

FOREVER ACTIVE

PERSONALIZED FITNESS AND WELLNESS FOR MEN 50 +



7 Principles to Exercise Successfully

Introduction

Everyone has great intentions when it comes to starting an exercise program. The benefits, especially for older adults, are well known: stronger heart, better weight control, increased cognitive awareness, emotionally uplifting, slowing down muscle atrophy/loss, less arthritis and overall a higher quality of life. What is there not to love about exercise? If it is all good, then why do so many well intentioned people fail to succeed in their plans to exercise regularly for a life time?

The answer is relatively simple, they go about starting and doing it all wrong. The motivation is there but the execution is not, because their approach to starting and maintaining their exercise program is faulty.

The key to maximizing the benefits of exercise is to do it regularly over a sustained period of time, preferably throughout your life. However this is hard to do. The old cliché, “use it or lose it” is never more true than when it comes to exercise. It is estimated that you will lose muscle and cardio vascular fitness twice as fast as you gain it. So the gains you achieved over three months of exercising are lost in 6 short weeks. This can be disheartening and a deal breaker for those who want to be healthy and fit but can't seem to make the commitment to sustained activity.

This newsletter is aimed for those who understand the benefits of exercise and have the motivation to exercise regularly but just can't seem to get over the hurdle and make it work on a sustained basis for them. Follow the eight principles outlined in this newsletter and you will have a much great chance of being successful, guaranteed!

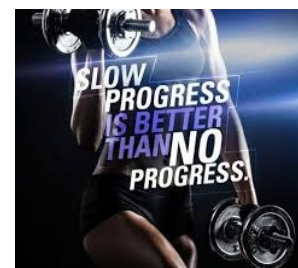
1. Train Low and Slow

I consider this one of the most important and misunderstood points with respect to training. It has been my observation that not adhering to this principle far exceeds all other reasons why people fail to reach their fitness goals.

As mentioned in the introduction, when we start an exercise program we are all "pumped" to get in the best physical condition possible as soon as possible. Good intention but bad execution. Our bodies are consistently, physically and emotionally, adapting to the stress that we put them under. But these adaptations take time to occur. If we stress our bodies and minds with physical and emotional stress too much too quickly, we break down due to injury or exhaustion.

Everyone starts at different levels of physical fitness so we should all be starting at different levels of intensity and frequency of training. For someone who has not been training regularly, starting up doing 3 cardio and 3 strength training sessions a week is too much. After two or three weeks you will “hit the wall” both physically and emotionally. Physically, you will not be giving your body sufficient recovery time and your body will start to become achy and stiff and you increase your chance of injury exponentially. Mentally/emotionally, you have not given yourself enough time to make exercising on a regular basis a habit. It is generally accepted that it takes doing something regularly about 21 times before it starts to be ingrained as a habit. If you go zero to six exercise sessions per week all at once, you have not created a habit but created a nightmare. Over a few short weeks, your body becomes tired and achy, as well, you become emotionally tired because you have added something new into your already busy schedule. As a result, after about three weeks, you are not looking forward to your training sessions, you are looking for ways to avoid them. You start to accept the simplest of excuses for not exercising.

This principle is so important. Start slow- your weekly frequency should be no more than twice or three times per week for those that are not well trained and used to a training routine. As well, start with low intensity which means low weights/resistance and short cardio exercise. You will build upon this conservative start every couple of weeks.



2. Consistency and Sustainability

This principle is almost as important as the previous one. The Low and Slow principle focuses on starting the right way so you develop a successful routine and you will be less likely stop exercising. The consistency and sustainability principle focuses on getting the most out of your exercise routine. As mentioned previously, the body responds very favourably to physical stress if it is introduced in a conservative manner. However, to receive maximal benefit from exercise it must be done consistently and sustained over a long period of time. Doing two strength training sessions and two cardio sessions one week and only one of each the next week will not allow you to achieve the result you want or need. The body needs consistent and sustained stress to build strength and endurance. This is a key but often over looked component of the "overload" principle in training. It is not just physically stressing our bodies that is important but doing it consistently and over a period of time that gets the results. This is why the first principle, starting low and slow, is so important. If you begin with too high an intensity and frequency of training it will not lead to consistent and sustained training.

As a result, don't stop, start low and slow, be consistent and do it over a long period of time to achieve your training goals.

3. Recovery Time

Giving yourself sufficient recovery time is an often over looked but very important aspect when you are developing your training schedule. Recovery time is an important indicator of your fitness level as well. Generally speaking, the more physically and emotionally conditioned you are, the less time you need to recover from a specific exercise session. Conversely, the more intense your exercise session the more recovery time is needed.

It is important to note that not all exercises sessions are created equal and they should not be. For example, if you are exercising four time per week, let's say three cardio and one upper body strength training session, then your strength training session may be intense, but that is ok since you have 6 days to recover. Remember to build the level of strength training intensity slowly over a period of time. With respect to the three cardio exercise sessions, one of your cardio sessions may be intense such as a spin class or interval training, but the other two sessions can be more moderate in nature. The moderate sessions may be a long walk and the other may be hill training. Each of these stresses your body in different ways and will require you to vary the length of recovery after each. After an intense spin session or a hill walk, you will need to give yourself more recovery time than you will need after a long slow walk.

Experience goes a long way to understanding how much recovery time you need. It is important to listen to your body. Eight signs of over training and not giving yourself sufficient recovery time are:

1. Feeling consistently achy and sore between exercise sessions.
2. Restless sleep. Not waking up feeling refreshed.
3. Your energy level is generally low. You don't feel like doing anything outside of work and exercise and even these are hard to find energy for.
4. Mood swings. You feel more agitated and find that you have less patience than normal.
5. Not looking forward to your workouts. It is becoming increasingly laboursome to do them.
6. You find that you are becoming prone to injury more frequently. For example, slight hamstring pull or calf strain.
7. You are more prone to head colds and chest infections. Your immune system is weaker than normal.
8. Your resting heart rate is elevated. Develop the habit of taking your heart rate before you get out of bed each morning.

The body's adaptation to exercise, its ability grow and develop strength, occurs while you are in recovery mode. It is important that you give the body sufficient time to do so. Over time, you will see improvements in strength, endurance and you will be less vulnerable to acute and overuse injuries.

If you only do it
once in a while,
don't get mad when
you only get results
once in a while...

Active vs. Passive Recovery

- Recovery after exercise is associated with reduction of blood lactate concentration
- Active recovery (low intensity aerobic exercise) reduces recovery time compared to passive recovery
- During active recovery, blood flow to the active muscles remains high
- Since the energy consumption during active recovery remains high, the use of lactate as an energy source is higher compared to passive recovery

4. Change up your Routine

Variety is the spice of life and with respect to exercise, it is the key to avoiding hitting the dreaded plateau wall. As mentioned previously, the body has a great ability to adapt to the physical stress. However, if we don't consistently change the way that stress is applied, the body will only adapt so much until growth slows and plateaus. The changes in your training routine don't have to be drastic, the body is not that smart, but they need to be made every 5 weeks or so or after every 10 exercise sessions. For example, if you are doing upper body strength training twice a week, then change the way the routine is performed after 5 weeks. Let's take push-ups for an example, I love push-ups. Regular push up are done with your hands about shoulder width apart. You may do them on your knees or on your toes. The key to a good push-up is to do it rhythmically on a count of one, two down, one, two up. Keep yourself in a straight plank position, your core (Stomach) tight and lower yourself to just before your nose touches the ground. There are many variations to the push-up so that you are "confusing" the neuro pathways to the muscles and thereby avoid muscle memory and plateauing. For example, rather than keeping your hands shoulder width apart they can be moved inward toward your ribs (Military) or much wider than shoulder width. Rather than going straight down you can pretend you are going back and forth under a fence. You can also increase (down on one and up on two) or decrease (down 1, 2, 3, 4, and up 1,2, 3, 4) the speed of each repetition. Varying the way you do the various exercises is really only limited by your imagination and what you can find on Google. Just Google, "Various ways of doing a bicep curl, triceps extension or chest press," etc.



For cardio exercise, you can vary your exercise sessions between high intensity spin classes or aerobic classes, long slow walks, hill walking, swimming, stair climbing, stair climber machine, running/jogging, etc.

The secret is to keep varying your strength and cardio routines. You will get better and quicker results, avoid plateaus in strength and endurance gains and enjoy the variety in your workouts more.

5. Prioritization

Prioritizing your exercise routine into your daily and weekly schedule is necessary to achieve successful training results. Many of us are type A multi tasking individuals and unless we emphasize and embrace the importance of having consistent and sustainable workouts by prioritizing them as essential, life will just get in the way and excuses will set in as to why we can't exercise on any particular day.

The first step in prioritizing is recognizing the importance of what you are trying to accomplish. There is a saying, "If you understand the why's you can overcome the how's." For most individuals the "why" is easy to identify. It maybe that we want good health and best quality of life possible. Perhaps we are training for a charity walk, ride or run. Regardless of the "why", the "how" becomes more easily identifiable once we prioritize it as an essential part of our daily and weekly schedule.

To prioritize the correct way, we must be as specific as possible considering the day, the time and what we are specifically doing with respect to exercising on that day. Never say, "I will get to it when I can today" or "I will see how I feel" or "I will decide later to do cardio or strength training."

As well, when prioritizing your schedule, try to pick the same type of exercise, muscle strengthening or cardio, on the same day and time each week. We are creatures of habit and the more consistent we are in scheduling our exercises into our daily routine the quicker exercising becomes a habit and the less influence the negative forces will have to drive us from exercising.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<i>Quadrant I:</i> Urgent & Important	<i>Quadrant II:</i> Not Urgent & Important
NOT IMPORTANT	<i>Quadrant III:</i> Urgent & Not Important	<i>Quadrant IV:</i> Not Urgent & Not Important

source: Stephen Covey, 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

6. Gold Medal Performance

Unless you are a professional athlete, don't expect a gold medal performance each time you exercise. Even professional and Olympic athletes know that they will not and cannot have a great exercise session every time they hit the gym or go for a cardio workout. Our bodies and minds are not built that way and for most of us this is sometimes hard to accept. It is important to show ourselves a little self-compassion and realize that it is sometimes a victory to just show up and do our exercise routine regardless if we performed it as well as we are used to.

A good rule of thumb to follow on days when you know you are not at your best is to start the exercise routine that you are scheduled to do that day. If after 10 minutes of exercising it just doesn't feel right and the exercise session is just too much of a struggle, stop, clean up, go home, have a nice meal and a good sleep. Tomorrow is another day. Everyone has these days but if you follow the 10 minute rule you will surprise yourself how often you get into the zone and complete the workout. It may not be a gold medal workout but you did it and maintained consistency and sustainability.



7. 80/20 Rule

I like to save the best for last. This is the "best" rule because it gives you permission to miss a scheduled workout. That is right, you have permission to miss a workout. Life is not a game of perfect, so why should we even attempt to be perfect, especially with respect to our exercise routine. If you can achieve 80% compliance with respect to following your scheduled exercise routine, you will have achieved the consistency and sustainability necessary to see great results and meet your goals.

Don't worry if life forces you to miss a workout, there is always tomorrow's or the next day's workout coming. It is also important not to try and "make up" a missed exercise session. This will just mess up your finely planned exercise schedule.

Forget about it and move on. A good rule to follow is to "do your best and forget the rest." Exercising successfully is a marathon not a sprint so if you are compliant 80% of the time you are doing great.



Summary

Following these seven principles gives you a solid foundation to be successful in exercising on a regular basis. Without following these principles, reaching your exercise goals is much harder to achieve.

Let's review:

1. Start low and slow. Give your body and mind time to adapt to the new stresses you are putting it under.
2. Be consistent and strive for sustainability. This is the key to developing strength and endurance.
3. Build into your program sufficient recovery time so body repair can occur. Look for signs of body and emotional fatigue.
4. Change up your routines every 10 sessions to introduce muscle/neurologic confusion in order to avoid strength and endurance plateaus.
5. Prioritize exercise as an essential part of your daily and weekly schedule.
6. Don't expect a gold medal performance with every workout. Life is not a game of perfect so do not expect your workouts to be either.
7. Follow the 80/20 rule. It gives you permission to occasionally miss a workout.

By following these principles, you will instinctively look forward to your time exercising. Interestingly, you will find that when life does get in the way and you miss an exercise session you will probably feel out of sorts. At this time you will know that your body has physically and emotionally adapted to your new exercise routine and is craving it. Exercise has now become a positive addictive force in your life.