

## How to create an exercise program



One of the things that sports medicine physicians and personal trainers do is develop exercise programs or exercise guidelines for their patients and clients. While almost anyone can safely exercise an exercise program needs to be designed specifically for your health status, goals, abilities and interests.

A general exercise prescription will take into consideration the principles of conditioning and include the following basics:

- **Health Status Questionnaire / Physical Exam**  
Your physician will perform a general physical exam to determine if you have any health issues that would limit your ability to exercise or require modifications to your program. Most personal trainers require a physician's clearance before they design your program.
- A fitness assessment is the next step in designing your exercise prescription. This assessment is useful to establish a baseline of your current fitness and help determine what sort of exercise you can safely perform. The assessment often includes simple measurements of your blood pressure and heart rate, strength, flexibility, body composition, cardiovascular endurance, exercise history, and goals and interests. A variety of assessment protocols are used and these are often repeated at regular intervals to gauge your progress.
- **Exercise Type**  
A big part of your exercise prescription is what type of exercises you will do. A good prescription will include a variety of exercises and a balanced routine to build core strength, endurance, flexibility and base fitness first and then become much more specific to your fitness goals. These goals may vary, such as as running a marathon, enjoying a ski vacation or lowering your blood pressure.

- **Cardiovascular Fitness**

Rhythmic movements using large muscle groups (such as bicycling, walking or swimming) is one of the best ways to increase blood flow to the muscles and raise the heart rate for a longer period of time. This type of exercise leads to improvements in the heart's ability to pump blood through the body to the working muscles and improves overall cardiovascular health. Cardiovascular exercise is also linked to a number of health improvements including a decreased risk of many diseases, decreases in total cholesterol, blood pressure and levels of body fat.

- **Strength Training**

Strength training is an important component of fitness and is one area of your exercise prescription that may vary widely from person to person. A good program will include the core and all the major muscle groups in various combinations working against resistance and building strength, agility and balance. That resistance can be weights, gravity, tubing, your own body. A good trainer will find the right combination, but the most basic routine involves 1 to 3 sets of 10 to 12 repetitions for building strength.

- **Frequency of Exercise**

How often you exercise is an important aspect of fitness in order to make safe, yet continued progress. This prescription often starts with two to three times per week and progress to four to five times per week.

- **Duration of Exercise**

Depending upon your current fitness level and exercise history, your exercise prescription could begin with as little as ten minutes of steady exercise and build from there. Ideally, you will strive for a minimum of 20 to 60 minutes of regular exercise about three times a week. Also see: [What Causes Muscle Fatigue](#)

- **Intensity of Exercise**

The intensity of your exercise prescription may be the most important aspect of an efficient, safe and fun program. This is also where the skills of the specialist or trainer are put to the test. Because every person responds differently to exercise, finding the right intensity and a balance between effort and rest is critical. Trainers generally use heart rate as a basic measure of exercise intensity guidelines. A variety of protocols can professionals find the most appropriate heart rate range that will help you improve, but not overdo it. Your trainer will often monitor your heart rate and other vital signs while you exercise. A beginner may start at 50 percent of their maximum heart rate range whereas an elite athlete may work at nearly 90 percent of their maximum heart rate range during intense [interval training](#).

- **Exercise Session Order**

Your exercise program will usually follow a similar order, but this varies depending upon your training goals. All programs will begin with a warm up and end with a cool down and stretching.

- **Exercise Progression**

This is how your physician or trainer keeps you on track and reaching your fitness goal. It is essential for both you and your trainer to provide regular feedback and communicate openly. Most trainers will keep a written record of your training details but it's wise to keep your own training log as well. Write notes about the type of workout, time, distance, weight, reps and how you felt. The rates of progression for new exercisers are generally broken into three separate 6 week phases: (1) initial conditioning, (2) fitness improvement and (3) fitness maintenance.

- **Exercise Modifications**

A good exercise prescription is adaptable and flexible and can be modified often and easily while still moving you towards your goals. Adjustments are a constant and ongoing part of your exercise prescription for the rest of your life. You will find that you need to constantly change your routine, try new activities, take breaks, increase and decrease your time and intensity over the years. Periodic visits to your physician and personal trainer will help keep your routine fresh, but by this time you will have enough skill and experience to go it alone, design your own exercise program, and set a personal best if that's what you desire.