



Weill Medical College of Cornell University

Food & Fitness Advisor[®]
Helping Women Live Healthier, More Active Lives[™]

Reduce your risk of workout injury: whether you enjoy walking, playing golf, or exercise classes, warming up and proper form are crucial.

Recent research shows that staying active and fit prevents or delays illness and disability as you grow older and can also help prolong your life. But to reap the benefits, "You have to work out safely as well as regularly," says Amy Shapses, PT, CMDT, director of physical therapy at the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center at Weill Cornell Medical Center.

Getting started

Regardless of the activity you intend to do, start by warming up for three to five minutes with a cardiovascular exercise such as walking or riding a bicycle. Next, do stretching exercises for the large muscle groups, including your quadriceps (see exercise 1), hamstrings, and calf muscles. This will prepare you for walking, jogging, and weight training.

"If you're going to play golf or tennis, also do something like arm circles to warm up the arms and take them through a full range of motion, and stretch the wrist extensors and flexors, which will help your swing," Shapses advises. "Follow this by practicing your swing without using a golf club or tennis racquet, simply going through the motion of the movement."

Use proper technique

Doing exercises incorrectly is a leading cause of injury, according to the American Council on Exercise (ACE, www.acefitness.org). Common errors include allowing the knees to extend beyond the toes during a lunge or squat, placing undue stress on the knees; using momentum to lift weights that are too heavy for you; and not exercising through a full range of motion--for example, extending down only a few inches instead of back to the starting position when doing bicep curls.

Not adjusting exercise machines to your body size also can cause injury. Most exercise equipment can accommodate a wide range of body types and sizes; however, it's up to you to adjust each machine to your body's needs. If you're not sure how to adjust a machine, ask a staff member for help.

Reading or watching TV while exercising can distract you, taking your attention away from the task at hand. This is especially risky when you are working out with weights.

If you're taking fitness classes such as yoga or Pilates, *trove* at your own pace and don't be afraid to ask for help, advises Lisa Corsello, a personal trainer in San Francisco who works with older adults. "An instructor should be able to adapt poses so that they work for your body. If you have an area of weakness, pain or injury, let the instructor know before the class."

Listening to your body also will reduce the risk of injury. "Ask yourself if what you're feeling seems to be an appropriate response to the activity," says Corsello. "For example, if you're doing a yoga sequence and you feel your muscles working, that's appropriate. But if you feel a sharp or sudden pain, an electric shock-like sensation, or pins and needles, which could indicate pressure on a nerve, stop immediately."

Vary your routine

Doing the same exercises or sports day in and day out increases your risk of overtraining and injury, Shapses stresses. She advises allowing a day or so between your usual workouts; on your "off" days, do exercises that can help improve your

performance and reduce the risk of injury. For example, standing on one leg improves balance and "fine-tunes" muscle strength, she says. "When you're on one leg, all the leg muscles--quadriceps, hamstrings, calves--contract simultaneously, activating and strengthening all the muscle fibers. This can help keep you from falling and injuring yourself--whether you're hitting a ball while on one leg during a tennis game, or in a yoga class, doing a single-leg yoga posture."

EXERCISING WITH PROPER FORM

1. Quadriceps (thigh) stretch

Stand next to a counter or sturdy chair with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees straight, but not locked. Hold on to the chair or counter for balance. Bend your left leg back, grasping your left ankle in your left hand until your thigh is perpendicular to the ground and you feel a stretch in the front of the thigh. If you can't grasp your ankle, keep your leg as close to perpendicular as possible. Hold for a count of 20. Release your ankle and repeat with the other leg.

2. Seated alternate dumbbell curls

Strengthens the biceps. Sit comfortably on a flat bench with your arms at your sides. Hold the dumbbells with an underhand grip, palms facing up. Keeping your elbows at waist level, raise the left dumbbell until your left bicep is fully flexed; then lower the dumbbell. Do two sets of eight to 10 curls with each arm.

3. Alternate leg lunges

Strengthens thighs and inner legs; also stretches back of leg. Take a comfortable stance with your hands on your hips. Step forward 18 to 24 inches with your left leg. Keep your right heel on the floor. Push off your left leg and resume a standing position. Repeat five to 10 times with each leg.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons offers these tips to prevent injury when you exercise:

Warm up before you exercise. Do a moderate activity such as walking at your normal pace, making sure you also move your arms.

Follow the 10 percent rule. Never increase your program (i.e., walking distance or amount of weight lifted) more than 10 percent a week.

Don't do the same routine two days in a row. Walk, swim, play tennis or lift weights to work different muscles and keep exercise more interesting.

Know how to use exercise equipment. Read instructions carefully and, if needed, ask someone qualified to help you.

Stop if it hurts. If you experience severe pain or swelling, stop exercising and consult your doctor.

COPYRIGHT 2007 Belvoir Media Group, LLC

This material is published under license from the publisher through the Gale Group, Farmington Hills, Michigan. All inquiries regarding rights should be directed to the Gale Group.