

## QuickTakes



### The Dangers of Inactivity

One of the biggest health risks to Americans today is doing nothing at all. Think there are no consequences to being inactive? Think again!

#### It increases your disease risk.

People who are even just moderately fit are less likely than those who are inactive to develop common medical conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, some cancers, osteoporosis, diabetes and obesity.

#### It leads to a lower quality of life.

Lack of exercise and low fitness are associated with reduced ability to do daily activities. This in turn, lowers peoples' ability to live independently into their senior years.

#### It shortens life span.

Preliminary studies conducted at The Cooper Institute in Dallas suggest that people who are moderately- or highly-fit live five to eight years longer, respectively, than people who are unfit.

Are you ready to get started on your workout? You should know that regular exercise is a key part of a healthy lifestyle. Where to begin? First you need to learn the basics: flexibility, strength and cardio. Any fitness program should help you increase flexibility, improve muscular conditioning and get regular cardiovascular exercise. Before making the leap, read on and make yourself familiar with each.

### Flexibility

When you're trying to get in shape, your first instinct may be to just go. You want to burn calories and build muscle tone as quickly as possible, and you may feel like stretching is holding up your workout. It isn't. Flexibility is defined as the range of motion around a joint. By increasing your flexibility, you will not only reduce your risk of injury caused by straining tight muscles, you will have a direct impact on the quality of your exercise.

### Strength Training

Many people associate lifting weights with bulging muscles and body builders. But muscle conditioning, either with weights or other forms of exercise, has broad health benefits. Did you know that an increase in muscle tone will actually increase your metabolism?

It's true! Muscle is the highest metabolic tissue in the body. In other words, the more muscle you have, the more calories you'll burn — even at rest! That's a hard working pound of muscle! Also, muscle conditioning has been shown to increase bone density, which decreases your risk for osteoporosis.

If you are looking to start a muscle-conditioning regimen, be sure to start slow. Taking on too much weight too soon will make your muscles sore, and make you less likely to stay with your program. Once you've found a weight you feel comfortable with, begin with one set of about 12 to 15 repetitions. As your body adjusts, work up to two to three sets per exercise. Begin with exercises that use multiple muscle groups, such as a chest press or body weight squat, rather than isolated muscle exercises.

### Cardio

Whether it's running, swimming, biking or hiking, any fitness regimen should involve a regular cardiovascular workout. The benefits are many. You will burn calories, which will help reduce body fat. Plus, cardiovascular exercise helps you distribute more blood and oxygen throughout the body. The more oxygen the body's tissues have, the more productive they are.

At the beginning you should start slow. A short-term goal should be to workout three times a week for twenty minutes. The intensity should be mild at first and then can be raised as you gain endurance. Increasing intensity is important to avoid what's called a "plateau." As your body gets in shape, it takes less energy to perform easier workouts. So you need to vary the frequency, intensity, length or type of your exercise to make the most of your workouts. That way you can keep improving your fitness over the long haul!

# Fitness Testing

It's time to assess your current fitness level. This will not only help you determine the right plan for you, but it will help you gauge your progress once your training is under way. Again you'll focus on the three main components of fitness: flexibility, muscular strength and cardio. These at-home tests can give you a basic idea of your fitness level. If you want a more in-depth assessment, contact fitness professional.

## **FLEXIBILITY:** Flat Back Wall Reaches

Added flexibility can improve your balance, help your posture and reduce your risk of injury. Find out how flexible you are:

- Sit on the floor with your back flat against a wall.
- While attempting to keep your legs flat, reach forward with your hands as far as you can. If you can touch your toes with minimal bending of your legs, your flexibility is in good shape.
- If not, note the location on your body that you are able to reach without bending your legs. If you can make it to your ankles, your flexibility is okay but needs work, if you can only make it to your shins you need to keep at it!

Make sure to perform a brief cardio warm-up prior to testing (a short walk is fine).

## **CARDIO:** The Staircase Test

Do you huff and puff when you walk up stairs? The step test will show you exactly how much the stairs get your heart pumping. It's not high tech, but this is an effective way to test your heart rate at home:

- Time yourself going up and down a flight of stairs at a medium pace for exactly three minutes.
- At the end of three minutes, sit down and find your pulse at the wrist, count the beats for one minute, and log the result.

- To find an approximate target rate, subtract your age from 220, then multiply by about 60-65 percent.
- After a few weeks of working out perform the test again. If you have improved your cardiovascular fitness level your heart rate value should be smaller.

## **STRENGTH:** The Push-Up Test

Strength training isn't just for bodybuilders! Keeping healthy muscles provides valuable health benefits.

Drop and give me 20! Okay, do I hear ten?

- After a short cardiovascular warm-up (a five-minute walk is fine), try to do ten push-ups using proper form: arms placed on the ground even with your chest, hands about six inches apart. Bend your elbows until your elbow reaches 90 degrees, then push up.
- If you can perform ten properly executed push-ups without too much difficulty, you're starting with acceptable muscle conditioning.
- If not, you have something to work up to! If you can't do a standard push-up at all, don't be discouraged! Place your knees on the floor and go through the same motion. See how many push-ups you can do using this method. Over time you'll be able to move on to "real" push-ups.
- Make your goal to be able to complete double the number of push-ups (standard or not) you completed on your first effort within one month.

**Note:** *If you've been inactive, contact your doctor before engaging in strenuous exercise; anyone with lower back problems should be cautious about pushing past their normal range of motion.*

## Asparagus with Orange Zest

Makes: 2 to 3 servings | 15 minutes

(Photo Source: ©Ellen Silverman/Matria Healthcare)

### **Ingredients:**

- 1 pound thin asparagus spears, tough stems trimmed
- 1 large orange, scrubbed
- 1 large shallot or small red onion, sliced
- Salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

### **Make Ahead:**

*The asparagus is also good served cold, drizzled with a little reduced fat vinaigrette.*

### **Preparation:**

1. Choose a skillet just large enough to hold the asparagus and set over high heat. Add water to fill 1/2 inch deep.
2. With a paring knife or a vegetable peeler, remove 2 or 3 long strips of orange zest and add to the skillet. Slice the orange in half and squeeze the juice into the skillet. Add the shallot or onion slices as well. When the liquid comes to a boil, add asparagus spears and cook until just tender, about 2 minutes.
3. Drain. Season with salt and pepper just before serving. (The asparagus is also good served cold, drizzled with a little reduced-fat vinaigrette.)



**Nutrition Facts:** (PER SERVING) 47 Calories, 0.5g Fat, 0.1g Saturated fat, 4.0g Protein, 9.0g Carbohydrate, 2.4g Fiber, 16mg Sodium