

How to Exercise

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Exercise is a key part of staying healthy, but figuring out how to get more active can be tough. If you're not used to physical activity, start slow. Go for 10 to 15 minute walks, and work your way up to briskly walking or jogging for 30 minutes daily. Try adding strengthening exercises 2 or 3 days per week, and consider boosting your flexibility with yoga or Pilates classes. Whenever you work out, always listen to your body's limits, and ask your doctor for advice if you have a history of any medical issues.

Part
1

Part 1 of 6: Creating an Exercise Routine



1 Tailor your routine to your experience level. Start slowly if you aren't used to physical activity and want to develop an exercise routine. As you gain experience, try increasing your workouts' intensity levels gradually.^[1]

- For example, start off by walking for 10 to 15 minutes at a time. After 1 to 2 weeks, work your way up to 30 minutes. Try to pick up your pace, too. You might start by walking $\frac{1}{2}$ mile (0.80 km) in 15 minutes, then work your way up to 2 to 3 miles (3.2 to 4.8 km) in 30 minutes.
- When you do strengthening exercises, start with 2 sets of 8 repetitions (such as 8 push-ups). Then add 1 to 2 additional reps per week until you can do a set of 12 to 14.



2 Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes before working out. When you warm up, target the muscles you plan on exercising, but use less intense movements. For instance, walk for 5 to 10 minutes before jogging or doing a lower body workout.^[2]

- If you're swimming, go slowly at first, then pick up your pace. Before an **upper body workout**, walk or jog and do light jumping jacks to raise your heart rate and increase blood flow.



- 3 Try to get 30 minutes of aerobic exercise per day.** As a rule of thumb, you should get at least 30 minutes of moderately intense aerobic exercise daily. Examples include going for brisk walks and jogs, running, cycling, and swimming.^[3]
- When you're exercising at moderate intensity, your heart rate should increase and you should **breathe harder**. You should still be able to speak, but you should be winded enough that you can't sing.
 - Keep in mind you can break your workout times into chunks and spread them throughout the day. Being active for 5 or 10 minutes at a time is a good way to ease your way into exercise if you're not used to it.



4 Include strength training at least 2 days per week. Also known as resistance training, strength training involves using free weights, resistance bands, or your own body weight to strengthen your muscles. If you're just starting out, try doing upper and lower body workouts 1 day a week each. In time, gradually work your way up to including 3 to 4 strength training days in your weekly routine.^[4]

- A sample intermediate upper body workout could be 2 sets of 30-second planks and 2 sets of 12 reps each for crunches, push-ups, dumbbell biceps curls, and dumbbell shoulder presses.
- To strengthen your legs, do 2 sets of 12 reps each for squats, glute bridges, [calf raises](#), and [lunges](#).
- Generally, rest for 30 to 60 seconds between sets. If building muscle power is your goal and you're doing high-intensity weight lifting, resting for 3 minutes can result in greater increases in strength.^[5]
- You can do strength training at home or use resistance machines at a local gym.



5 Mix up your routine to keep things interesting. Varying your activities can help keep you from getting bored, which can motivate you to stay on track. Additionally, switching up your workouts will engage your entire body and help prevent injury.^[6]

- For instance, you could jog on Monday, do upper body strength training Tuesday, swim laps on Wednesday, do a lower body workout Thursday, take a yoga class on Friday, ride your bike Saturday, and go for a light walk on Sunday.
- On strength training days, get your daily aerobic exercise by warming up and cooling down with brisk walks, doing jumping jacks, or jumping rope. Climbing stairs and going for a walk during your lunch break can help you squeeze in 5 or 10 more minutes of aerobic exercise throughout the day.
- Avoid targeting the same muscle group 2 days in a row. Don't, for instance, do **biceps curls** and shoulder presses on back-to-back days. Muscles need time to recover, and overworking them can lead to injury.



6 **Walk for 5 to 10 minutes and stretch to cool down after workouts.** Cool downs, like [warm-up exercises](#), are a gentler forms of exercise meant to ease your body from working hard to being at rest. Cool down by walking for 5 to 10 minutes and stretching the muscles your workout targeted.^[7]

- Stretch individual muscles for a total of 30 to 60 seconds. For example, you might do 3 to 4 quad stretches per leg and hold each stretch for 10 seconds.^[8]
- Avoid stretching before you exercise, which poses an injury risk. Stretching after exercise, when your muscles are warm, can help them recover and improve your flexibility.

Part 2 of 6: Getting Aerobic Exercise



1 **Go for a brisk walk or jog every day.** Walking and jogging are great ways to stay active, especially if you're just beginning to exercise. You could go for a 15-minute brisk walk during your lunch break, then walk or jog around your neighborhood for 15 minutes after dinner.

- If you're elderly or have a history of joint issues, jogging may be tough on your knees, hips, and ankles. Respect your body's limits and, if necessary, stick to walking.



2 Jump rope for 5 to 15 minutes. More than just a fun game for kids, jumping rope is an excellent cardio workout. Grab a rope, and try jumping for 5 minutes straight. If you're not used to exercising, it's okay if you can only jump for a minute or so.^[9]

- If you need to stop, take a break and **catch your breath**. Try jumping rope for gradually longer periods of time. You could aim to add 30 seconds or a minute to your time each week until you can jump for at least 5 minutes straight.



3 Do jumping jacks for 5 to 15 minutes. Start by standing with your legs together and arms at your side. Then jump straight up as you move your legs outward and raise your arms together above your head. Return to the starting position, then repeat.^[10]

- As with jumping rope, take a break if you feel too winded, and try to gradually increase the length of time you can do jumping jacks.



4 Go for bike rides. When you're just starting off, go for easy bike rides around your neighborhood, on a local bike trail, or at a park. At first, try cycling for around 3 miles (4.8 km) in 30 minutes, then gradually increase your speed and distance.^[11]

- As you get used to being active, try to work your way up to 5 miles (8.0 km) in 30 minutes. Eventually, aim to cover 4 miles (6.4 km) in 15 minutes.



5 Swim laps at your local pool or fitness center. Swimming is a great full body workout, and it can help add variety to your routine. Try swimming laps for 20 minutes, or for as long as you can without getting too winded. It's okay if you need to take a break, especially when you're just getting used to exercising.

- In addition to swimming laps, you could do water aerobics or just walk around in a pool. These are good options for people with joint problems or those who are significantly overweight.



6 Try running once you're used to being active. Go for runs around your neighborhood, or look for a local indoor or outdoor track. Try to run for 15 to 30 minutes straight, but don't push yourself too hard if you're just starting to get more active.^[12]

- Each week, try to add another minute to your running time. Eventually, see if you can run 1 mile (1.6 km) straight, track your time, and try to cut down your time each time you run.
- Running might be tough on your legs if you're elderly or have a history of bone or joint issues. Remember to respect your body's limits.



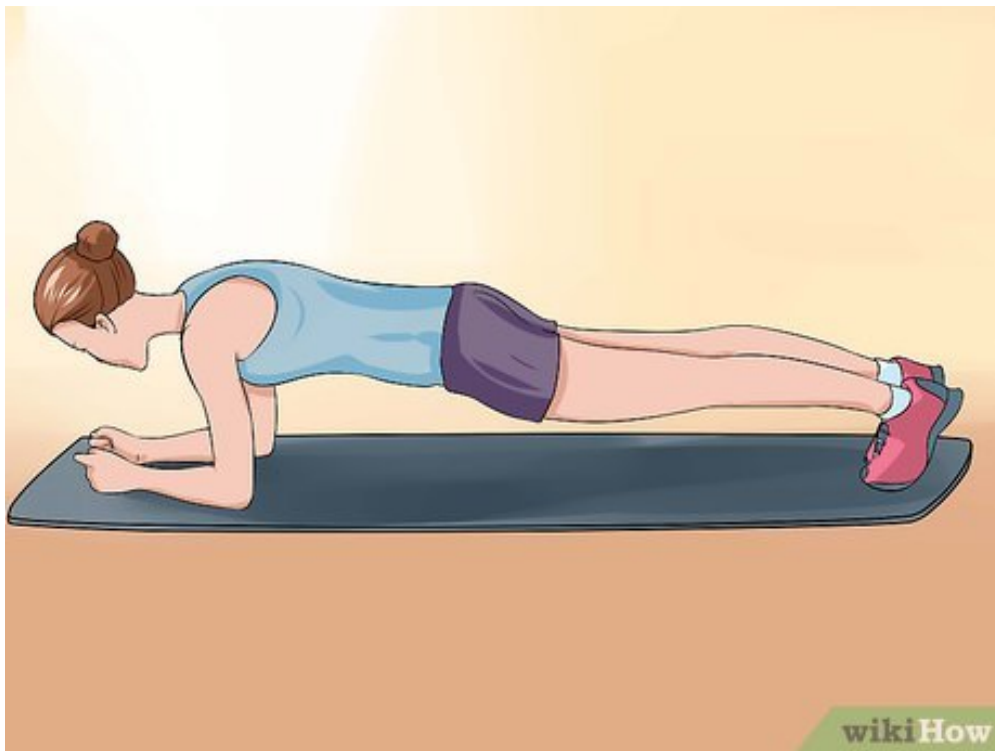
7 Challenge yourself with interval training. Interval training involves alternating high-intensity and low-intensity exercises, and it's a great way to burn calories. Since it involves high-intensity activities, such as running or sprinting, it's best to include interval training in your routine if you're already used to regular exercise. For a good, basic interval session, try doing a sprint-walk routine.^[13]

- Warm up by walking briskly for 5 to 10 minutes, then jog for 5 to 10 minutes. After jogging, sprint for 30 to 60 seconds, then jog for 5 minutes. Alternate running for 30 to 60 seconds with 5 minutes of jogging at least 2 to 3 times, then cool down by walking for 5 to 10 minutes.



1 Do push-ups to strengthen your arms and chest. Lie face down with your palms flat on the floor by your shoulders. Then, keeping your head, neck, back, and legs aligned, exhale and lift your body by extending your arms. Your hands and toes should support your body weight.^[14]

- Straighten your arms, but don't lock your elbows. Hold yourself up for a second, then inhale as you slowly lower yourself back down so that your nose nearly touches the ground. Repeat the steps to complete 2 sets of 12 reps.
- To mix up your routine, set your palms at a wider distance as you perform push-ups. You could also hold your arms close to your body as you do push-ups to shift the work from your chest to your triceps.



2 Try to hold a plank for 30 to 45 seconds. Start by lying face-down on the floor, as if you were about to do a push-up. Raise your body and support your weight on your forearms and toes. Try to hold the pose for at least 30 seconds, lower yourself to the floor, rest for 30 to 60 seconds, then repeat.^[15]

- Keep your head, neck, and back in a straight line as you hold the pose. Avoid looking up; keep your head in a neutral position so you face the floor.
- If 30 seconds isn't challenging, try holding the plank for 1 minute or more.
- Remember to keep breathing normally as you hold the plank.



3 **Work your abdominal muscles with crunches.** Start by lying on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Place your hands across your chest or behind your head, engage your ab muscles, and exhale as you slowly raise your upper torso off of the floor.^[16]

- Lift your torso until your shoulder blades are off of the floor, hold for 1 to 2 seconds, then inhale as you slowly lower yourself back to the ground. Repeat the steps to complete 2 sets of 12 reps.
- Use slow, controlled motions to avoid injury and make your muscles work harder.
- If you place your hands behind your head, do not use them to pull up your head and neck. To avoid injury, just rest your fingertips on the back of your head, or cross your hands over your chest.



4 Target your glutes and core muscles with bridges. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and your arms by your sides. Inhale, then exhale as you engage your core muscles and slowly raise your hips and lower back off of the floor. Lift yourself until your shoulders and knees form a straight line, and keep your arms flat on the floor to keep your balance.^[17]

- Hold the lifted position for 1 to 2 seconds, then inhale as you slowly lower yourself back into starting position. Repeat the steps, and complete 2 sets of 12 bridges.
- To increase difficulty, try holding yourself in the raised position, then raise and extend 1 leg straight. Lower the leg back to the floor, repeat on the other side, then lower yourself to the floor.



5 Strengthen your legs by doing squats. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointing slightly outward, back straight, and your arms by your sides or crossed over your chest. Keeping your torso aligned and core muscles engaged, slowly bend your knees and lower your hips as if you were going to sit in a chair.^[18]

- Stick your rear end out as you lower your hips so your weight is back on your heels. Keep your knees and toes aligned, and avoid bending your knees past your toes.
- Continue lowering yourself until your thighs are roughly parallel with the floor, then push your feet into the floor through your heels to raise yourself back to the starting position.
- Inhale as you lower yourself, and exhale as you exert your legs and lift yourself. Repeat the steps to complete 2 sets of 12 squats.



6 Try doing burpees for a full body workout. Start by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, then jump and drop to a crouched position. Place your palms flat on the floor and thrust your legs back to enter the push-up position, and do one push-up.^[19]

- After the push-up, pull your legs back to the crouched position, and then jump straight up with your hands raised to return to the standing position. Repeat to complete 2 sets of 12 burpees.



7 Invest in free weights or a gym membership. While you can do plenty of strengthening exercises without weights, dumbbells, barbells, and resistance machines can add intensity to your workouts. To avoid injury, start with lighter weights, and avoid trying to push your body beyond its limits.^[20]

- Choose weights that challenge you, but still allow you to maintain proper form. Watch yourself in the mirror, and make sure your reps are smooth, steady, and controlled. If you look out of balance or struggle to make it through a set, choose lighter weights.^[21]
- Try doing 2 sets of 12 **biceps curls**. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, and hold a dumbbell weight in each hand by your sides. Bend your elbows, keeping them close to your side, to lift the dumbbells to your shoulders. Inhale as you lower back to the starting position, and exhale when you exert your biceps.
- Do **shoulder presses** by raising the dumbbells by your shoulders with your elbows bent. Exhale as you extend your arms straight above your head, bring the dumbbells back to your shoulders, and repeat to complete 2 sets of 12.
- Consult a trainer or experienced friend to ensure you use proper form. If you use resistance machines at the gym, have a trainer instruct you on proper use.

Part 4 of 6: Boosting Your Balance and Flexibility



1 **Stretch after you've warmed up your muscles.** You should only stretch muscles that have been active and received increased blood flow. Stretching cold, inactive muscles poses an injury risk. Whenever you stretch, hold the pose steadily instead of bouncing in and out of it. Inhale as you move into a stretch, and exhale as you hold the pose.^[22]

- To stretch your **hamstrings**, sit on the floor with your legs straight in front of you. Reach toward your toes as far as you can until you feel a stretch in the backs of your legs, then hold the stretch for 15 to 20 seconds.
- To stretch your **quads**, stand and use a chair or wall for support. Bring your right foot toward your rear end, grab your toes with your right hand, and gently pull until you feel a stretch in the front of your thigh. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds, then repeat on your left leg.
- For a simple shoulder stretch, gently pull your right elbow across the front of your body towards the opposite shoulder until you feel a stretch in your right shoulder and back. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds, then repeat on your other arm.
- Stretch your **calves** by standing next to a wall, then place your palms flat against it at shoulder height. Keeping your arms straight and feet on the floor, extend your right leg back, and bend your left knee slightly. Press into the wall until you feel a stretch in your right calf, hold the pose for 15 to 20 seconds, then repeat on the other side.



2 Start doing [yoga](#). In addition to improving balance and flexibility, yoga can boost concentration and help you keep stress levels in check. You could take classes at a local gym, community center, or yoga studio, or practice at home using online or DVD guides.^[23]

- From yoga to [tai chi](#), taking a group class is a great way to stick with an exercise routine. Adding a social component can make staying active more fun, and you might feel a greater need to hold yourself accountable.



3 Try taking up [Pilates](#). Pilates is a series of movements inspired by yoga and dance that combines aerobic, balance, and flexibility training. Like yoga, you could find a local Pilates group to practice with or take a class at a local gym or studio.^[24]

- While group classes might liven up your routine, you can also look for Pilates DVDs or online video guides.



4 Stay active by dancing. From ballet to flamenco, dancing can be a rigorous form of exercise. It can improve your flexibility, offer aerobic or endurance training, and boost your coordination. Find a local group to practice with or take a class from a local gym or community center.^[25]

- Learning how to line dance or attending a dance-exercise class might be fun, but you could also put on your favorite tunes and dance around your house.



5 Add tai chi to your exercise routine. Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that involves sequences of slow movements. It can help improve your balance, flexibility, and concentration, and it's a good way to manage stress. Since it's a low impact form of exercise, it's a good option if you're elderly, have a history of medical issues, or have recently suffered an injury.^[26]

- Look for tai chi classes at a local gym or studio, or find online video guides.

Part 5 of 6: Fitting Exercise into a Busy Schedule



- 1 Find small chunks of time to get active throughout the day.** You don't have to dedicate hours of your day to exercising. Find ways to fit exercise into small blocks of time when you'd otherwise be sedentary.^[27]
 - For instance, do squats while you wait for water to boil or for your coffee to be ready.
 - Squeeze in a minute for planks when you first wake up in the morning.
 - Take 5-minute breaks every hour at work to walk around the office and stretch.



2 Spend less time sitting. Spending most of your day sitting in a desk chair is tough on your body. Try using a standing desk, or even a standing desk in combination with a treadmill. If that's not for you, just do your best to take regular breaks to get up and walk around.^[28]

- You could also try sitting on an exercise ball instead of a desk chair. Since you'll need to engage your core muscles to keep yourself steady on the ball, it's a bit like a workout even though you're seated.



3 Take the stairs instead of using elevators. When getting to your apartment or office, skip the elevator and take the stairs instead. If you can't make it up a 5-flight walk-up, just do 1 or 2 sets of stairs, and try adding a floor each week.^[29]

- Climbing stairs can burn up to twice as many calories as walking for the same amount of time.



4 Walk and ride your bike instead of driving. Instead of driving to nearby locations, head out on foot or ride your bike whenever possible. For instance, turn grocery shopping into a workout by walking to the store a few times a week.^[30]

- If work is too far away to cycle, you could take a bus and get off a few stops early to walk the rest of the way.
- Some buses have bike racks or allow folding bikes on board, so you could also split your commute between cycling and riding the bus.
- When you do drive, try parking a few blocks away from your destination, or at the far end of a shopping center's parking lot.



1 Check with your doctor before starting an exercise routine. It's especially important to consult a doctor if you have a history of heart, bone, muscle, joint, or other medical conditions. Ask your doctor for advice on how to safely start exercising and to recommend exercises that benefit your specific condition.^[31]

- If you experience pain, dizziness, inability to catch your breath, or any other concerning symptoms during exercise, you should talk to a doctor.



2 Drink lots of water before, during, and after exercising. Try to drink about 2 cups (470 mL) of water before you exercise, and 1 cup (240 mL) every 15 to 20 minutes during your workout. Your body will need extra water to help your muscles work and to replace the fluids lost as you sweat.^[32]

- Sports drinks can also help you replace salts and minerals lost in sweat. However, if you're trying to lose weight, limit your consumption of sports drinks, as they contain lots of sugar and can add extra calories to your diet.
- It's also wise to eat a healthy source of protein or complex carbs after exercising. Examples include fruit, nuts, a peanut butter sandwich, lean meat, cheese, whole grain crackers, or a protein bar.



3 Choose clothes that suit your activity. In general, wear clothes that won't restrict your movement or blood flow. For some forms of exercise, like biking, you might want to wear form-fitting clothes, but they still shouldn't be too tight. Looser workout clothes are better for strength training, brisk walking, and sports such as basketball or soccer.^[33]

- Make sure your clothes suit the weather. Wear short sleeves and light, breathable fabrics in hot temperatures, and wear layers if it's cold.



4 Stop exercising if you experience pain. “No pain, no gain” is not the advice to follow. If you feel any soreness or sharp pain, stop the activity. Do your best to rest the affected area until the pain starts to subside.^[34]

- If you believe you’ve injured yourself, you might be able to treat it at home. Rest, apply ice for 20 minutes every 3 to 4 hours, compress the injured area with athletic tape, and try to keep it raised around heart level. To manage pain, take over-the-counter medication, such as ibuprofen.^[35]
- Seek medical attention if you hear a pop, experience severe pain, have uncontrolled bleeding, can’t move or bear weight on a joint, or if mild to moderate symptoms don’t improve within 1 to 2 weeks.



- 5** Wear **athletic shoes that offer support and cushioning.** When you're out shoe shopping, look for athletic shoes with sturdy rubber soles. Good shoes shouldn't bend in half, so hold a shoe by the toe and heel, and gently try to see if the soles resist pressure.^[36]
- Shoes should fit comfortably; they shouldn't feel tight, and your toes should reach the shoes' tips without being constricted. Always try on both shoes of a pair when checking their fit.
 - Go with shoes that match the activity you're doing, such as running shoes or basketball shoes. Different activities put stress on your feet in different ways. For instance, running shoes provide the flexibility required for a proper running step, but lack the ankle support needed for tennis or basketball.^[37]



Expert Q&A

Question

What is the correct way to exercise?



Laila Ajani
Fitness Trainer
Expert Answer

Balancing cardio and strength training will help you have a well-rounded exercise routine. One really good way to set up a routine is to have 3 days that you allot just for strength training, where you try to go to reps and you focus on getting physically stronger. Then, on the other 3 days, you would do something that gets your heart rate up, like going for a jog, a hike, or a bike ride. Even just doing that for 30 minutes a day, 6 days a week, you'll see results on both sides of the spectrum.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 0

Question

Will exercise help with chronic illnesses?



Liana Georgoulis, PsyD
Licensed Psychologist
Expert Answer

Exercise can reduce chronic stress and anxiety, but it will also help your body keep functioning well.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

Question

What's the best way to exercise if you have fibromyalgia?



Joel Giffin, PT, DPT, CHT
Physical Therapist
Expert Answer

It's different for everybody with fibromyalgia, but one important thing is to not push too much. Do short bursts at a time. So rather than exercising for a full hour, maybe do 10 minutes 6 different times during the day. Monitor yourself very closely, like what bothers you and what doesn't, and have a good cool down and warm up time. If you haven't done something in a while, be very cautious about getting into it. Having a physical therapist guide you is quite important.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0

Question

What kind of exercises should I do?



Allison Broennimann, PhD
Clinical Psychologist
Expert Answer

Look for types of exercises that you find fun. You could walk, hike, dance, lift weights, or do any other type of physical activity that you find enjoyable.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 0

Question

Is it okay to exercise even late night? Please answer



Michele Dolan
Certified Fitness Trainer
Expert Answer

Yes of course. Exercise at the time that works best for you. Some people have better sleep after working out. Only if you have trouble sleeping after exercising should you consider exercising earlier.

Helpful 66 Not Helpful 7

Question

How do you begin working out?



Michele Dolan
Certified Fitness Trainer
Expert Answer

One of the safest, easiest options is to start with walking every day, and build from there.

Helpful 29 Not Helpful 5

Question

How do you make exercise fun?



Michele Dolan
Certified Fitness Trainer
Expert Answer

Make exercise a game, have a friend join you or listen to music while exercising to make it more fun.

Helpful 23 Not Helpful 2

Question

Which exercise is best for belly fat?



Michele Dolan
Certified Fitness Trainer
Expert Answer

Any exercise at all that causes a sustained, elevated heart rate will burn fat from all over. You cannot target belly fat (or fat from anywhere) specifically.

Helpful 29 Not Helpful 5

Question

How often should you train per week, e.g. if you take the 'Hard Routine' Plan?



Michele Dolan
Certified Fitness Trainer
Expert Answer

Everyone should get 60 minutes of physical activity each day. How intense that activity will be varies depending on a person's fitness level, age and health. If someone were to do the hard routine three times a week, one hour of moderate activity per day on the other days of the week would maintain a fairly high fitness level.

Helpful 34 Not Helpful 6



Tips

- Consistency is the most important part of an exercise routine. It'll take more than a few days to see results. Make exercise a normal habit, and focus on maintaining your healthy routine.
- Listening to music while you work out can be a great way to stay entertained and motivated.
- If you're a preteen or teen, your body is still developing, and some exercises could be bad for your bones and joints. If you're interested in strength training exercises, ask your doctor for tips on staying safe.
- It's impossible to use targeted exercises to lose fat in a particular part of your body. For instance, doing ab and quad exercises doesn't target fat around your belly or thighs. You'll need to burn more calories than you consume in order to reduce overall body fat percentage.
- Exercise is meant to make you healthier, not make you look like someone out of a magazine. Concentrate on developing healthy habits, and pat yourself on the back for putting forth the effort.



Warnings

- Avoid exercising the same muscle group 2 days in a row and working out when you're experiencing muscle or joint pain.

- If you have any preexisting health conditions, then **light physical activities** may be safer than moderate and high intensity exercises.
- Ask your doctor for advice about exercising if you're not used to physical activity or have a history of any medical conditions. Consult a doctor or physical therapist if you've recently suffered an injury before resuming exercise.

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29 votes - 92%

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