



## Shaping up when you're out of shape

If you are overweight and out of shape, the physical and mental effort it takes to get active again can be overwhelming. The greater the body weight, the greater the challenge is to get active, but the greater the health benefit that accrues.

**Question:** What is the best way for an overweight, sedentary person to become active?

**Answer:** Gradually! "Fitness is a lifetime commitment, so there is no hurry," says Dr. Ron Hetzler, exercise physiologist in the Kinesiology and Leisure Science Department at the University of Hawaii.

Everyone starts from a different level of fitness and capability to exercise. The heavier the person, the greater the risk of injury from starting an exercise program too quickly. Just as it takes time to get out of shape, developing fitness is a gradual process.

The ideal starting point is to get clearance from a physician. A doctor can assess limitations and possible risks related to physical activity. Depending on an individual's physical attributes, limitations and specific health problems, the doctor may recommend

initial physical therapy to carefully rehabilitate some weak links.

If physical therapy is unnecessary, referral to a qualified personal trainer may be in order. A good personal trainer will first carefully assess a person's current level of activity, then work out a plan of action that is safe and appeals to the individual.

Whether you are working with a trainer or not, it is essential to listen to your body. Building fitness and strength depends upon the right balance between reasonable exercise stress and allowing adequate time for the body to recover and adapt to the stress.

**Q:** Why are adults often injured by new exercise programs?

**A:** Muscles adapt to the stresses of increased exercise faster than joints and ligaments. Muscles can strengthen within weeks, but it can take several months for joints to adapt. So it may be more important to consider the reactions of your joints than your muscles.

**Q:** How much exercise is enough?

**A:** Any increase in activity brings benefits. Gradually in-

creasing daily activity up to 30 minutes per day has been shown to improve fitness and benefit weight management. Further increasing this to 60 minutes per day can provide additional benefit.

**Q:** Is it necessary to do 30 to 60 minutes of exercise all at one time?

**A:** No. The goal is to accumulate this much throughout the day on most days of the week. Getting intermittent short bouts of exercise throughout the day can be just as beneficial as setting aside an hour each day. Many people wear a pedometer to monitor their daily activity and gradually increase their walking to 10,000 steps as a fitness goal.

Because exercise bouts help lower blood glucose, people with non-insulin-dependent diabetes may benefit more from two short daily bouts of exercise than one long session.

**Q:** What helps a person maintain physical activity for life?

**A:** Enjoyment and convenience are the two biggest factors. If the activity is fun and exercise partners are enjoyable, people are more likely to keep it up.

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