

Personal fitness management

By Harold L. Rainwater
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The way to a healthier lifestyle is through planning, studying and disciplining yourself to change your habits.

Anyone who tells you there are secrets to becoming successful at physical management is wrong. I know, because I spent years looking for those secrets. The way to a healthier lifestyle is through planning, studying and disciplining yourself to change your habits. And although it's not always easy, the rewards far outweigh the sacrifice.

To be successful at managing your personal fitness, you must work through your plan one step at a time, at your own pace. Once you have accomplished one step, go on to the next without backing off and losing momentum. This discipline factor is important in achieving any goal in life, and it certainly pertains to a healthier lifestyle.

Plan + discipline = success

Five steps are required for a successful program of personal fitness management:

* First, establish program goals. Such goals help you to be personally accountable. The key is to set realistic goals that are a reflection of your own personal fitness assessment/evaluation. You can either plan in order to succeed, or not plan, and succeed at failure.

* Second, select specific activities that will help you reach your personal goals. These activities should develop all four components of health-related fitness, and ought to be manageable, accessible, realistic and enjoyable.

* Third, set physiologically appropriate targets for intensity, frequency and duration of exercise that is within a safe, efficient and effective range for you personally. This should be established in conjunction with your physician's approval.

* Fourth, begin the program and make a commitment to maintain it, while trying different strategies to keep your program interesting.

* Finally, record and assess your program. Good records offer a sense of accomplishment and incentive to continue. This record keeping brings full circle the emphasis of holding yourself personally accountable to your goals.

The American Medical Association defines fitness as the general capacity to adapt and respond favorably to physical effort. Physical fitness is usually classified into two categories: health-related fitness and motor-skill-related fitness. A personal fitness management program focuses on health-related fitness, according to Werner W.K. Hoeger in his book *Fitness and Wellness*. There are four basic components of health-related fitness: Cardiovascular endurance. The ability of the heart, lungs and blood vessels to supply oxygen and nutrients to the muscles for sustained exercise.

Muscular strength and endurance. The ability of the muscles to generate force. Flexibility. The capacity of the joint to move freely through a full range of motion. Body composition. The ratio of lean body mass to adipose tissue (fat mass) found in the human body.

Motor skill components of physical fitness such as agility, coordination, reaction time, speed, power and balance are important in achieving success in sports and athletics, but they are not thought to be crucial in the development of better health.(1)

How do you go about setting up an exercise program that includes all of the components of health-related fitness?

The American College of Sports Medicine has recommended a "well rounded" exercise program combining aerobic training, resistance training and flexibility or stretching to maintain a healthy, fit body.(2)

The art of fitness management allows you to create a holistic approach, or total-fitness exercise program, that enhances the likelihood you will achieve your fitness goals. Do what you enjoy. If you do not, you will quit. While some activities may not include all components of health-related physical fitness, they are still superior to starting and then quitting the other activities that may include all the components.

One example of a good fitness program includes 30 minutes of aerobic activity and 30 minutes of weight training. Proper warm-up and stretching for 10 to 20 minutes will improve flexibility and muscular development, and help prevent or reduce injuries. The aerobic program should include a frequency of at least three times per week with an intensity of 60 to 90 percent of maximal heart rate reserve. The resistance training should be at least two times per week with a minimum of eight to 10 exercises that affect the large muscle groups of the body, for one to three sets. Duration depends on the intensity of the activity. Lower-intensity activity should be conducted over a longer period of time. Because "total fitness" is more readily attained in longer-duration programs, lower- to moderate-intensity activity of longer duration is recommended for the non-athletic adult.

Any successful personal fitness program is intended to be used in conjunction with a balanced nutrition program. This plan should be directed at a lifestyle change, which promotes well-being. Important dietary areas include cholesterol, sodium, fat and fiber. Medical research has recommended levels of 300 mg cholesterol, 3,000 mg sodium, 30 mg fiber, and not more than 30 percent fat. Following this approach should lead to an optimal body fat range.

Fat is calories stored as energy reserves for your body. If you consume more calories than your body burns, the excess calories are stored as body fat. Excess body fat frequently results in a significant impairment of health.

When better eating is combined with aerobic and strength training, the body is geared to using food as energy rather than storing it as fat.

Your body's normal structure and function depends on nutrients provided from food. Every cell and every molecule is built from raw materials, making a well-balanced diet extremely important. Without exaggeration, you really are what you eat.

A common-sense approach to eating can be summarized in one sentence: Eat at proper times, eat proper amounts and eat a variety of natural and proper foods. Eat to live; do not live to eat.

Guidelines:

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1. Eat a variety of foods from the basic food groups.
2. Concentrate on fat grams, not just calories.
3. Eat smaller balanced meals throughout the day.
4. Eat your smallest meal at night.
5. Limit snacks.
6. Eat more fiber.
7. Eat less fat, sugar and salt.
8. Drink more water.

These changes will result in weight loss and weight maintenance. By combining dietary changes with weight

training, we burn more calories, thus helping maintain optimal body weight and composition.

Medical research has shown that individuals who adopt a healthy lifestyle have decreased incidence of cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke and diabetes. In addition, regular exercise and proper eating keeps you mentally sharp, allowing you to work more efficiently.

REFERENCES

1. Hoeger, Werner W.K. Fitness and Wellness, Morton Publishing, Englewood, Colo., 1990.
2. Silvester, L.J. Weight Training for Strength and Fitness, Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 1992.