

Fitness

What is fitness?

Stamina, or **endurance**, means the ability of your body to continue fitness activities for a long time.

To improve this kind of fitness you need to do **aerobic** exercise.

Aerobic exercises strengthen your heart and lungs, which means that more blood and oxygen can be pumped around your body to where it is needed, and you can work for longer lengths of time without getting "puffed out" - or whatever you say where you live that means you are really short of breath and tired.

What you can do

- Brisk walking, jogging, swimming, cycling and dancing are all aerobic exercises, most of which you can do at home.
- You could join an aerobic class in your area. Ask around - there are cheaper classes than those run by sports centres. Maybe your local high school or community centre has some.
- See the related topic "**Exercise - check your pulse**" to find out how well you are doing in your aerobic exercises.

Strength and power

Anaerobic activities increase your strength and power, and build up your muscles. This helps when you are jumping or sprinting.

If your muscles are strong and well developed, they will support your joints and lessen the risk of injury when:

- you are doing sudden, explosive movements like flat-out sprinting.
- you are bending over and lifting things (always use your legs to help you or you could hurt your back and arms).

You may think that you will need to lift weights to build up your muscles - after all that's what a lot of athletes do - **Wrong!**

Lifting weights is not good for people who have not finished growing. It may be something you want to do when you have finished with growth spurts, but even then, you should follow the advice of a professional trainer, as you can do serious damage to your body.

The best way to build up strength and power is to use your own body in resistance training activities, eg push-ups, where your arms are pushing against the weight of your body.

Rowing is good too, either using a rowing machine or rowing like this.

Flexibility and suppleness

This means that your body is able to go through all its regular movements without any pain. (This doesn't mean that you should be able to wrap your legs round your neck or do the splits! Hey, you probably could if you practise a lot and your body becomes more flexible!)

Your body needs to have regular movement or your tendons, the stringy tissues that fasten your muscles to your bones, get tight and you find it harder to do things like touch your toes or scratch your back.

Gentle stretching will ease the stiffness, and you should always warm up your body gently before you start any physical activity. (See the topic "**Exercise safely**")

Some activities, like bike riding, exercise your heart and lungs, and at the same time strengthen your muscles.