

## Well Balanced Exercise

The three components to a well-balanced exercise routine are: aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility training.

### **Aerobic Exercise**

Like other muscles, the heart enjoys a good workout. You can provide it with one in the form of aerobic exercise. Aerobic exercise is any type of exercise that gets the heart pumping and quickens your breathing. When you give your heart this kind of workout regularly, it will get stronger and more efficient in delivering oxygen (in the form of oxygen-carrying blood cells) to all parts of your body.

If you play team sports, you're probably meeting the recommendation for 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous activity on practice days. Some team sports that give you a great aerobic workout are swimming, basketball, soccer, lacrosse, hockey, and rowing.

But if you don't play team sports, don't worry — there are plenty of ways to get aerobic exercise on your own or with friends. These include biking, running, swimming, dancing, in-line skating, tennis, cross-country skiing, hiking, and walking quickly. In fact, the types of exercise that you do on your own are easier to continue when you leave high school and go on to work or college, making it easier to stay fit later in life as well.

### **Strength Training**

The heart isn't the only muscle to benefit from regular exercise. Most of the other muscles in your body enjoy exercise, too. When you use your muscles and they become stronger, it allows you to be active for longer periods of time without getting worn out.

Strong muscles are also a plus because they actually help protect you when you exercise by supporting your joints and helping to prevent injuries. Muscle also burns more energy when a person's at rest than fat does, so building your muscles will help you burn more calories and maintain a healthy weight.

Different types of exercise strengthen different muscle groups, for example:

- For arms, try rowing or cross-country skiing. Pull-ups and push-ups, those old gym class standbys, are also good for building arm muscles.
- For strong legs, try running, biking, rowing, or skating. Squats and leg raises also work the legs.
- For shapely abs, you can't beat rowing, yoga or pilates, and crunches.

### **Flexibility Training**

Strengthening the heart and other muscles isn't the only important goal of exercise. Exercise also helps the body stay flexible, meaning that your muscles and joints stretch and bend easily. People who are flexible can worry less about strained muscles and sprains.

Being flexible may also help improve a person's sports performance. Some activities, like dance or martial arts, obviously require great flexibility, but increased flexibility can also help people perform better at other sports, such as soccer or lacrosse.

Sports and activities that encourage flexibility are easy to find. Martial arts like karate also help a person stay flexible. Ballet, gymnastics, pilates, and yoga are other good choices. Stretching after your workout will also help you improve your flexibility.

### **What's Right for Me?**

One of the biggest reasons people drop an exercise program is lack of interest: If what you're doing isn't fun, it's hard to keep it up. The good news is that there are tons of different sports and activities that you can try out to see which one inspires you.

When picking the right type of exercise, it can help to consider your workout personality. For example, do you like to work out alone and on your own schedule? If so, solo sports like biking or snowboarding may be for you. Or do you like the shared motivation and companionship that comes from being part of a team?

You also need to plan around practical considerations, such as whether your chosen activity is affordable and available to you. (Activities like horseback riding may be harder for people who live in cities, for example.) You'll also want to think about how much time you can set aside for your sport.

It's a good idea to talk to someone who understands the exercise, like a coach or fitness expert at a gym. He or she can get you started on a program that's right for you and your level of fitness.

Another thing to consider is whether any health conditions may affect how — and how much — you exercise. Doctors know that most people benefit from regular exercise, even those with disabilities or conditions like asthma. But if you have a health problem or other considerations (like being overweight or very out of shape), talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise plan. That way you can get information on which exercise programs are best and which to avoid.