



Step 5: Health Benefits of Exercise & Movement

Cardio, Strength Training and Flexibility Guidelines

How much and what type of exercise you do will depend on your fitness level, 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 intense cardio 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, OR
2. Vigorous cardio 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



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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



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Yoga

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.

What about HIIT workouts?

Short intervals of extremely high-intensity exercise involving a lot of muscle mass require a tremendous amount of oxygen, during both the work interval and the recovery periods. As a result, HIIT workouts train your body to tolerate and quickly recover from periods of high-intensity exercise. You can modify these exercises depending on your body tolerance and range.

Nitric Oxide Release Workout 4 minute workout!

These are calisthenic exercises that can be used to help release nitric oxide production. Your body produces nitric oxide for the vasodilation, meaning it relaxes the inner muscles of the blood vessels, causing them to widen and increase circulation. Nitric oxide production is essential for overall health because it allows blood, nutrients and oxygen to travel to every part of your body effectively.

Dr. Zach Bush devised this 4 minute workout to fit into even the busiest schedule. Working 16 muscles in 4 minutes, you follow him through proper squat technique (check yourself in a mirror to be sure you have this important basic move), arm swings, arm circles and overhead presses.