



FITNESS

How'm I Doing?

Planning and Assessing Your Own Fitness Program

BY PETER MOREL

Knowledge is your best friend when it comes to your health. The more you learn, the better the result. With the proper information and understanding, anyone can increase his or her level of fitness.

The first thing to consider when designing your exercise program is safety. The program must be designed so that the possibility of injury is remote. Start by having your current level of fitness evaluated by a Certified Fitness Consultant or Lifestyle Appraiser. He or she will then be able to make recommendations that are specific to you and can tell you exactly what you'll need to do to reach your goals safely. The cost for this service varies from \$25 to \$75 dollars for an evaluation, which lasts about one hour.

Next, consider what purpose the program is to serve. Do you want to increase your strength? Do you want more muscle? Do you want your program to help with a particular sport or are you simply interested in improving your general fitness? The program may be intended to help with rehabilitation for arthritis, back pain, or tendon problems; if so, it is best to consult your physical therapist before beginning.

If your purpose is rehabilitation, you may find that a single approach for a given health problem won't be as beneficial as a combination. When treatments are combined to attack the problem from all sides, your rehabilitation can be completed much more quickly and you can return to your normal exercise habits. As you know, if the body is not continually challenged, the adaptations to exercise will begin to diminish. The shorter your "down time", the faster you can get back into shape.

The next thing to consider is where your program will take place, and how much it's going to cost you. The location will greatly depend on your mobility. If you enjoy getting out and about and can do so relatively easily, an athletic facility is a great place to get in shape, meet new people, and get expert help with your program. If going to a fitness facility is not possible, work out at home. You can get into great shape at home for no more than the cost of a small weight bench, and some dumbbells or resistance tubing. And don't forget the powerful possibilities inherent in body weight exercises like pushups, pull-ups, and sit-ups which require no equipment at all but are great for devel-

oping a base in strength and stability.

If you do decide to join a fitness facility, the first issue you'll need to consider is cost. Can you afford to spend \$200-\$1000 per year for a membership? If so, be sure to ask these key questions before you sign on the dotted line:

How accessible is the building? Is the equipment all on one floor? If not, are there stairs? How many? Is there an elevator? Do they have discount rates based on usage? For example, if all you want to do is use the weights, must you pay the full membership rate of \$1000 dollars a year? If you won't be using the saunas, the tennis courts or the pool, do you rate a discount? If not, move on! Do they have trainers? How are they qualified? Do any of them have experience with people with disabilities? Do any of them know about your specific challenge? If not, can someone be hired who does? If you bring an attendant or personal trainer with you will there be extra costs to pay? Get all the facts and make an informed decision.

Once you've determined the why, the where and the when, it's time to design your fitness program. If you're looking to increase your strength or to build muscle, then you must work with resistance. Weights, resistance machines, tubing, even manual resistance will all help build strength and muscle. It's a great idea to have someone who has experience in weight training to teach you the motions necessary for each exercise. At Top Shape, we recommend that you hire a personal trainer to teach you the proper posture and control needed for your exercises. The cost for such a service is usually \$25-\$75 dollars per hour.

If your goal is to change your body composition, then some sort of cardiovascular exercise will be needed, such as biking, rowing, running, or wheelchair pushing. If you are like most people, and want to put on a little muscle mass, you'll need to increase not only the number of total repetitions, but also the intensity – gut-wrenching, heart-pounding, sweat-pouring, heavy-breathing intensity! The weights you lift must be heavy enough to create muscular damage, forcing the muscles to rebuild and become larger and stronger. Perform four to five sets of ten to twelve repetitions each time. Lift until the muscle fails to continue working within a given set with a repetition rate of one repetition every two seconds. Remember that a muscle grows on the days you don't work out – the exer-



cise is just the stimulus to create the desired effect. Recuperation between bouts of exercise, therefore, is as important as the exercise itself. Research shows that a muscle may take as long as five days to recuperate from an intense weight training program.

If the program you're designing is sport-specific, you'll need basic weight training equipment as well as your golf clubs, tennis racquet, handcycle, skis, etc. Trainers and coaches may suggest other specialty equipment that can improve your abilities in a given sport, such as stability balls, medicine balls, weight sleds, etc. Sports program design is a little more complicated, as each sport needs its own levels of strength, mass, power, endurance, etc., so you may choose to separate your training into cycles (see the article *Are You Ready For Winter Sports?:* Active Living magazine, Vol.8#5).

If you are just beginning a basic fitness program, start with one set of 10-12 repetitions with weights. Use compound movements (exercises that use more than one joint), such as bench-presses, squats, and latpulls. Add weight until it is difficult to com-

plete the final repetition. Allow four to six weeks before adding sets. If you're interested in building your general strength without greatly increasing your muscle size, keep the total number of repetitions to 20-25. Remember that as you lower the repetitions, you must raise the weight to get the same training effect. If you're not accustomed to working with heavy weights and if you train alone, stay at the 10-12 repetitions range, using a weight you can handle but which presents some difficulty. Work each body part twice a week at first, and progress as required. For wheelchair users, a "push/pull" workout is a good idea as it strengthens the muscles and joints in two planes of motion, builds stability in those joints and opposing muscles, and will help with day-to-day activities like pushing your chair.


Your final consideration should be cardiopulmonary (heart and lung) fitness. In order to achieve a good level of fitness, your program can be as frequent as five days a week or as infrequent as just two days per week, depending on the intensity. For those

whose fitness level is lower, it is best to begin at one day a week, at the low end of your heart rate target zone. As fitness levels improve, you can progress slowly to two sessions per week and then three, etc. Here's a simple way to find what the low end of your heart rate should be: Subtract your age from 220 and multiply that number by 0.6. The resulting number is the lower heart rate appropriate for a person with no apparent health concerns. (This may change depending on your disability, so be sure to see your health care provider for your proper zone.)

In planning your fitness program, remember that exercise is not meant to be grueling or painful as many people are inclined to believe, but rather it should be designed to create a feeling of well-being and to add vigor to your life. Design your program with that in mind and you'll be sure to find ways to have fun, stay fit and be strong!

For more information on hosting a seminar with Peter Morel or for more information, contact Mike Hayden VP TopShape Inc. at (888) 288-7779.

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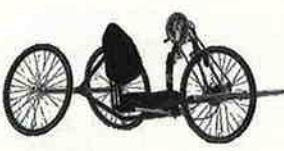
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