



**Dr. Joseph Mercola**  
Author of the  
[Total Health Program](#)

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## Exercise to Improve Your Body and Your Brain

Exercise is a critical component of good health, especially as you age. Exercise will help you:

- Sleep better
- Lose weight, gain weight, or maintain weight, depending on your needs
- Improve your resistance to fight infections
- Lower your risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes
- Help your brain work better, making you smarter.

The key to obtaining the benefits of exercise is to find a program and stick to it. Of course, it is useful to have a guide, and toward that end I offer the recommendations below and an [exercise table](#) you can print out and use to help you track your progress.

Key points to remember when exercising:

**Listen to your body.** If exercise worsens symptoms, modify your program or, if need be, stop. As your energy and health improve, you will be able to tolerate larger amounts of the aerobic exercise, which will lead to weight loss.

It helps to hire a personal trainer who can guide you through the specifics of a good exercise program. If you do use a personal trainer please be aware that many don't understand the nutritional principles discussed on this site, and it is useful to ask them to read the [nutrition plan](#) to understand the healthy direction you are taking.

**Be consistent.** You need at least 30 minutes of exercise a day to experience any weight loss benefits. Major studies have shown that 60 minutes a day is actually best. Ideally, the exercise should be continuous, but it could be split up into two 30-minute sections.

**Start with walking if you are overweight.** Most heavy people start with walking and that is an excellent choice, as it is low-risk and inexpensive. The major problem with walking, however, is that many people become fit relatively rapidly but don't increase the intensity of

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the workouts as they become more fit. Once you become comfortable with a routine, it is important to increase the intensity in order to continue benefiting.

For more information on walking for fitness, see my article "[Walk Your Way to Better Health.](#)"

**Increase your intensity regularly.** Ideally you should exercise at an intensity that makes it somewhat difficult to talk to the person next to you. This prevents you from having to measure your pulse or use a heart-rate monitor. If you can comfortably talk to the person next to you, you aren't working hard enough to produce the benefits you need to lose weight. However, if you are using so much oxygen with your exercise that there is not enough left over to allow you to carry on a conversation at all, then you are exercising too hard and need to cut back a bit.

**Try race-walking.** When outdoors, it is sometimes difficult to walk fast enough to get to the necessary level of exertion. Try race walking -- Racewalk.com has an excellent section on teaching you how to do this. However, if you use a treadmill indoors you can easily increase the incline to improve the intensity of the walking.

**Try running.** If you feel ambitious you can advance to running, which is my personal favorite -- I have been a runner since 1968. It is one of the most efficient and inexpensive ways to stay healthy; the only equipment required is a good pair of shoes. If you do decide to run, please recognize that most shoes will not last more than six months. If you use them longer than six months you will increase your risk of injury.

One of the downsides of running is that you must depend on the weather to cooperate. You can always use a treadmill, of course, but that adds the expense of a health club or the equipment for your home. If you are elevating your program to this level and will invest in equipment, I believe that an elliptical machine is, for reasons explained below, far superior to the treadmill in providing an optimal aerobic exercise experience.

**Try an elliptical machine.** Elliptical machines are generally less expensive and far quieter than treadmills and provide a complete lower body workout by rotating the use of the different muscle groups on your legs. However, you will have to be sure to use the elliptical that can incline throughout various levels. Some models have a fixed base and handles that allow you to exercise your arms, but I believe it is more helpful to exercise the different leg muscles as they are much larger than your arm muscles.

I normally suggest adjusting the resistance setting and frequency of steps per minute so one is just short of not having enough breath to

carry on a conversation. This is the aerobic threshold that will produce cardiovascular benefits.

The ellipticals are also great for reducing the boredom and monotony of exercise.

What I normally advise patients to do is to change the incline setting every minute or two by one notch. This will activate different leg muscles. I also suggest reversing the direction of the leg movement. With ellipticals it is equally easy to walk backwards or forwards. You can also avoid holding on to the sidebars, which will exercise your kinesthetic sense of balance.

**Be cautious.** If you are going to use exercise for weight loss, consider a weight bearing exercise. It has been my experience that non-weight bearing exercises like swimming and bicycling, are not as efficient or effective for weight loss. You will typically need to exercise four times as long in these activities to receive the same benefit of running or using the elliptical. Since most of us are seriously time pressured, these exercises become less valuable for most of us.

**Swim, but only in fresh water.** Swimming is one of the best exercises on the planet, working all the major muscles, but it poses the challenge of exposing you to the large amounts of chlorine that are in most swimming pools. However, you still have the option of swimming in the lake, river or ocean depending on the temperature of the water.

**Try bicycling, but be aware of safety measures.** If you decide to bicycle for health, study all bicycle safety measures and be aware of the high risk for serious injury compared with other exercise options. Always, of course, wear your helmet.

**Stick with it!** The fact that we need to exercise is not news to anyone. For those who don't exercise, it's not a matter of understanding its benefits, but far more so, finding the motivation to start -- and stay -- on a program. The big breakthrough is that we now have techniques like [EFT](#), a form of psychological acupressure, that can facilitate our ability to start and successfully stick with a long-term exercise program. You can go to my [free EFT manual](#) to learn how to use this incredible tool.

Finally, it is also quite useful to map, plan and track your program to obtain long-term success; you can use [this printable exercise table](#) toward that end, or create your own chart.

#### **Further reading:**

- [Exercise Can Increase Your HDL](#)
- [Exercise Improves Brain Power](#)
- [Ellipticals Run Ovals Around Treadmills](#)

- [Exercise Good for Depression](#)

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