Cardio, Strength Training and Flexibility Guidelines

How much and what type of exercise you do will depend on your <u>fitness level</u>, goals and time constraints, but a complete exercise program should include cardio, strength training and flexibility exercises.

Cardio exercise is any rhythmic activity performed continuously and can include activities like walking, running, aerobics, cycling, swimming and dancing. Cardio strengthens the heart and lungs, increases endurance and burns calories which helps you lose weight. While you should always stick with a cardio program that fits with your fitness level, the general guidelines for cardio exercise include:

1   For health benefits, do moderately <u>intense cardio</u> 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, OR

2   <u>Vigorous cardio</u> 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week

3   For weight loss, you may need to do 60-90 minutes of activity several days a week

Working at a moderate intensity means you're working, but still able to talk, which is about a Level 5 on this perceived exertion scale.

Keep in mind that you can also split your workouts throughout the day and get the same results.

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Strength Training Guidelines

Strength training is another form of exercise that works the body in a different way than cardio. With strength training, you lift weights (dumbbells, barbells, resistance bands, machines, etc.) to strengthen the muscles, bones and connective tissue. Strength training is just as important for weight loss as cardio. By lifting weights, you build lean muscle tissue which raises metabolism and reduces body fat as long as you're also watching your calorie intake.

The general guidelines for strength training are:

1. Choose 8-10 exercises, targeting the major muscle groups (lower body, chest, back,shoulders, biceps, triceps and abs)

2. For beginners, do one set of 8-16 reps of each exercise to fatigue. More advanced exercisers can do 2-3 sets.

3. Train each muscle group 2-3 non-consecutive days a week

4. Work each exercise through its full range of motion and use good form

Flexibility Guidelines

While stretching is often the most overlooked exercise, it's one of the most important for keeping us agile as we get older. And, unlike the rigors of cardio and strength training, it's relaxing and it feels good. Stretching can be done anytime throughout the day, but it's also important to stretch after your workouts, especially if you have any chronically tight areas. The guidelines for stretching are:

1. Stretch your muscles when they're warm (after your warm up or, even better, after your workout)

2. Do static stretches with a focus on tight areas such as the hamstrings and lower back

3. Stretch a minimum of 2-3 days a week...even better would be every day

4. Stretch within your range of motion. Stretching shouldn't hurt.

5. Hold each stretch for about 15-30 seconds and do 2-4 reps of each stretch

Don't forget that yoga workouts are a great way to both stretch your body at the same time you build endurance and promote relaxation and stress-reduction. Pilates also promotes flexibility along with core strength and stability. Both of these activities are a great addition to a traditional cardio and strength training routine.