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WOMEN'S FITNESS



What does it mean to be a Fit Woman?

Fitness is a multi-dimensional concept that results in health, vitality, and long life. However it does require some effort. In this report we'll tell you all about Women's Fitness – what it means and how to achieve it safely, without killing yourself with boring exercises or pain.

Fitness helps you feel your best and reduces the risk of heart attack, cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. In your day-to-day life, being fit helps you control your weight, have more energy throughout the day for work or school, and energy left over to enjoy your free time.

Fast Fact

A Harvard study that followed 72,488 nurses for eight years concluded that the more a woman exercises, the lower odds she will suffer a stroke. (Journal of the American Medical Association as cited in "Physically active women reduce risk of stroke: Walking is step in right direction." Harvard University Gazette, June 15, 2000.)

Components of Fitness

There are 4 main components to fitness:

- Cardiovascular endurance
- Muscular strength
- Flexibility
- Nutrition and Weight Control

Within each of these areas you also need to consider safety, so that you don't injure yourself as you achieve your fitness goals. Let's talk about each of the components of fitness individually:

Cardiovascular endurance

Cardiovascular exercise simply means that you're involved in an activity that raises your heart rate to a level where you're breathing hard, but you can still talk.



Here's why cardio is so important:

- It makes your heart strong so that it doesn't have to work as hard to pump blood
- It increases your lung capacity
- It helps reduce risk of heart attack, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes
- It makes you feel good
- It helps you sleep better
- It helps reduce stress

Bottom line: you need cardio if you want to improve your heart health and get your stress to a tolerable level.

These days, there are so many choices, there's no reason you can't find something you enjoy. Walking is great, but a slow stroll won't get you fit – you need to move!

If you like to go outdoors, running, cycling, hiking or walking are all good choices. If you like the gym, you'll have access to stationary bikes, elliptical trainers, treadmills, rowing machines, stairmasters and more. For the home exerciser, the available videos cover everything from Tai Chi to kickboxing.

Just about anything is acceptable as long as it involves a movement that gets your heart rate up and you breathing hard.

Remember:

- There is no 'best' cardio exercise. **Anything** that gets your heart rate up and makes you breathe harder for at least 30 minutes fits the bill.
- It's not what you do, but how hard you work. Any exercise can be challenging if you make it that way, including housework and gardening.
- Do something you enjoy. If you hate gym workouts, don't force yourself onto a treadmill. If you like socializing, consider team sports or a walking club.
- Do something you can see yourself doing at least 3 days a week.
- Be flexible. You don't have to do the same thing all the time--it's boring and will lead to weight loss plateaus as well. Feel free to turn on the radio and dance around the house like a fool.

Muscular Strength

Much has been written about the benefits of cardiovascular training for women. Until recently, however, little attention has been given to strength training, an important component of a balanced women's fitness program.



You do not need to be a body builder to benefit from strength training, and women don't have to worry about "bulking up" like a body builder by lifting weights. A well-designed strength-training program can provide the following benefits:

- Increased strength of bones, muscles and connective tissue (the tendons and ligaments), decreasing the risk of injury.
- Increased muscle mass. Most women lose about one-half pound of muscle per year after the age of 20. This is largely due to decreased activity.
- Muscle tissue is partly responsible for the number of calories burned at rest (the basal metabolic rate or BMR). As muscle mass increases, BMR increases, making it easier to maintain a healthy body weight.
- Enhanced quality of life. As general strength increases, the effort required to perform daily routines (carrying groceries, working in the garden) will be less.

The benefits of strength training are no longer in question. Research continues to demonstrate that strength training for women increases both muscle and bone strength and reduces the risk of osteoporosis. A safe strength-training program combined with cardiovascular and flexibility training will give you the benefits of a total fitness program.

An encouraging aspect of strength training is the fact that you'll likely experience

rapid improvements in strength and muscle tone right from the start of your program.

It's only natural that, as your fitness level improves, improvements in strength and appearance will follow at a slightly slower pace. To help keep your motivation up, find a partner or a personal trainer to train with you.

Fast Fact

Women who practice the same well-designed strength training programs as men benefit from bone and soft-tissue modeling, increased lean body mass, decreased fat and enhanced self-confidence. (Ebben, W.P. & Jensen, R.L. (1998). "Strength training for women: Debunking myths that block opportunity." The Physician and Sportsmedicine.)

Flexibility

Flexibility doesn't mean being able to do back-bends or splits – it means being able to reach up to the high shelf in the closet, bend down to pick up a dropped coin, and dance without any pain!



Do you remember to stretch before you begin your workout routine? If you're not stretching before and after you exercise, you could be putting yourself at risk for a serious injury. Besides avoiding a workout-related injury, stretching can also improve your posture, make you stronger, reduce your cholesterol and even help you to lose weight. Flexibility is very important as we get older, since our joints tend to "stiffen up" with age and make everyday tasks (like those above) more difficult. Here are some tips for getting the most out of stretching:

- The most common mistake women make is stretching until they are in pain. Pushing your body way beyond normal is just asking for trouble and injury to your muscles. Instead, take your time when stretching and only go as far as a little discomfort.
- Ease into that stretch instead of moving quickly. Sudden jerks and movements before our muscles are warmed up can cause your muscles to tear.
- Breathe in deeply. Breathe out through pursed lips. Focusing on your breathing will actually allow your body to relax and make you stronger before your workout.

Nutrition and Weight Control

Combined with regular exercise, eating well is one of the best ways you can take of yourself—and those who depend on you. Whether you have children, are helping to care for your parents (or, increasingly, handling both of these responsibilities simultaneously) or simply being a friend and companion to others in your life, you can only be of service to them when you feel healthy and energetic yourself.



Regular physical activity and a healthy diet is an important part of effective weight control for women. It helps to control your weight by using excess calories that otherwise would be stored as fat.

Your weight is determined by the number of calories you eat each day minus what your body uses. Everything you eat contains calories, and everything you do uses calories, including sleeping, breathing, and digesting food. Any physical activity in addition to what you normally do will burn those extra calories.

Balancing the number of calories you expend through exercise and physical activity with the calories you eat will help you achieve your desired weight. The

key to successful weight control and improved overall health is making physical activity a part of your daily routine.

Another key to successful workouts is keeping well hydrated before, during and after exercise. The length of your workouts, heat, humidity and the amount you sweat are all major considerations for keeping your body in proper fluid balance.

Hydration Tips for Women's Fitness

- * *Start hydrating early by drinking 1-2 cups of water in the morning*
- * *Keep a water bottle with you all day long*
- * *Drink before you get thirsty*
- * *Drink 1-2 cups of fluid 30 minutes before exercise*
- * *Drink 1/2 - 1 cup of fluid for every 15 minutes of exercise*
- * *Replenish fluids lost (2 1/2 cups for every pound lost during exercise)*

Getting Started with Fitness

The percentage of women who spent most of their day sitting increased from 36.8% in 2000 to 39.9% in 2005! Part of the reason may be your hectic, stressful life, with not a moment to spare for recreation or formal exercise. The environment plays a part too; inactivity has been engineered into our lives, from escalators to remote controls to riding lawn mowers to robotic vacuum cleaners to electric toothbrushes to the disappearance of sidewalks and safe places to walk. But research shows that all this automation is bad for our health. Inactivity is the second leading preventable cause of death in the United States, second only to tobacco use.

You keep telling yourself that you will start a fitness program soon. You'll start right after "this" or as soon as "that" is done. A helpful hint in getting started is to simply to take the first step: try it.

Following are some guidelines to follow when beginning an exercise program:

- Choose activities you enjoy! Don't do something because you think it's a popular activity. You are more likely to stay with an activity if it's something you enjoy. If having people exercise with you is important then join a class, club or form your own group. When working out with a partner be sure to choose someone with a similar fitness level. As a beginner, you may work too hard if you exercise with an experienced partner.
 - When beginning, ease into a program and have fun. Remember, you should not try to make up for all the years you have not exercised in the first few workouts. Because your body is unaccustomed to exercise, realize that you may be stiff or sore after the first day. This soreness will pass as you continue to work the muscles. If you overdo it the first day, you may be so sore that it turns you off of exercise.
 - Participate in more than one activity. Anything can become boring or monotonous day after day. If you like cycling and swimming then alternate these activities. Don't try to learn a new skill as a way to exercise unless it is very simple. A novice tennis player will burn far less energy than a proficient player.
 - Remember to choose some activities that can still be done during bad weather. You want to exercise year round, not just in the spring or summer. A good program incorporates aerobic, strength, and flexibility components. Try for all-around conditioning, not just one aspect.
 - When possible, exercise at the same time each day. This helps to form a schedule. Once you have a routine it becomes a natural part of your week.
 - If you are over 40 or have any preexisting health concerns please see your doctor to receive medical clearance to participate in exercise.
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