

CERTIFIED WOMEN'S HEALTH COUNSELOR ONLINE COURSE: SESSION 9

- **Fitness and Health: To Gym or Not To Gym? That is the Question.**

Without exercise our health would be doomed. Learn how to get started on your fitness plan, what to do when you get off track with your exercise goals, how to use everyday activities to meet your goal for physical fitness, as well as other facts you should know about exercising at home, outside, or at the gym.

Exercise Benefits, Guidelines and Principles for Weight Loss and Health

We all know what exercise is - Any type of physical exertion we perform in an effort to improve our health, shape our bodies and boost performance. Obviously that covers a broad range of activities and, luckily, there are plenty to go around whether you want to lose weight, get healthy or train for a sport.

The Benefits of Exercise

I could go on and on about all the things exercise can do for you, both physically and mentally. The great thing about it is that you don't need much to get the benefits. Even just a few minutes a day can improve your health, well-being and help you:

- Lose weight
- Reduce stress
- Relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer
- Boost your mood
- Give you more energy
- Help you sleep better
- Increase bone density
- Strengthen the heart and lungs
- Improve your quality of life

Motivating Yourself to Exercise

While it's important to know basic exercise guidelines and principles covered on the next few pages, I think the most important step in starting an exercise routine is exploring the idea of motivation. Without that, all the advice in the world won't do you any good.

It's important to remember that motivation doesn't just happen. It's something you make happen each and every day. If you have multiple reasons to exercise, you'll always have something to get you moving, even when motivation is short. The hardest part of exercise is getting started...if you can get that far, you've won half the battle. Some ideas:

- Remind yourself of your weight loss goals
- Think of a future event to get ready for (a wedding, a vacation, etc.)
- Consider how much energy you'll have to get more things done
- Imagine how relaxed you'll feel after a workout
- Think of your exercise time as the only time you may get to yourself all day
- Remind yourself how good you'll feel by following through
- Promise yourself a reward for completing your workout
- Think of all the diseases and illnesses your workout could protect you from
- Remind yourself that this workout is necessary to reach your goal

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 Guidelines

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 help 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:

- For health benefits, do moderately intense cardio 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, OR
- Vigorous cardio 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week
- 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. Keep in mind that you can also split your workouts throughout the day and get the same results.

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:

- Choose 8-10 exercises, targeting the major muscle groups (lower body, chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps and abs)
- For beginners, do one set of 8-16 reps of each exercise to fatigue. More advanced exercisers can do 2-3 sets.
- Train each muscle group 2-3 non-consecutive days a week
- 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:

- Stretch your muscles when they're warm (after your warm up or, even better, after your workout)
- Do static stretches with a focus on tight areas such as the hamstrings and lower back
- Stretch a minimum of 2-3 days a week...even better would be every day
- Stretch within your range of motion. Stretching shouldn't hurt.
- 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.

The Basic Principles of Exercise

There are some basic principles that govern the world of exercise, and knowing them can help you set up and manipulate different components of your workout.

The F.I.T.T. Principle

FITT is an easy way to remember the exercise variables you can manipulate to avoid boredom and to keep your body challenged:

- **Frequency** - how often you exercise
- **Intensity** - how hard you exercise
- **Time** - how long you exercise
- **Type** - the type of exercise you're doing (e.g., running, walking, etc.)

When you work out at sufficient intensity, time and frequency, your body will improve (also called the **Training Effect**) and you'll start to see changes in your weight, body fat percentage, cardio endurance and strength. When your body adjusts to your current FITT levels, it's time to manipulate one or more of them. For example, if you've been walking 3 times a week for 20 minutes and you've stopped seeing improvement, you could change your program by implementing one or more of the following ideas:

- **Frequency** - Add one more day of walking
- **Intensity** - Add short bursts of jogging, speed walking or hill training
- **Time** - Add 10-15 minutes to your usual workout time
- **Type** - Do a different activity such as cycling, swimming or aerobics

Changing any of these variables every 4 to 6 weeks can help you keep that training effect going.

Progressive Resistance (the Overload Principle)

In order to improve your strength, endurance and fitness, you have to progressively increase the frequency, intensity and time of your workouts. A simple way to stimulate your body is to try different activities. If you normally walk on the treadmill, try riding the bike which will use different muscles and allow you to burn more calories. If you've been doing biceps curls with dumbbells, change to a barbell.

Specificity

This principle is just how it sounds...how you exercise should be specific to your goals. If you're trying to improve your racing times, you should focus on speed workouts. If your main goal is simply health, fitness and weight loss, you should focus on total body strength, cardio and a healthy diet. Make sure your training matches your goals.

Rest and Recovery

While we often focus on getting in as much exercise as possible, rest and recovery is also essential for reaching your weight loss and fitness goals. While you can often do cardio every day (though you may want to rest after very intense workouts), you should have at least a day of rest between strength training workouts. Make sure you don't work the same muscles two days in a row to give your body the time it needs to rest and recover.

Exercise is Good for Your Weight and Your Health

Exercise isn't a Way of Life Anymore

Exercise seems to not come naturally today; we just don't move much anymore. We drive cars and take elevators to offices where we sit in front of a computer for hour upon hour. Then, we come home and sit in front of a computer for hour upon hour, or we plant ourselves on the sofa for a full night's worth of TiVo. Who would pass that up to exercise?

We must not do much better on the weekends, either. It seems one out of every four Americans gets precious little physical activity during her spare time. An American Medical Association study showed that nearly 25% of us engage in absolutely no physical activity during our leisure time; almost half of the 10,000 adults studied said they do not exercise regularly.

Why We Should Exercise

These are surprising statistics considering the well-known and significant health benefits of exercise. The risk of developing diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, and many other health problems is lessened with regular physical activity. Some conditions, such as hypertension and type-2 diabetes, have a direct link to a sedentary lifestyle.

Regular exercise also brings more immediate benefits to nearly every aspect of your life. It improves resistance to infections, joint flexibility, emotional well-being, energy and stress levels, and digestion. With continued, regular exercise, you will find that you will move easier, feel stronger, have better posture, and experience less chronic pain (if any at all).

Exercise: The Missing Piece of the Weight Loss Puzzle

Regular physical activity is an absolute necessity when it comes to long-term weight loss success.

Dieting can cause muscle mass to be lost, while exercise increases it. Exercise and healthy eating will help you lose more weight than dieting alone since muscle burns more calories than fat. Because exercise speeds up your metabolism, you can cut fewer calories from your diet and still lose weight with regular moderate exercise.

Exercise: Just Do It!

When you're starting out, it's easy to get hung up on whether you're exercising long enough or hard enough. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* showed that the duration or intensity of exercise isn't as important as you might think.

In a 12-month study, 184 overweight, sedentary women were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 exercise programs in addition to caloric restriction. In the end, the weight loss seen in the subjects was the same among *all groups*, regardless of the intensity or duration of their exercise regime.

The bottom line? What is most important is to simply add exercise to your diet. (You can always work on upping intensity and the length of your workouts down the road.)

Exercise: Balance and Beginning

Exercise and Eating: Balancing it All Out

The key is finding a healthy way of eating that you can live with and that will provide slow and steady weight loss, as opposed to a restrictive diet that brings faster results. You will then find it easier to add exercise to your routine because your body will be receiving the fuel it needs in order to work out.

The good news is just starting out with a slight increase in activity -- like walking the dog or a session of gardening -- can go a long way. It will bring physical and emotional benefits and can help you get in the habit of being more active.

Eventually, you can begin setting a daily goal for yourself such as 10 minutes of walking. Those 10 minutes can become three 10-minute sessions a day; in time you will be able to work up to 30 consecutive minutes of exercise.

Before You Begin to Exercise

The Surgeon General recommends that women over 50, men over 40, and those who have been inactive for an extended period time see a doctor before beginning to exercise.

Many health conditions can directly affect your ability to exercise. High blood pressure, for example, is quite a common issue for those carrying extra weight. It is important to get your blood pressure in check before beginning an exercise regimen. (It should be lower than 140/80 before you begin working out.)

There are also special exercise guidelines for people with certain health conditions. For instance, if you have coronary heart disease, you should avoid activity in heat, humidity, or high altitudes.

It's crucial to get your doctor's approval and advice about beginning to exercise. Working out a few times only to be completely sidelined by a worsening health problem would do you more harm than good.

Can Exercise Really Be Fun?

How much physical activity do you get each week? Every one of us needs at least 30 minutes daily of exercise just to maintain our current weight. Those of us who wish to lose a few pounds may need as much as 45 to 60 minutes of daily exercise to achieve the desired results.

How can you make sure you are getting an adequate amount of physical activity? Think of some activities that you enjoy. For example, do you like:

- Dancing? It could be either formal dancing with a dance group, or just dancing around your own house. The point is that you are moving and enjoying what you're doing!
- How about rollerblading or bicycling? How about swimming? If the weather is right or if an indoor pool is available, swimming is a wonderful no-impact aerobic activity that can both relax you and burn off some calories.
- Maybe there's a sport that you've always loved to play? Do you like to play football? Or basketball? Perhaps the All-American pastime of baseball is your favorite sport. Whether you choose one favorite sport or all of them, gather up some of your neighbors and friends for some old-fashioned neighborhood ballgames next weekend and get the whole neighborhood involved in your quest for improved fitness!

Sometimes being physically active with another person or a group such as on a sports team is more fun. This way you not only get the benefit of physical fitness but you have someone to cheer you on and help you stay committed when you don't quite feel like being active.

In many school districts the high school stadium has a track around the football field (usually a quarter-mile long). These tracks are a great place to walk, jog, or run with a friend. A city park is often a wonderful spot to take a leisurely stroll.

If you really want to go all out with your fitness goals, join a local gym or recreation center. Hiring a personal trainer is a great way to get your fitness plans started and make sure you are getting the maximum benefit from your workout.

Lastly, if you are one of those people who think you simply do not have time to work out. Consider making just a few small changes to your daily routine to increase your level of physical activity.

- Use stairs whenever possible.
- Park your car as far from where you are going as possible
- If you ride public transportation, get off one stop early and walk the remaining distance.
- When you are shopping, walk the entire mall or shopping center.

Why Should You Exercise?

Studies have shown that regular exercise significantly increases life expectancy and improves overall health. Regular physical activity reduces the risk of cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis. It can reduce or improve symptoms of menopause, PMS, diabetes, as well as numerous other conditions. An improved self-image and increased energy level are frequent added benefits of exercise.

Regular exercise is also helpful in the prevention of one of the most common reasons for doctor's office visits-- lower back pain. Special exercises for those with back pain are many times beneficial in reducing and/or eliminating lower back pain.

However, safe and injury-free workouts require certain precautions be taken before beginning a new exercise program including seeing your physician first, and for women fifty and over having an exercise stress test to check for any underlying heart problems.

Taking it slow and easy...

Walking offers the easiest, least expensive way to work out for most people. Research shows that people who go from a sedentary lifestyle to one which includes moderate amounts of physical activity derive the most health benefits from exercise.

It's important to start out slowly if you have been inactive for a long period of time. The speed and length of your walk should match your level of fitness. It may be necessary for you to start with just 10 or 15 minutes and increase your walking as you feel able.

A good way to measure whether you are working too hard is if you are unable to carry on a conversation-- if you can't talk-- slow down your walk! A healthy, injury-free walk is one in which you can easily continue talking while you walk.

Back and Neck Stretch

Stretching the back, neck and abdominal muscles before exercise can prevent sprained backs and necks.

Foot Stretching

Foot pain can be prevented by gently stretching the Achilles tendon. Pull your foot backward and hold for 10 seconds, repeat 10 times. Properly fitted and appropriate foot ware is also important in preventing foot injury.

Stretching Muscles

Gently stretch all major muscles prior to a workout to prevent muscle strains and pulls. Strengthen the muscles on the front of your thighs by contracting and relaxing the muscle with your knee straight. Contract to the count of ten and relax- repeat 10 times on each leg.

Shin Stretching

Shin injury can be prevented with a slow warm-up before and stretching following each workout. Proper arch support is also important as is a soft workout surface-- grass, instead of asphalt.

Shoulder Stretch

After-work out shoulder pain is prevented by standing straight and rolling the shoulders backward in a circular motion, also stand and hold the back of a chair while bending at the waist so that your back is parallel to the floor-- make 25 circles with your free arm and repeat on other side.

Elbow Stretch

Forearm strength can be built up by doing reverse curls with light weights or squeezing a rubber ball.

Eating your way to injury prevention...

Proper nutrition for those who participate in endurance sports such as running, jogging, and bicycling includes consuming large amounts of carbohydrates before an event or work out session. Studies have shown that a depleted store of muscle glycogen results in fatigue, which results in injury.

A diet rich in carbohydrates (60 to 70 percent of daily calorie intake), increases the amount of glycogen stored in the muscles, however the carbohydrates must be consumed shortly before a workout in order to be beneficial. It is also a good idea to consume carbohydrates soon after a heavy work out.

What if I already have osteoporosis or another bone disorder?

Even people with bone and joint conditions can safely participate in a balanced program of moderate physical activity. Swimming is probably the best overall activity for those who are afflicted by diseases of the bones and joints-- no stress is put on the joints and the water offers exceptional, non-stressful resistance.

But I don't have time to exercise...

Your daily one hour can be broken up into segments of time-- perhaps, one hour of brisk walking in the morning and one hour of gardening or another physical activity in the evening. Keeping a daily activity record might help you to remember your daily workout.

Remember, any amount of exercise is better than none at all and once you establish an exercise routine, you will probably find yourself exercising beyond the minimum one hour, three to five times a week required for good health.

Mixing it Up - Exercise Variety Keeps Your Body Going Strong

Feel like you're stuck on the same old treadmill?

You may be, if your regular exercise routine has become dull, dull, dull lately. And that boredom can undermine your best intentions. When physical activity becomes ho-hum, it's easy to find excuses for not doing it.

To cure the blahs, mix up your routine. Summer is a great time to add new physical activities, outdoors or inside, to boost your interest and keep your exercise engine going. You might choose to lap swim at the local pool as part of your weekly routine, or start each morning of your vacation with a tandem bike ride. Even a power walk through an outlet mall can provide a different twist on your usual walking circuit.

If you've been exercising alone for months, the American Council on Exercise suggests you take a class (tennis, step aerobics) or join a club (cycling, ballroom dancing).

Changing activity not only helps some people enjoy exercise more, it may encourage them to keep exercising while others are still doing the same-old-same-old drop out. So, stop yawning, and start kick-boxing?

The Value of Exercise Variety

Mixing up your routine does more than just beat boredom. There are some physiological benefits as well as psychological benefits of having variety in your exercise program.

When you do the same type of exercise exclusively, your body builds certain specific strengths. By switching your activity mode, you broaden your physical abilities.

Doing a different activity stresses the body in a new and novel way. That's why, after trying a new physical movement, you sometimes feel sore in places where you had forgotten you had muscles.

Stress on the body is a good thing. We don't want it to be an excessive overload, but...we need to push it beyond what it normally does in order for it to improve.

Exercise variety may help reduce dementia risk as well. A 2005 study published by researchers at The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the University of Pittsburgh found that dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, occurred less frequently in people aged 65 or older who participated in more physical activities, from gardening to jogging to golfing.

Take a Hike... or Bike

If you usually walk for exercise, taking up hiking is just, well, a step beyond. Hiking over natural terrain burns more calories than brisk walking (193 to 129 calories per 30 minutes for a 135-lb. woman⁴) and it's a lot more fun. What's more, when you go hiking on a scenic trail, you'll usually spend more time at it than when you walk around a boring track.

To begin, the American Hiking Society suggests you start with short distances and then gradually advance to two- or three-mile hikes. When you're comfortable with those lengths, try a longer weekend day hike that might include more challenging trails. For day hikes, be sure to take water, healthy snacks, a map and a compass.

It's important to pick a trail that's suitable for your hiking level. You'll find information on hiking trails, gear and clubs at the American Hiking Society.

Bike riding can be an all-weather change to your exercise routine. When it's dry out, cycle in a local park, along specially marked bike lanes, or with a cycling club. In rain or cold, use a stationary bike indoors. You might enjoy joining a stationary bike or spinning class, in which a leader takes riders through a routine.

Cycling is a non-weight-bearing exercise, so it's easier on your joints. To avoid other injuries, make sure you're on a bike that's sized and fitted correctly for you. It's best to get help with this from a knowledgeable person (bike shop staff or cycling club members can help). There should be a little bend in your knee when the pedal is in the down position. Always wear a helmet when biking.

Exercise in Water - Exercise on Water

Summer's a great time to mix up your routine by adding water activities. Take the plunge and you may discover some muscle groups you've been neglecting. "Swimming is a different kind of exercise than walking. It primarily works the upper extremities, whereas walking is lower extremities. If you like keeping track of your distance, swim laps in a pool. Swimming just for fun--in a pool, lake or ocean--also adds exercise benefits.

Water provides natural resistance, but more gently, since impact is lessened by buoyancy. That's part of the reason that water aerobics classes have become so popular, especially with women who may be overweight. In deep water run training you wear a buoyancy vest or belt and use running motions while the buoyancy device holds you up in deep water. It's non-impact, because you're not touching the bottom of the pool.

Canoeing, kayaking and rowing give you a work-out on top of the water. Open water kayaking is done on a lake (so there's no river current to help you along). It builds core muscle strength in your arms, torso and legs.

Many river locations offer canoe, kayak and even rowboat rentals in hourly increments, so you can try one for as lengthy (or brief) a time as seems comfortable to you. "Its good exercise," Thompson says. "If you want to introduce variety, as a single-day substitute, instead of going for a walk, go for a paddle."

What Exercise Variety Can Do for You

Activity	Calories used per 30 mins.*	Benefits
Biking (12-14 mph)	258	strengthens lower body; non-impact**; aerobic
Canoeing	225	strengthens upper body; non-impact
Dancing	145	strengthens lower body; aerobic
Gardening	161	strengthens whole body
Hiking	193	strengthens lower body; aerobic
Jogging	225	strengthens lower body; aerobic
Kayaking	161	strengthens whole body; non-impact
Swimming (laps)	258	strengthens upper body; non-impact; aerobic
Tennis	225	strengthens whole body
Walking (4 mph)	129	strengthens lower body; aerobic

] *Calorie expenditure is for a 135-lb. woman

Do You Need a Heart Rate Monitor for Your Workout?

If you want to get more exact with your precision cardio, you can use a heart rate monitor in addition to evaluating your rate of perceived exertion. The heart rate monitor will tell you exactly what your heart rate is as you're exercising, which means you can then increase or decrease your intensity to get a precise workout. Monitors are available at sporting goods stores and some department stores.

First, you'll need to figure out the heart rate range that you should be working at. The best way to do this is to get tested by an exercise physiologist. If you don't want to do that, you can get a pretty good estimate by calculating your maximum heart rate and then calculating certain percentages of this rate to work at for your warm up and cool down, your moderate pace, and your interval pace. This will be a good starting point, though keep in mind that this calculation is based on the "average" person -- something that none of us is!

To estimate your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 226. (Men would subtract their age from 220.)

$226 - \text{your age} = \text{age-adjusted maximum heart rate}$

Now, take your age-adjusted maximum heart rate and calculate the following percentages for the various parts of your workout.

- 60 percent for your warm up and cool down
- 65 to 75 percent for your moderate pace
- 75 to 85 percent for your vigorous or interval pace

For instance, a 40-year-old woman's estimated maximum heart rate is 186 ($226 - 40 = 186$).

- 60 percent of her max = 112
- 65 percent of her max = 121
- 75 percent of her max = 140
- 85 percent of her max = 158

Keep in mind, however, that this calculation can be off by as much as 15 beats, so use the rate of perceived exertion as well. Also take into account that your heart rate can vary depending on which activity you choose. Different activities use different skills and muscle groups, so an experienced swimmer will have a lower heart rate swimming than she does when running. Keep that in mind as you vary your cardio choices. Also, some exercises that you do while sitting down, like riding a recumbent bicycle, won't get your heart rate as high as those that you do while standing, such as walking hills outside. So use your heart rate monitor and evaluate your rate of perceived exertion, but also learn to listen to your body.

Put Cardio Exercises in Your Fitness Plan

You need cardio exercises in your fitness program. Why? Because cardio exercises strengthen your heart and lungs. Cardio: short for cardiopulmonary -- as in heart and lungs, as in vital organs, as in no good health and fitness without strong ones. Weight loss, stress reduction, and more energy are also benefits of cardio workouts.

What are Cardio Exercises?

Cardio exercises elevate your heart rate and keep it elevated for a continuous period of time. Aerobic exercise is another name for cardio. How high your heart rate needs to be in order to make an exercise cardio depends on your level of fitness. There are target heart rate calculators that will help you figure out what your maximum heart rate is and what percent of that you want your heart beats per minute to be for cardio benefit. As for how long to exercise for, the American College of Sports Medicine suggests 20 minutes of vigorous cardio 3 days a week, or 30 minutes of moderate cardio 5 days a week.

Choosing Cardio Exercises

To get benefit from cardio exercise, you need to be consistent about it. Therefore, it is important that you choose a type of cardio exercise that you like, that is convenient enough that you will do it regularly, and is safe for your body. A poll of people who do Pilates as the moderate strength training part of their fitness program revealed that their top cardio choices were:

- **Walking** - Walking is a wonderful choice because it is usually very safe for the body. The only drawback to choosing walking as a cardio exercise is that you have to stay focused to keep your heart rate up. Most people don't walk fast enough.
- **Running** - Unlike walking, with running you probably won't have trouble keeping your heart rate high enough. However, a drawback to running is that it is high-impact exercise, making it harder on the joints. For those interested in weight loss, running is one of the best calorie-burning exercises.
- **Bicycling** - You can't just toddle around on your bike and call it cardio, but it's not hard to turn bike riding into cardio exercise. And bicycling is also low-impact, which is good. Bicycling for cardio does require a good bike, and willingness to go some distance, but what a nice way to enjoy your cardio.

Other popular cardio exercises are swimming, elliptical training, and step aerobics. If you look at these lists and groan with the idea that cardio is boring, know that you can mix up your cardio workouts. That might affect your technique or progress in a certain form, but as long as your heart rate is in your target zone, and you get the time in, it counts. You can also go for less conventional cardio exercise, like dancing. So have fun.

Cardio and Weight Loss

Cardio exercise burns a lot of calories, so adding cardio to your workout routine will help you lose weight -- more or less depending on the intensity of the activity you choose. If you don't want to lose weight, you might have to eat more calories than you are used to in order to maintain your weight.

Best Fitness Plan: Strength Training with Cardio

Keep in mind that while cardio exercise is good for you, to be truly fit you need to do *both* cardio and strength training. The health benefits of strength training include stronger bones and muscles, better posture, and better balance. And, of course, appearance is a valid motivating factor for many. For that, the core strength and muscle tone that comes with strength training is a must.

Weight training is obviously strength training, but Pilates is also in the strength training category. Considered moderate strength training, Pilates has many benefits and is entirely adequate for a healthy strength training and cardio fitness plan.

Get In Shape with Pilates

To get in shape with Pilates is to embark on an amazing journey of not just physical fitness, but as Joseph Pilates said, *a complete coordination of body, mind, and spirit*.

Everyone likes to talk about the flat abs Pilates gives you or the long, lean muscles, even weight loss; and if you commit to Pilates training those are among the benefits you can enjoy. But, as you will see, they are part of a much bigger picture.

What we are after in Pilates is, "a uniformly developed body with a sound mind fully capable of naturally, easily, and satisfactorily performing our many and varied daily tasks with spontaneous zest and pleasure." (Joseph Pilates).

That's what it means to get in shape with Pilates!

I bet you are ready to get started already. But first, there are a few things about Pilates that make it a uniquely effective system. If you understand these things about the Pilates approach to exercise you will get in shape much faster, and in a more integrated and life enhancing way:

Pilates is for Every Body

Getting in shape with Pilates is a path anyone can embark on, from the couch potato to the athlete. Pilates exercises can be modified to meet the needs of the individual.

The Pilates Principles

In order for the Pilates method to work its magic, the exercises should be done with certain principles in mind. The Pilates principles are: centering, concentration, control, precision, breath, and flow. These ideas are integral to achieving the dramatic results that Pilates is known for. Results like a body that is strong, flexible, and able to gracefully accommodate the movement demands of your life. They are also the keys to the body/mind/spirit integrative aspects of the work.

Pilates is Core

Pilates exercise starts with the core of your body -- with full breaths refreshing your cells; with your heart and circulatory system pumping fresh blood into your tissues; and with training the deep muscles of your abdomen, back and pelvis (your Pilates powerhouse) to support your spine, and provide stability in your pelvis and shoulders as you move. When we strengthen and stabilize the core, we can safely move out from center to increase the flexibility of our spine, stretch our muscles, and improve the range of motion in our joints.

Increasing Your Fitness Level

If you are consistent in your Pilates training your fitness level will continue to improve. You will, however, need to continue to challenge yourself - as is true with any fitness method. As you progress, will find that the pace of a workout picks up as do the strength and stability challenges. It is also important to evaluate your Pilates training periodically and make sure you are really getting the results you deserve.

Adding Pilates Equipment

Once you get your foundation in the Pilates mat work, you can add challenge, and variety, with Pilates equipment. There is small equipment that can use at home and you can take classes at a studio for work on the larger equipment like the reformer and Pilates chair.

Scheduling Pilates

To get in shape with Pilates, it is recommended that you schedule Pilates four times per week, building the duration of a session up from as little as 10 minutes to 45 minutes at home or an hour at class. It is a good idea to take Pilates classes if you can. A combination of classes and Pilates at home seems to be optimal.

Many people find Pilates to be an entirely satisfying fitness regimen. In traditional exercise terms, Pilates is moderate strength and flexibility training. If you want to round out your fitness program with a more cardiovascular workout, you might want to cross train with aerobic exercises.

Get in Shape with Yoga

You've probably heard that yoga is great for reducing stress, increasing flexibility, and improving your overall health. But can yoga help you get in shape? Most definitely.

Getting in shape means losing weight, building muscle definition and strength, and feeling fitter and healthier. Any kind of yoga, when practiced regularly, will improve your strength, flexibility, and muscle tone, but losing weight is a little trickier, since it also requires more cardio and healthier eating. See my full guide to yoga and weight loss for more info.

If you have never done yoga before and want to know how to start, the best thing to do is sign up for a series of beginners' classes at a yoga studio near you (ask your co-workers, relatives, and Facebook friends to recommend a good studio). This way you'll get a solid introduction to beginners' yoga poses. From there, it's great to keep going to classes as often as you can.

While yoga is a great practice that is accessible to all (including seniors and the overweight), it is not a quick fix. It takes time and commitment to lengthen and strengthen your muscles. As you study yoga, you'll be getting in shape, but that may come to seem like a side benefit to discovering a practice that allows for limitless development and personal growth.

Walking and Exercise Shape-up Workouts

Do you want to use walking to build your aerobic fitness, endurance, and strength? If walking is your favorite exercise activity, it can be the base to build on for a more complete shape-up program.

Cardiovascular and Aerobic Conditioning

Walking by itself is cardiovascular exercise. Walkers can improve their aerobic conditioning by building their speed and following a program of a variety of interval, heart-rate guided, and endurance workouts. Moderate to vigorous intensity cardio workouts burn calories and fat while reducing health risks. Our free Walk of Life 10-Week Program uses the walking workouts and exercises detailed below.

Walking Shape-up Program

Equipment suggested: exercise ball, dumbbells, and resistance bands.

You can mix up this schedule, but the goal is to have a challenging day followed by an easier recovery day, and to work different muscle groups on different days.

Monday: Warm-up walking for 5-15 minutes. Workouts for core, upper body, and quads.

Tuesday: Speed Building Walking Workout: Interval walking to help build speed. Perform a stretching routine after warm-up or as a separate activity.

Wednesday: Recovery walk: an easy health walk of 30-60 minutes. Core, upper body, and quads workout.

Thursday: Threshold Walking Workout: This is a walk at nearly top speed sustained for 50 minutes, or a walk with high speed for eight minutes, with a slow down for two minutes, repeated 3-4 times. It builds aerobic fitness.

Friday: Recovery walk: an easy health walk of 30-60 minutes. Core and upper body workout.

Saturday: Cross training such as bicycling which works the opposing leg muscles.

Sunday: Distance Walking Workout.

Core Strength

Walking relies on the core and abdominal muscles for good posture, which is essential for speed and walking form. But walking by itself won't work the core; this must be done as a separate workout activity.

Ab and Core Workouts

Opposing Leg Muscles

Walking works the hamstrings, glutes, and shin muscles. But it does little for the quadriceps, the big muscles at the front of the thighs which are important for knee health. For complete lower body shape-ups, walkers need to add cross training activities that work the quads, such as bicycling, step-ups, and squats.

Upper Body

Walking doesn't work the upper body. Walkers need to add an upper body workout as a separate workout. It is unwise to carry hand weights to try to do an upper body workout while walking. It is more effective to do this while standing still.

Flexibility and Balance

Walking outdoors on a variety of surfaces helps keep the body's sense of balance in tune. Stretching and dynamic flexibility exercises can be added to a walking workout after a five minute warm-up at an easy walking pace. But further flexibility and balance exercises can be added to a workout that includes upper body, core, and opposing leg muscle exercises. Performing a core and upper body exercises on an exercise ball or fitness disk can add balance training to those workouts.

Diet

Shape-up your eating as well as your exercise. Aim to increase your fresh vegetables and fruits and balance proteins, carbohydrates and fats. If you want to lose fat and gain lean muscle, keeping a food diary can help you spot empty calories. Use Calorie Count to track your food and activity with an online food and exercise diary. Calorie Count grades your food choices and makes healthier suggestions.

A Learn to Run Guide for Couch Potatoes

Have you decided that now is the time you want to get in shape? A beginner running program is a great way to get in shape and establish a regular exercise routine. An extra bonus, of course, is that hopefully you'll lose weight along the way.

If you've never run before, it's helpful to do a little research before you throw on a pair of running shoes and run out the door (or hop on the treadmill).

Once you've been cleared by your doctor for starting a running program (a good idea for anyone who has been sedentary for more than a year or has a medical condition), you want to learn some of the basic running techniques. Knowing the proper running form and technique will make running (or run/walking) easier, so you'll be able to consistently build up the time and distance that you're running.

Using Weights to Get Fit and Shape Up

Getting in shape means to get fit. That's the easy part -- to understand the basic concept. Yet if we dig a little deeper, all sorts of questions arise about *how* we will approach this goal -- and how we can know when we have achieved it. General fitness is the main consideration here, although the principles apply to special fitness goals for sport and other endeavors as well.

How Do I Know I'm Not in Shape?

This seems like a basic question to start out with. Even though "in shape" does not necessarily mean having a body like Brad Pitt or Madonna, the first thing to note is your **weight**. If you know you're overweight, chances are you will be unfit as well.

There will be exceptions to this general rule as it is possible to be "fat and fit" if you have a tendency to carry excess body fat, even after working out a lot. The natural apple and pear shapes can look a little bulky and still be very fit.

The Four Pillars of Fitness

We all have an image of what it means to be fit. For many, a lean body with rippling abs and muscle will just about do it. But to be really fit, you need to have a few more things going for you.

1. Aerobic or heart and lung fitness
2. Strength and power
3. Speed
4. Flexibility

You can argue about how much any one of those means to you, but you need to at least include the first two in a real fitness program. If you concentrate on the first two, you will develop the second two to some extent, as well as increasing muscle at the expense of fat. Targeted training can improve your special needs further.

Does that mean a marathoner or Tour de France cyclist is not really fit? It makes for a good argument, but some would say their fitness is a little unbalanced, being highly slanted toward number one -- aerobic fitness -- even though they have their own applications of strength and power.

The best approach, if you have time and inclination, is the "fitness triad." This involves aerobic running for up to 40 minutes several days a week, a weights program (home or gym) a few days a week, and several sessions of intervals -- high-intensity "sprints" or similar at the park or at the gym on treadmill, bike, stepper or other machines to suit. That program covers a lot of bases and it builds rugged all-round, superior fitness.

How Weight Training Can Help You Get In Shape

The days of big men pushing even bigger weights over their heads and banging them back down again has not left us, but there sure has been a lot of other stuff added to weight training as a fitness discipline. At any busy gym, you are likely to see both genders from ages 12 to 80 at various times. The running boom of the eighties and nineties created a lot of very fit but skinny people. This is changing, and the baby boomers are seeing that holding onto muscle into their elder years has a lot of advantages.

That's where circuit training with weights has an important role to play. This type of circuit training will build strength and power, as well as heart and lung fitness. You will also earn some speed and flexibility along with it.

What Is Circuit Training?

Circuit training is an exercise workout where you move from one exercise to another around a "circuit," the idea being that as you complete the last exercise you start again at the beginning. The variety is just about endless because you can do this with many different types of activity and in many places -- at home, the gym, the sports field or even the local park.

Circuit training builds aerobic fitness because you are moving more or less constantly, and that movement is the key to heart and lung fitness. On the other hand, when you work out in a gym with weights, traditionally you stand still and do your exercises. You can do many sets and repetitions to get the heart rate up, but movement in the form of rapid whole-body movement is what gets you aerobically fit. Why not combine both?

Circuit Training with Weights

In circuit training with weights, you move rapidly from one exercise station to another. The advantage of the weights circuit is that you build aerobic fitness and muscle and power in the same session. Plus, this sort of training -- done right -- generally expends more energy than a standard weight training session and this is great for losing weight.

How to Know When You're Fit

Although this subject needs another complete article to do it justice, here are a few brief guides.

- **Body fat percentage:** Try to get an accurate measurement from a professional trainer or clinic. Aim to be fewer than 12% for men and fewer than 20% for women, a little more as you age. This is not as tough as it could be. For example, elite sports people are often under 8% and 15% respectively.
- **Aerobic fitness heart rate recovery:** Do this test if you have a reasonable level of fitness. Get a doctor's opinion if you're not sure. You may need a heart rate monitor to do the test successfully, but you can try it without. Warm up, and then build up gradually to your maximum heart rate. You can estimate this by subtracting your age from 220. Remember that this is only an estimate. Try to hold maximum effort for about 20 seconds. Record your maximum heart rate. Stop, but don't rest completely -- keep walking or cycling very easily for one minute. After one minute, take your pulse again. Subtract your heart rate after one minute from your maximum heart rate. The acceptable levels of fitness will be in those with a heart rate recovery of greater than 30 beats per minute.
- **Strength** norms vary widely across gender, age, weight and training.

Knowing those three measures should give you an idea of your progress in getting in shape.

Get in Shape with Exercise

Getting in shape is a common goal, but what exactly does it mean and how do you do it? Getting in shape is an individual experience, depending on your age, preferences, lifestyle and other factors. A mom with four kids may have very different goals from a mountain climber, for example. But, at its heart, getting in shape simply means working your body more than you are right now. Any time you do more than what you're used to, your body grows stronger, getting you in better shape than you were before.

If your goal is to get in shape, you'll need a few basics: Cardio to burn calories and help your heart and lungs work more efficiently, Strength training to build lean muscle tissue while strengthening your bones, muscles and joints, flexibility exercises to improve your range of motion, and rest so your body can recover and grow stronger.

Get in Shape with Cardio Exercise

Cardio exercise includes any rhythmic activity that gets you into your target heart rate zone. The options are endless, including walking, running, aerobics, cycling, swimming and dancing. You can even use daily chores like raking leaves or shoveling snow, if you can keep the movement consistent enough to raise your heart rate. How to get started:

1. Choose any cardio activity that's accessible and enjoyable.
2. Schedule your cardio workouts for at least 3 days a week.
3. Begin your workout with a comfortable 5-10 minute warm up to gradually increase your heart rate.
4. Increase your intensity by going faster, adding hills, resistance or incline (or a combination) until you're just out of your comfort zone (Level 5 or 6 on the Perceived Exertion Scale).
5. Maintain that pace for 15-30 minutes or for as long as you can, adjusting your intensity as needed to stay at Level 5 or 6.
6. End your workout with a cool down and stretch.
7. Each week, increase your workout time by a few minutes until you can work continuously for 30 minutes a session.
8. Progress by adding more workout days, trying new activities and/or adding more intensity.

Sample Cardio Schedule

- **Monday:** 20-Minute Basic Cardio and Total Stretch
- **Wednesday:** 10-15 Minute Beginner Walking or Cycling and Total Stretch
- **Friday:** 20-Minute Basic Cardio and Total Stretch

Get in Shape with Strength Training

The other part of your workout program is strength training with a focus on working all the major muscle groups. How to get started:

1. Choose about 8-10 exercises, targeting the major muscle groups, including the lower body, chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps and abs.
2. If you're a beginner, do 1 set of 15 reps for each exercise. Choose weights that allow you to complete 15 reps - the last rep should be hard, but not impossible.
3. Do your strength workout 2-3 times a week with at least one day of rest in between.
4. Progress each week by adding a set (until you're up to a total of 3 sets per exercise), using heavier weights or trying new exercises.

Sample Strength Training Workout

- Ball Squats
- Lunges
- Side Step Squats
- Hip Lifts on the Ball
- Modified Pushups
- Chest Flies
- One-Arm Row
- Bent-Arm Lateral Raises
- Bicep Curls
- Tricep Extensions
- Crunches on the Ball
- Bird Dog

Get in Shape with Rest and Recovery

It may surprise you, but a big part of getting in shape is giving your body rest. While you can often do cardio on consecutive days, your muscles need more recovery time from lifting weights. Give yourself at least a day of rest between strength workouts and schedule regular rest days whenever you feel tired, sore or your performance is suffering.

Putting It All Together

Sample Workout Schedule for Getting In Shape

Monday: 20-Minute Basic Cardio Total Stretch	Tuesday: Total Body Strength
Wednesday: Rest	Thursday: Walking or Cycling Total Stretch
Friday: Total Body Strength	Saturday: 20-Minute Basic Cardio Total Stretch

Basic Total Body Strength

The basic total body workout targets all the muscles in the body, including the hips, glutes, thighs, chest, back, shoulders, arms and abs. This workout is short and simple -- a great way for beginners to get started with strength training.

Precautions

See your doctor before trying this workout if you have any injuries, illnesses or other conditions.

Equipment Needed

Various weighted dumbbells, an exercise ball, and a mat.

How To

- Begin with a 5- to 10-minute warm-up of light cardio (walking in place, etc.)
- Perform 1 set of each exercise (12 repetitions) using moderate weights.
- To progress, add 1 to 2 reps each week (up to 16 reps); add sets and/or increase weight each week by about 5 to 10%.

Do this work out 1 to 3 non-consecutive days a week, taking at least one day of rest between workouts. For best weight loss results, combine this workout with regular cardio and a healthy, low-calorie diet.

Ball Squats



Place a ball on the wall behind you and lean against it, keeping feet about shoulder-width apart. Bend your knees and, keeping weight in the heels, lower into a squat, keeping the knees behind the toes. Repeat for 1 set of 12 reps; hold weights for added intensity, if desired.

Assisted Lunges



Using a chair or rail for balance, stand in split stance with feet about 3 feet apart. Keeping your torso straight, bend your knees and lower body toward the floor without allowing the front knee to bend over the toe (you should see the tip of your shoe). Push through the heel to come back up. Repeat for 12 reps, and then switch sides.

Modified Pushups



Get into pushup position with your hands a bit wider than your shoulders, and your knees on the floor. Keep your back flat. Lower into a pushup until the elbows are at 90-degree angles. Push back up and repeat for 1 set of 12 reps.

Dumbbell Rows



For this back exercise bend at the waist to about 45 degrees, keeping your back flat and holding medium-heavy weights in each hand. Squeeze the back as you bend the elbows, pulling them up toward the torso in a rowing motion. Lower and repeat for 1 set of 12 reps.

Overhead Presses



Sit or stand, abs engaged, and hold weights just over the shoulders, keeping elbows bent like goal posts. Press the weights overhead, without arching the back, concentrating on the shoulders. Lower down until weights are at ear-level, and repeat for 1 set of 12 reps.

Bicep Curls



Stand with your feet hip-width apart, holding medium-light dumbbells in front of your thighs, palms out. Bend your elbows and curl weights towards the shoulders. Lower and repeat for 1 set of 12 reps.

Tricep Extensions



Lie on the floor and hold weights straight up overhead, palms facing in. Bend the elbows and lower the weights down until they're next to the ears. Straighten the arms, squeezing the triceps and repeat for 1 set of 12 reps.

Crunches on the Ball



Lie down with the ball under the mid-upper back, keeping hands crossed or behind the head. Contract your abs to lift shoulders off the ball. Lower and repeat for 1 to 2 sets of 12 to 16 reps.

Back Extensions



Lie on your back and cross your right foot over the left knee. Lift your shoulder blades off the floor and curl the left shoulder toward the right knee, contracting the right side of waist. Lower and repeat on the same side before switching sides.

**CERTIFIED WOMEN'S HEALTH COUNSELOR ONLINE COURSE - SESSION 9
QUESTION & ANSWERS**

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
CITY, STATE, ZIP, PC: _____
PHONE: _____
FAX: _____
E-MAIL: _____

Please be sure to fill out the information above, complete the test and e-mail or mail it back to us at iridology@netzero.net or P.O. Box 485, Weimar, CA, 95736-0485. We will grade your question & answer session and will let you know if we have any questions or concerns. **Please use a separate sheet to do this assignment.**

1. What are the benefits to exercise?
2. When should you check with a doctor about exercise?
3. How can you motivate yourself to exercise?
4. What are cardio exercises and what benefit do they have on the body?
5. What are strength training exercises and what benefit do they have on the body?
6. What are Pilates and why would you want to do them?
7. Why would you want to take a rest day when you are on an exercise program?
8. What does F.I.T.T. mean?
9. What should you eat before and after exercise to maintain muscles and blood sugar?
10. Dieting can cause muscle mass to be lost, while exercise increases it. T/F
11. What is most important is to simply add exercise to your diet. T/F
12. Swimming works the _____.
13. Walking works the _____.
14. Why is stretching important when exercising?
15. What is progressive resistance?
16. Do you exercise? What is your exercise routine? Do you exercise as much as you think you should? If not, what are your goals to change that?
17. Do you have enough energy to exercise? Do you sleep well?