

What is Physical Fitness?

- Physical fitness is to the human body what fine tuning is to an engine. It enables us to perform up to our potential. Fitness can be described as a condition that helps us look, feel and do our best.
- Physical fitness involves the performance of the heart and lungs, and the muscles of the body. And, since what we do with our bodies also affects what we can do with our minds, fitness influences to some degree qualities such as mental alertness and emotional stability.

Benefits of Exercise:

What is in it for you? Most people could name some or all of the benefits of being physically fit. Some of which are to avoid illness, disease and injury, look better and have more energy; there are some additional unexpected benefits as well!

- **Exercise Can Help Control Stress** - Chemicals called neurotransmitters, produced in the brain, are stimulated during exercise. Since it's believed that neurotransmitters mediate our moods and emotions, they can make us feel better and less stressed. (*FIT FACTS, American Council of Exercise – 2006*)
- **Exercise can keep your immune system STRONG** – Research has shown that during moderate exercise, several positive changes occur in the immune system. Various immune cells circulate through the body more quickly, and are better able to kill bacteria and viruses. (Exercise immunology, *Current Sports Medicine Reports – 2003*)
- **Exercise Can Improve your SEX Life!**
 - Men who exercise vigorously 20-30 minutes were about half as likely to have erection problems as inactive men. (Harvard School of Public Health, 2003)
 - Women's sex lives can also benefit. In a recent study of women's vaginal responses (blood flow to the genital tissue) was 169 percent greater after exercising. (University of Texas at Austin)
 - Doctors believe that exercise has the effect it does on increasing sexual potency because it strengthens the cardiovascular system and improves circulation. Good circulation is important for sexual function. (*FIT FACTS, American Council of Exercise – 2006*)

KNOWING THE BASICS

Physical fitness is most easily understood by examining its components, or “parts.”

- **Aerobic Fitness or Cardiorespiratory Endurance** – the ability to deliver oxygen and nutrients to tissues and to remove wastes, over sustained periods of time. **Guidelines: 20-30 minutes of exercise to raise your heart rate most days.**
- **Muscular Fitness** – Muscular fitness refers to the strength and endurance of your muscles. Strength training can help you improve your muscular fitness. It also enables you to increase your body’s lean muscle mass, which helps with weight loss. **Guidelines: two or three 30 minute sessions a week that challenge the major muscle groups to fatigue (you can use calisthenics and/or weight training).**
- **Flexibility** – the ability to move joints and use muscles through their full range of motion. Flexibility can help with performing daily tasks, improve circulation and posture, aid in stress relief and enhance coordination. Many experts believe that stretching can help reduce the risk of injury due to physical activity. **Guidelines: Stretch when you work out or at least 3 times a week to maintain flexibility.**
- **Stability and Balance** – Stability and balance are associated with your body’s core muscle strength — the muscles in your lower back, pelvis, hips and abdomen. Strengthening these muscles can help to combat poor posture and low back pain. It also helps prevent falls, especially in older adults.

A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

The keys to selecting the right kinds of exercises for developing and maintaining each of the basic components of fitness are found in these principles:

- **SPECIFICITY** - pick the right kind of activities to affect each component. Strength training results in specific strength changes. Also, train for the specific activity you’re interested in. For example, optimal swimming performance is best achieved when the muscles involved in swimming are trained for the movements required. It does not necessarily follow that a good runner is a good swimmer.
- **OVERLOAD** - work hard enough, at levels that are vigorous and long enough to overload your body above its resting level, to bring about improvement.
- **REGULARITY** - you can’t hoard physical fitness. At least three balanced workouts a week are necessary to maintain a desirable level of fitness.
- **PROGRESSION** - increase the intensity, frequency and/or duration of activity over periods of time in order to improve.

As you undertake a fitness program, it’s important to remember that fitness is an **individual quality** that varies from person to person. It is influenced by age, sex, heredity, personal habits, exercise and eating practices. You can’t do anything about the first three factors. ***However, it is within your power to change and improve the others where needed.***