Injury Prevention

A workout injury can happen to anyone, no matter your experience or fitness level. Even walking can cause an injury.

But you can significantly cut your risk of getting hurt by following certain workout precautions.

Common Workout Injuries

People hurt themselves in all kinds of ways when they work out. Common workout injuries include:

- muscle pull and strain
- sprained ankle
- shoulder injury
- knee injuries
- shin splint
- tendinitis
- wrist sprain or dislocation

Preventing Workout Injuries

There are simple steps that can help keep you injury-free during your workout.

But first, pay attention to this rule of thumb. If you're a man over the age of 55, check with your health care provider before you start an exercise program. Then you'll be sure you're healthy enough for working out. The same applies to a woman over age 45.

Here are guidelines for avoiding injuries during your workout:

Warm-up and cool-down. Every workout should begin with a warm-up and end with a cool-down period. A warm-up helps your body get ready for exercise. It gradually increases your heart rate and loosens your muscles and joints.

Some ways to warm up:

- ride an exercise bike
- jump rope
- jog in place for five to 10 minutes

A cool-down after you work out is important to slowly bring your heart rate back to normal. Walking for five to 10 minutes after you work out is one way to cool down.

Stretch. Stretch before and after you workout. This will:

- increase flexibility
- reduce risk of muscle soreness and injury

It's best to stretch after you warm up and cool down.

Ease into it. When you begin an exercise routine or start a new workout program, start slowly. Then gradually build on the intensity, duration, and frequency.

Don't push yourself too hard. As your fitness abilities increase, you will be able to challenge yourself more.

Cross-train. Vary your workout. Don't overuse one set of muscles. When you repeat the same muscle movements frequently, it can lead to overuse and repetitive-use injuries such as shin splints and tendinitis.

Some ways to vary your workout:

- run on day one
- lift weights on day two
- swim or cycle on day three

Know your trouble spots. Tailor your workout for problem areas. For example, if you have arthritis in your knees, you'll want to build up strength. But don't do exercises that actually hurt. And be sure to start out lightly.

Listen to your body. The "no pain, no gain" philosophy can set you up for an injury. You can get fit without feeling pain. Don't push yourself to the point of pain. If you feel pain, you may be injured. Stop your workout and rest for a day.

Fuel your body. Drink plenty of water before, during, and after you work out. A good rule of thumb is to drink this amount of water:

- 8 ounces about 20 to 30 minutes before working out.
- 8 ounces every 10 to 20 minutes during your workout.
- 16 ounces when your workout is done.

Eat a small meal or snack every two to three hours to keep a steady source of fuel for your body. After your workout, eat a healthy carb and protein snack to replenish your energy stores.

See a trainer. Before starting a weight-lifting or exercise routine, meet with a trainer. He or she can show you how to work out correctly. The trainer will help you create a safe and realistic exercise program.

Dress right. Wear the proper gear for your workout. If you are a runner, wear a good pair of running shoes that fit properly. If you are a biker, always wear a helmet.

Rest: Take one to two days off a week to rest. Rest days give your body a chance to recover between workouts. That can help prevent injuries.