



By Jessica L. Nonkes, M.S., P.T.

Spring is finally here and it's a good time to commit to making exercise a regular part of a healthy lifestyle. Here's some advice on how you and your family can incorporate regular exercise into your lives.

First, start with simple changes that increase your activity level every day: park farther away from the store's entrance; make a "walking date" with a friend; take an aerobics class with a co-worker; or take the family for a walk or bike ride around

the neighborhood. Even a small increase in your daily activity level improves your heart, lungs, and muscles. Regular exercise also helps to decrease stress, control blood pressure, and decrease weight.

Second, make regular exercise a permanent part of your daily life by adopting a fitness plan for yourself and perhaps your family (depending on the ages of your children). That could be as simple as planning a daily walk, a half hour on the treadmill or a daily visit to

your health club. Make it fun by incorporating your family's interests such as hiking, biking, or skiing. Other ideas include:

- Train for and participate in a fund-raising walk, bike ride, or run for your favorite charity.
- Try new things together as a family. Take joint classes for family members with similar interests like rock climbing, racquetball, swimming, karate, or ballet. This is a perfect way to spend time together as a

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family and develop closer relationships while improving your health.

- Add variety to your routine to keep it fresh: change your walking route, have your children take turns picking the destination for your bike ride, or set up an obstacle course in your backyard for your children to navigate.
- Share your favorite childhood games with your children. Games like tag, kick the can, hopscotch, and jumping rope can help get everyone moving and are a lot of fun! Throwing games like catch can help get your arms active, too.

One of the most important factors in any new fitness program is consistency. Making definite plans with your family, friends, and/or neighbors makes it easier to stay active and helps you keep the daily demands of life from crowding out your goals. Some people like to keep

a visual reminder of their exercise progress in a prominent place at home. Others have a tracking grid that they can check off when they've completed their exercise for the day.

Getting Started

There are several key things to remember when starting any new fitness program:

1. Talk to your doctor first if you have any serious medical conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, or if you are pregnant. Your doctor can give you specific precautions that you will need to follow.
2. Start any new program gradually to allow your muscles and joints time to get used to the new activity. This will also help limit the amount of muscle soreness that you experience. Doctors and physical therapists frequently see patients who don't train during the week and then perform high-level workouts on the

Get Ready for Spring *continued on page 80*

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weekend. Frequently, the result is needless sprains and strains. Even those who are not injured may suffer from Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (D.O.M.S.), the painful muscle soreness that results from muscle damage from unaccustomed exercise that peaks 24-48 hours following strenuous exercise.

3. Expect some muscle soreness as you begin to use muscles that you haven't trained in a while. Soreness should decrease as your muscles strengthen and get used to the new exercise. Consult with your doctor or physical therapist about pain that doesn't subside within a few days, is accompanied by swelling or sharp pain in a joint, or seems to be getting worse over time. A doctor may need to do a thorough evaluation to rule out serious injury to the muscle, ligament, tendon, or bone.

4. Set realistic goals for yourself and your family about the time that you can spend exercising. Don't forget the time you spend getting ready, warming up, and stretching your muscles before exercise. If you rush through the warm-up, your muscles and joints won't be properly prepared to handle the stress of exercise. This may predispose you to injury that could have been prevented. Your doctor, physical therapist, or athletic trainer can review basic stretches with you. The Internet also has a wide variety of knowledgeable resources for stretching. You may have to find creative ways to restructure your day to make time for exercise, but it's well worth it.

5. Maintain proper hydration. Make sure that you're drinking enough water each day. Adults should drink 8-10 glasses of water every day to replace the water lost through perspira-

tion. Children also should increase their water consumption as their activity level increases.

6. Make sure everyone is properly dressed for exercise in light layers of comfortable, non-constrictive clothing to prevent overheating. Specialty fabrics wick the moisture away from the skin, helping you to stay dry. Don't forget to wear supportive athletic shoes to protect and cushion your feet, knees, hips, and back from impact.

These tips should make it easier for you and your family to adopt more healthy routines in your daily life. The hardest part of any exercise program is getting started. Decide that today is the day you take charge of your fitness goals and start to achieve them. *

Jessica L. Nonkes is a physical therapist with Amber Hill Physical Therapy which has offices in Frederick, Damascus, and the Brunswick/Jefferson/Middletown area.



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