

[IMAGE]

Fundamental Fitness Principles

"If you're going to do it, then do it right."

By Editorial Staff

1. Stick to a schedule. When setting your workout schedule, keep in mind your goals. What do you want to achieve? Whether you're training for a marathon or just want firmer triceps, set a reasonable workout schedule to accomplish the results you want. If your workout availability varies from week to week, then set a more flexible schedule without sticking to specific days. For example, make a commitment to do cardio three times a week and weights twice a week.

2. Stay hydrated. Before starting a workout, your body should be properly hydrated; any fluid you drink during a workout does little to help if you're already dehydrated. Maintaining your fluids throughout the day will delay muscle fatigue and keep your energy level up. You should be consuming water before, during and after every workout. Lugging around huge water bottles isn't your only option for sustaining hydration; remember, most fruits and vegetables contain high percentages of water, including peaches (87 percent), cucumbers (97 percent) and tomatoes (95 percent).

- Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **3. Wear proper attire.** Whether or not you look "good" should not be the deciding factor in what you put on before a workout. When dressing for exercise, keep in mind weather, terrain, the type of workout and comfort. For example, even if it's snowing outside, when you go for an indoor cycling ("spin") class at your local gym, you want to make sure you are wearing appropriate shoes for the stationary bike and breathable fabrics that will keep you cool in a stuffy, sweaty room.

4. Warm up and cool down. Warming your muscles improves their elasticity, while stretching improves range of motion during physical activity. Focus on muscles you will be using most during your workout and hold each stretch for about 30 seconds. After a heart-pumping session, your body needs time to cool down in order to reduce muscle stiffness and soreness. According to MayoClinic.com, cooling down after exercise prevents dizziness caused by blood pooling in the legs.

5. Don't overdo it. The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services recommends 30 minutes of physical activity a day. However, it doesn't always have to be grueling; there's nothing wrong with an easy walk, light jog or even chasing after your kids in the park. Remember, your workout schedule should include time for rest and recovery. Schedule "off days" during the week to allow your body to recuperate and your muscles time to heal.

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