

[IMAGE]

Five Must-Know Fitness Principles

By Emily Duval Ledger

Contrary to what you may read in your Facebook feed or junk email box, there's no "magic pill" when it comes to fitness. Instead, following these simple, basic principles can help you reach and maintain your fitness goals.

1. Eat Food. Skip the bars, meal-replacement shakes, sugar substitutes and low-fat peanut butter – REAL food, which comes from the trees, the soil, the farm and the sea, and hasn't been messed with in a lab, is all your body needs to reach and maintain a healthy size. Opt for meals and snacks with a good balance of vegetables, protein, fat and complex carbohydrates, and let others get stuck in the dieting loop.

2. Move Every Day. Our bodies do best with consistency, so moving (even a little) every day is more beneficial than 1-2 big workout sessions a week. Walk on your lunch break, clean your own house, bike to dinner, do yoga in the living room, hire a trainer, plant a garden. It only takes 15 minutes to alter your brain for the better and improve your circulation, so get moving!

3. Stretch. Stretching is essential because it not only affects our ability to get stronger, it also improves circulation and decreases pain and injury. Think of it as the reward after a full day at work, a tough workout, or a long car ride. Plus, it's a good time to take deep, replenishing breaths, which help energize and de-stress you.

fitness - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **4. Play.** It's no secret that stress wreaks havoc on our health, and recreation is an excellent way to combat the effects. Take the kids to the park and toss a ball around, go dancing, learn how to surf or ski, strap on some roller skates! Do something that gives you joy, and you'll not only release essential endorphins in your blood stream, but you'll feel so much better that you'll be more likely to do it again and again. (see #2)

5. Un-plug. Living in a world of smart phones and tablets can be convenient and entertaining, but your brain and body need to un-plug. Regularly trading in your electronics and television for outdoor activities can significantly improve your mood and make you more inclined to embrace habits that benefit your health. Simply put, when we feel better, we are less likely to turn to the "comfort" foods and inactivity that

keep us from reaching our fitness goals.

Emily Duval Ledger is a certified personal trainer through the American Council on Exercise (ACE) and is the owner and lead trainer of Recreation Fitness in Long Beach, CA. In 2012, she and her team were chosen to be off-camera trainers for the ABC-TV series "The Revolution", and their clients were among the most successful participants. More about her recess-based, functional approach to fitness at www.RecreationFitness.com.

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