

The President's Challenge

Fitness Tips for Women

With busy schedules and numerous demands from family to career, it's tough for women today to squeeze fitness into their busy schedules. In fact, recent studies report that over half of U.S. women don't exercise for the suggested 30 minutes a day, and more than 25 percent of U.S. women aren't active at all. This is unfortunate, considering the many health and emotional benefits that physical activity provides. The following are some helpful tips gathered by experts from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports:

1. Start Slowly

For women just starting to work out, it's important to take it slow at first. If you push too much, you're likely to get frustrated and probably quit after a week or two. Start with ten minutes a day for the first week or two, then begin adding to that time. Before you know it, you'll be feeling comfortable at 30-45 minute intervals.

2. Vary Your Fitness Activities

Cross-training is incorporating a variety of activities that all have physiological benefits. For aerobic training, you may try walking on a treadmill, light group fitness class or stationary bike workout. All of these workouts will strengthen the cardiovascular, circulatory and respiratory systems. They also take the body through different movements and ranges of motion.

3. Help Prevent Osteoporosis

Eighty percent of the 10 million Americans affected by Osteoporosis are women, according to the National Osteoporosis Foundation. Along with a well-balanced diet and healthy lifestyle, physical fitness plays a key role in prevention of this disease. The focus here should be on weight-bearing and resistance exercises which build and maintain bone mass and density. Examples of this type of exercise include dancing, hiking and resistance exercises.

4. Build Your Confidence and Control

Physical fitness is an important way that women can strengthen their confidence. Self defense classes are an option that some women are using, not just to become more fit, but to also be more prepared and alert for whatever life may present them with.

5. Gain relief from Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) Symptoms

Research shows even a moderate amount of exercise provides relief from PMS symptoms such as fluid retention, anxiety, depression, head-ache, backache, cramps, fatigue, and mood swings. Even a 20-30 minute walk can help provide a prescription-free relief, leaving many women with a great sense of calm and well-being.

6. Stay Fit Before, During and After Pregnancy

Women who get and stay fit before and during pregnancy will feel better and likely have an easier labor, delivery and recovery due to improved tone and muscle strength, according to The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Fit mothers tend to avoid becoming overweight and they also regain their shape more

quickly after giving birth. Pregnant women should proceed to exercise with caution, however, after seeking advice from their physician before exercising.

7. Make It Social

Fitness should be fun, so make it a social affair with friends and family! A daily walk with a neighbor, a lunchtime trip to the gym with a co-worker, or a group fitness class - all provide an extra source of motivation to stick with your routine as well as a great opportunity to catch up on things.

8. Control Your Environment

Core body temperature rises during workouts and can be elevated unnecessarily by exercising in an environment that is too hot or humid. This can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke, potentially life-threatening conditions. Whenever possible, be sure to choose a cool (not cold) or controlled climate area to exercise.

9. Stay Hydrated

You've heard it before, but do you listen? Water is an essential nutrient that is lost through perspiration especially during periods of increased exertion. Always replace lost fluids with 6-8 oz. of water, 6-7 times a day - not just on those days that you exercise.

10. Think Opportunity, Not Excuses

It may sound obvious, but it's surprising how many of us can come up with excuses for why we don't have time or why we just can't exercise. Instead focus on the benefits - better overall health, disease prevention, and improved physical appearance, among others -- and try to keep a mental image of how you will look and feel as a more fit person. The more you can focus on the rewards, the more likely you are to work out. One great way to reward yourself is to work towards achieving the President's Active Lifestyle Award (PALA), which is now available to adults through the President's Challenge program via www.PresidentsChallenge.org.