



So you're ready to start an exercise program, eh...?

Before you start an individualized or agency-sponsored exercise program, there are a few questions you need to ask yourself. The first and most important is, "How active do I want to be?" This may sound like a silly question since you're probably planning on doing whatever you're capable of...whether that's a slow walk around the fire station or a functional fitness workout with your crew. Regardless of your ambition, take a moment to understand the type of intensity the new program will have.

Here's how most exercise programs are gauged with regards to intensity:

Low-to-Moderate

This is an intensity that can be sustained relatively comfortably for a long period of time (about 60 minutes). This type of exercise typically begins slowly, progresses gradually and usually isn't competitive in nature.

Vigorous

This is an intensity that is high enough to significantly raise both your heart and breathing rates, and is usually performed for about 20 minutes before fatigue sets in.

Are you a male older than 45 or a female older than 55 years old and planning on participating in vigorous exercise? If so, you should consider a medical exam first. The same is true for individuals of any age with two or more coronary artery disease risk factors. If you're unsure if this applies to you, check with your physician.

Thought we were done? No way... there are a few more questions to answer. A "yes" to any one of the following questions means you should talk with your doctor before you start a new exercise program. Explain which questions to which you answered "yes" and then describe to your physician the specific activities you would like to try.

- Have you been told that you have a heart condition and should only participate in physical activity recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain (or discomfort) in your chest when you do physical activity? When you are not participating in physical activity? While at rest, do you frequently experience fast, irregular heartbeats or very slow beats?
- Do you ever become dizzy and lose your balance, or lose consciousness? Have you fallen more than twice in the past year (no matter what the reason)?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could worsen as a result of physical activity? Do you have pain in your legs or buttocks when you walk?
- Do you take blood pressure or heart medications?
- Do you have cuts or wounds on your feet that don't seem to heal?
- Have you experienced unexplained weight loss in the past six months?
- Are you aware of any reason why you should not participate in physical activity?



If you answered “no” to all of these questions, you can be reasonably sure that you can safely take part in at least a moderate-intensity physical-activity program. If you’re not sure, consult with your physician.

Just to reiterate, if you are a man over 45 or a woman over 55 and/or have cardiovascular risk factors, such as smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or a family history of heart disease you should consult with your physician before starting a new exercise program.

By taking the time to evaluate if you are ready to start exercising, you’ve planted yourself firmly on the path to better health and fitness.

Good luck and stay dedicated!

Contributed by: Shannon Orndorff, Fire Rescue Training Specialist, ACE Fire Service Peer Fitness Trainer

Do you have a fitness related question? Email Shannon at shannon.orndorff@ncdoi.gov .

Resources

American Council on Exercise, ACE Fit-facts “Getting Started”
http://www.acefitness.org/fitfacts/fitfacts_display.aspx?itemid=2612&category=6

American Heart Association’s Scientific Position on Physical Activity:
www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4563