

Guidelines for Healthy Exercising

Exercise or movement of our bodies is an essential part of healthy living and well-being. If done properly, exercise not only helps impart physical benefits, but also provides benefits for our minds, hearts, and spirits. Physically, a well-balanced routine aims to improve circulation of blood throughout our body, allowing for much needed oxygen delivery to our vital organs and efficiency in the elimination of toxins. Mentally, a consistent exercise routine allows us to find our sense of self-awareness, enhance our ability to manage stress, and eventually gain freedom of our spirit.

Exercise doesn't have to be all-or-nothing. You don't have to spend hours in a gym or thousands of dollars on exercise equipment. Even just a few minutes of well-intentioned consistent physical activity can have a positive effect on your mental and emotional health. Whatever your age or fitness level—even if you've never exercised a day in your life before—find simple, fun ways to add more movement into your life and start noticing the differences in the way you feel, look, and live.

1. **Set a positive intention.** Exercising with intention changes the vibrations of your activity from mindless to mindful. Any activity done mindfully allows you to increase your sense of self-awareness and channel your potential for the highest good. If your preference is to transform a daily chore into exercise (i.e. gardening, walking up a set of stairs at work, housecleaning), designate it with an intention. That simple act can alter the entire outcome of the activity. Exercise generates a tremendous amount of energy, and the intention that it is done with can make a significant impact. I believe that when I exercise, I not only help myself, but also the world around me. For example, at the start of my outdoor run, I ask the universe to harness the energy I will generate and use it for the greater good of mankind.
2. **Be consistent as much as possible.** Even five minutes of some form of dedicated daily physical activity is better than one hour here and there. We often procrastinate, waiting for that perfect moment where we can set aside an hour to exercise. Sometimes, it never comes. Instead, if you do a little each day, finding the time to exercise becomes less overwhelming, much more manageable, and the minutes surprisingly add up. It is understandable that some days are just plain rough—even for 5 minutes of exercise. In that case, make sure that the entire week does not go by where you have not done at least something. Stop and dedicate 5 minutes of time for exercise. Otherwise, you will dig yourself into a deep hole.
3. **Choose an appropriate time of day.** The best times of the day to exercise are early morning and early evening. According to Ayurvedic medicine, exercising during the middle of the day is not recommended and can aggravate certain medical conditions. On the other hand, a brisk, evening walk after dinner can help with blood sugar regulation. Do not engage in overly stimulating exercises at the end of the day—it may become difficult to sleep at night. As much as possible, incorporate a pleasant, natural environment into your exercise routine.
4. **Don't over exert yourself.** Exercising done to the point of discomfort is counterproductive. Over-exercising can interfere with your metabolism. If you are feeling fatigued and in need of painkillers after your exercise routine, you are causing yourself a great deal of unnecessary stress and increasing the wear and tear on your body. The purpose of exercise is to elevate you, leaving you with a heightened sense of well-being. A rule of thumb is to exercise at 50% of your capacity, the point at which light sweat appears along your brow line. As long as you continue to exercise consistently, your exercise capacity will naturally increase. This way exercising is enjoyable, and burnout or injuries will be limited. When you exercise within your capacity, you provide much needed nourishment to your organs, process accumulated stress, and enhance your sense of emotional well-being.
5. **Know your body type and what type of exercise is most suitable for you.** Not every sport or exercise routine is right for everyone. What is enjoyable for one person may not be appropriate for you. Do not feel pressured or discouraged. Find what works for you. Pay heed to your body and it will guide you towards your optimum exercise type and level.
6. **Stay well-hydrated with appropriate fluids.** Exercising when dehydrated can cause muscle breakdown, cramps, and additional stress on the body. Water with lemon and a pinch of mineral salt can counteract acid that has accumulated during exercise as well as replenish electrolytes lost due to sweat. Do not hydrate with caffeinated teas, sodas, coffee, or protein shakes.
7. **Balance your routine.** Incorporate both cardiovascular, strength building, and flexibility exercises into your routine. Limiting one's self to cardiovascular exercise without the appropriate attention to maintaining muscle strength and flexibility is a surefire way of getting injured and developing muscle atrophy. Yoga is an excellent form of exercise that is cardiovascular as well as strength building.
8. **Stay away from caffeine containing beverages before and after your routine.** Many sports supplements contain caffeine. While there is a plethora of literature on exercise physiology that supports caffeine intake and enhanced endurance, my experience tells me otherwise. I firmly believe that caffeine enhanced sports products are harmful to your health. In my opinion, if you are having to support your body's needs by using energy drinks, sports gels, protein powders, and other artificial supplements, it might be time to reassess your exercise goals and realign your routine so that it supports your true nature in a more harmonious way.
9. **Breathe properly.** Allow your breath to be your focus. Take slow, deep abdominal breaths through your nose to calm your mind and enhance your endurance during exercise. To get the benefits from exercise without the side effects, exercise only as long as you can breathe normally through the nose. When you begin to feel yourself pushing beyond your zone of comfort or having to breathe through your mouth, slow down and walk until you can resume again without straining. Over time, as your body regulates itself, you will be able to exercise for longer periods with comfort. Attention to the cycle of inhalation and exhalation during exercise will assist with providing nourishment where necessary and releasing toxins and eliminating waste products as needed. In this way, you will feel cleansed, calm, alert, and revitalized after exercising.
10. **Have fun and show gratitude for allowing yourself the time to exercise.** Do not think of exercise only as the means to another goal such as attaining an ideal weight or being able to compete in an athletic event. Exercise because in itself it is a healthy activity when done properly. Enjoy it for its own sake and you will find that the results will work themselves out for your highest good. Instead of seeking diversion in the form of television or a magazine while exercising, focus on your breath, turning your physical activity into a form of meditation. Your positive and undivided attention to your work-out will add to the therapeutic benefits of the practice itself. At the end of your routine, thank yourself and the world around you for allowing you the time and ability to exercise.