradually increase the length of your walk up to 45 minutes to an hour over a period of two months. Walk briskly to get your heart rate up as well as your respiration. Try to maintain a pace that you can still carry on a “mildly winded” conversation with someone, perhaps your walking partner, your dog, or a nearby tree! Take different walking routes that incorporate hills and valleys. Try to walk on soft dirt shoulders or black top roads and paths instead of cement. Make sure you walk heel/toe to disperse the impact properly throughout the foot.
4. On the days you don't walk, do your resistance exercises selected from the fitness book. Do not do the resistance exercises everyday. Let your muscles rest a day in between. The most simple plan would be a total-body muscular routine three times a week, on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday format or perhaps Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Your walking days will be the alternate days. If you don't have time to do something active every day, do your walking before your resistance routine.
5. Finally, be sure to stretch out thoroughly after your workout. It is important to hold the stretches on every major muscle group for at least 15 seconds to get the most optimal stretch response.

Always listen to your body. You should experience mild muscle soreness just from the nature of taking on a new load on your muscles. However, you should not be in pain. If a muscle hurts, you need to assess whether or not you worked it too hard or you pulled something. Pain is an indication that you need to take measures to help the area heal. Give it some rest, but keep the joint and muscle mobile by moving them gently through the range of motion and stretch them often.