



Wrong Way Exercises

March 26, 2010

Exercise for Health

Health experts say we should get a total of at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity every day for most days of the week. Poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle increase the risk of a number of chronic health problems, like obesity, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and certain types of cancer. Regular exercise can help reduce the risk of these health problems, maintain joint flexibility, improve stamina, relieve stress and increase energy levels.

A good exercise program should include three types of activities: aerobic exercises, strength and endurance conditioning and flexibility exercises. Aerobic exercises are activities that increase heart rate, improving the efficiency of the heart and lungs. They include weight-bearing activities, like walking, jogging and dancing, and non-weight-bearing exercises, like swimming and bike ridings. Strengthening and conditioning exercises build muscle and improve endurance, or the ability to maintain increased activity over time. These types of activities are done in a series of repetitions and can be performed using a person's body weight, free weights and machines. Strength and conditioning exercises should work all the major muscle groups. Flexibility exercises stretch the muscles and maintain/improve range of motion.

Exercise the Right Way

While exercise is vital to a healthy lifestyle, too much can also be a problem, leading to overuse injury, pain and abandonment of physical activity goals. The key to a good program is moderation. Start out slowly and build intensity and duration in time.

Stacy Berman, Fitness Trainer with Stacy's Boot Camp in New York City, says another major problem that she sees is people sometimes don't do exercises correctly. Incorrect form and technique not only fail to target the right muscles, it can increase the risk of injury. She has picked five different types of simple exercises that people often do incorrectly:

- **Lunge.** A lunge is great for the legs, thighs, buttocks and stomach. Berman says people sometimes make the mistake of taking short steps, causing them to lean forward too much, which puts extra strain on the knee. When you step out, the front leg should bend at about a 90 degree angle. Slowly transfer weight onto the front leg, dropping the hips down rather than forward. Then push off with the front leg to return to a standing position.
- **Push-ups.** The big mistake with push-ups is using the body for movement rather than the elbows. Keep the body in a straight line, from the shoulders down to the hips, knees and toes. For those who have a hard time maintaining form with a standard push-up, Berman recommends starting with one or two push-ups, then switching to a modified kneeling push-up.
- **Sit ups.** Sit ups work the core muscles, but, if not done correctly, can strain the muscles in the neck. Instead of trying to bring the elbows all the way to the knees, lift the upper body off the floor until it forms an angle of a little more than 45 degrees with the lower body. This technique works the core muscles harder and spares the neck muscles.
- **Pull-ups.** Pull-ups are great for building muscles in the shoulders, back and arms. One mistake with pull-ups is swinging the knees to gain momentum. This defeats the purpose of doing the exercise in the first place because it reduces the work load of the muscles. Another mistake is that people tend to strain the muscles in the neck while lifting the body. Berman suggests focusing on the rib cage while pulling up the body.
- **Leg lifts.** Leg lifts give a good workout for the thighs and lower stomach. Many people make the mistake of arching the back and bending the legs, which can lead to back pain. Keep the legs totally straight, bending only at the hips.

Berman says it's easy to make mistakes when performing simple exercises because most people can't see how they are moving. She suggests using a mirror to check your form. If you're still not sure, or if the exercise doesn't feel right, seek advice from a certified personal trainer. She also suggests that it's better to do fewer repetitions correctly than to aim for a "target" number of repetitions using poor form.

For general tips on exercise:

- [American Council on Exercise](#)