

## **4 elements of a rounded routine**

**Want to achieve overall physical fitness? Make sure your fitness training routine covers the bases: aerobic fitness, muscular fitness, stretching and core stability.**

Whether you're an exercise novice taking the first steps toward fitness or a committed fitness fanatic hoping to optimize your results, a well-rounded fitness training program is essential. Base your exercise goals on the four primary elements of fitness.

### **1. Aerobic fitness**

Aerobic exercise is the cornerstone of most fitness training programs. Aerobic exercise causes you to breathe faster and more deeply, which maximizes the amount of oxygen in your blood. The better your aerobic fitness, the more efficiently your heart, lungs and blood vessels transport oxygen throughout your body — and the easier it is to complete routine physical tasks and rise to unexpected challenges, such as running to your car in the pouring rain.

So what counts? Any physical activity that uses large muscle groups and increases your heart rate. Try walking, jogging, biking, swimming, dancing, water aerobics — even gardening and housework. Aim for at least 30 to 60 minutes of aerobic exercise most days of the week, even if you need to break it into 10-minute spurts of activity.

### **2. Muscular fitness**

Muscular fitness is another key component of a fitness training program. Regular strength training can help you reduce your body fat, increase your lean muscle mass and burn calories more efficiently. Building muscle also protects your joints from injury and boosts your stamina. It might even help you get a better night's sleep.

Most fitness centers offer various resistance machines, free weights and other tools for strength training. But you don't need to invest in a gym membership or expensive equipment to reap the benefits of strength training. Hand-held weights or homemade weights — such as plastic soft drink bottles filled with water or sand — may work just as well. Resistance bands

are another inexpensive option. Your own body weight counts, too. Try push-ups, abdominal crunches and leg squats.

### **3. Stretching**

Most aerobic and strength training activities cause your muscles to contract and flex. For balance in your fitness training program, it's important to stretch those muscles, too. Stretching increases your flexibility, improves the range of motion of your joints, and promotes better posture and circulation. Regular stretching can even relieve stress and help prevent injury, especially if your muscles or joints are tight.

Set aside time to stretch after each workout, when your muscles are warm and receptive to stretching. If you don't exercise regularly, you might want to stretch at least three times a week to maintain flexibility. Activities such as yoga and tai chi promote flexibility, too.

### **4. Core stability**

The muscles in your abdomen, lower back and pelvis — known as your core muscles — support balance and stability. The final element of a well-rounded fitness training program? You guessed it. Strengthening your core muscles.

Abdominal crunches are a classic core exercise. You can also try tai chi, or do various core exercises with a fitness ball. Sitting on the ball with good posture is a good start. From there, you can try abdominal crunches and other core movements.

### **Cover all 4 elements**

Whether you create your own fitness training program or enlist the help of a personal trainer, make aerobic fitness, muscular fitness, stretching and core stability part of your overall exercise plan. Factoring in these four fitness elements can help you promote fitness for life.