

What Are the Benefits of Sport on Health?

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You don't have to be a [health](#) expert to understand that people who engage in regular [exercise](#) not only feel better, perform better at work, but typically live longer as well. But what are the types of benefits one can expect from getting involved in a regular sport program and what are the best [sports](#) to get involved in?

According to many exercise physiologists, a complete exercise program is made up of not only aerobic exercise like running and swimming, but should also include a variety of sports that enhance aerobic endurance, flexibility and muscular strength.

Getting Started

If you're over the age of 40 or it's been a while since you've played a sport, start with a complete physical examination, including a comprehensive lipid profile of your blood to rule out any risks for cardiac disease. Conditions like hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol could be lurking in the background and you may not even be aware of them. A complete physical examination will help to identify these types of risk factors and identify the best way to deal with them.

If you have a family history of heart disease, your doctor may recommend that you have a "stress test" before engaging in a sports program. A stress test will help your physician determine the best approach to beginning a sports program and how much you can handle in the beginning.

Many fitness centers offer complete "fitness evaluation tests" that include aerobic fitness, flexibility, muscular strength and range of motion that will help you to identify which areas need the most work and how to go about getting started.

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise is any form of exercise that uses large muscle groups over a sustained period of time. According to the American College of Sports Medicine, adults should engage in at least 20 minutes of aerobic exercise at their "target heart rate," most days of the week to help manage their body weight, reduce their blood pressure and increase their HDL cholesterol. Individuals who would like to lose weight should exercise more frequently and for longer durations.

Good choices that combine aerobic exercise and sports include running, hiking, biking (both road and mountain), cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and many more.

Stretching and Maintaining Good Range of Motion

Stretching and maintaining good range of motion go hand in hand with all of the other parts of a complete sports program. Sports fitness activities that are particularly beneficial for improving flexibility include yoga, Pilates, tennis, fencing and other activities that require wide ranges of movement.

Before you engage in any activity that is likely to move your joints beyond their "comfortable" range of motion, be sure to take a few moments to warm up the joints using low intensity activity. For instance, before your first tennis match, take a brief walk for five to ten minutes to improve joint circulation.

Building Muscular Strength

Mention weight training and the first thing that most people think of is spending hours in the weight room using free weights. But, there are also a number of other ways to use gravity and your body weight to improve muscular strength. Many fitness clubs now feature "climbing walls" to simulate the thrill of rock climbing outdoors. Wall climbing is a great way to build complete muscular

strength in all of the major muscle groups including shoulders, arms, hands, legs, lower back and abdomen.

Competitive Fun

In addition to choosing sports that emphasize specific areas of fitness, don't forget to take time out for general recreation. While sports like golf may not induce high levels of aerobic fitness and muscular strength, they are entertaining, relaxing, competitive and fun.

Rest and Relaxation

One of the most important elements of a high quality health and fitness program (and often overlooked) is rest and relaxation. It takes the body time to recover from the daily stress and abuse that sports put on your joints and muscles.

Even athletes who train for super-competitive events, like marathons or Ironman races, incorporate adequate amounts of rest into their training regimen. Rest allows the tissues to heal, re-build and perform better.