

Become Your Own Personal Trainer - Factsheet

Regular physical activity is important for achieving and maintaining good health and fitness. It is also a key strategy for preventing illness and disease, and minimising the risk of injury.

Specific benefits of regular physical activity include:

- Lowering blood pressure
- Lowering cholesterol
- Reducing cardiovascular disease risk
- Preventing Type II diabetes
- Improving bone density
- Weight management
- Managing stress levels
- Getting better quality sleep
- Improving reaction time, balance and coordination
- Increasing mental awareness and cognitive thinking

One of the best ways to establish a regular physical activity pattern and to achieve these benefits of regular exercise is to follow a structured training program. A structured training program facilitates regular activity by scheduling particular exercise sessions on particular days, ensuring frequency and consistency of training. Another advantage of a training program is that it incorporates progression into training which means fitness can improve in a systematic way over time.

Exercise physiologists and some personal trainers are skilled at developing safe and progressive training programs. However, with some thought and planning it is easy to do it yourself.

SMART Goals

It is important to set goals prior to developing your training program. These goals should be SMART goals. That is, they should be: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime Framed. SMART goals will help you clearly set out what you are trying to achieve and how you are going to achieve it with your training program. Your SMART goals can then help to keep you focused and on track to achieving results. An example of a SMART goal is: *to complete three 30 minute run sessions per week, starting this Saturday and continuing for the next 3 months.*

Exercise Guidelines

The next step in developing your own training program is to try and schedule in 4-5 aerobic activity sessions and 2 strength training sessions per week. Research has shown that this number and mix of training sessions will provide the maximum health benefits.

Aerobic activities should include a combination of moderate and vigorous activities, while strength training should target major muscle groups. It is recommended that the aerobic sessions be of at least 30 minutes in duration although each session doesn't need to be done as one 30 minute block of exercise. Two 15 minute sessions or even three 10 minute sessions are just as effective. And with

the strength training sessions, it is recommended that 6-8 different exercises are chosen (upper and lower body) and that 2 sets of 8-10 repetitions of each exercise are done.

When planning these sessions, it is important to start at a level that suits your current level of fitness. It is always better to start easy and build into more demanding exercise, particularly if you don't currently exercise regularly.

Finally, an important key to maintaining a training program is to select activities you enjoy doing and which you will be motivated to continue.

Training Principles

After deciding on which aerobic activities and strength exercises you are going to do, the next part of developing your training program is to schedule those sessions in such a way that you get the most fitness benefit out of them. This is where the FITT principle comes into programming. FITT stands for:

Frequency – How many times per week?

Intensity – How hard?

Type – What type of activity?

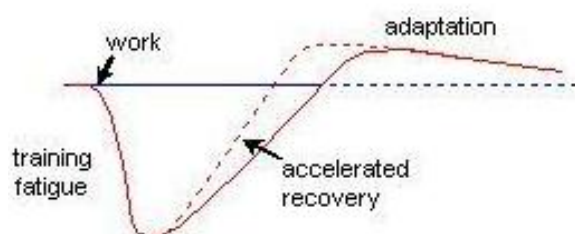
Time – How long does each session go for?

By altering any of the FITT variables, you can vary your training to make the most of the following training principles and in so doing improve your level of fitness:

Overload – The body adapts to new training loads, so plan a gradual progression in your training as the current load becomes easier to maintain.

Recovery – You need to ensure adequate recovery takes place between periods of overload. Recovery is essential for adaptation to occur and assists in the prevention of injury and overtraining.

Adaptation – The body adapts to fitness training and becomes fitter. Aerobic activity will lead to increased endurance and cardiovascular health, while strength training will result in improved strength and injury prevention.



Specificity – To become better at a particular activity, training needs to be specific to that activity. This is most important if you are trying to improve a particular aspect of your fitness. For example, if you want to run your first 5km race, you need to run in order to improve your running specific fitness.

Reversibility – Training is reversible. This means that if regular activity stops, de-conditioning occurs and a loss of fitness results. The rate of de-conditioning is dependent on your current level of fitness, training background and length of inactivity. It is easier to maintain your fitness than to have to improve your fitness again and again, so try and avoid extended periods of inactivity.

Training Program Design

By focussing on your SMART goal(s) and taking the training principles discussed above into consideration, you can then complete the design your own training program by following these steps:

- Write down your fixed commitments and available training times (AM, lunchtime and PM). Consider your lifestyle and be realistic;
- Plan your training in 4 week blocks (see Periodisation below)
- Schedule in your aerobic activity and strength sessions, making sure to spread them as evenly as possible throughout the week and avoid scheduling strength sessions on consecutive days.
- Include as much detail as possible for each session – e.g., type of activity/exercises, duration etc. This will add purpose and specificity to each session.

Periodisation

As discussed, you will get the greatest improvement in fitness if you program in periods of training overload and recovery so as to facilitate optimum adaptation. This means fluctuating your training week to week. For example:

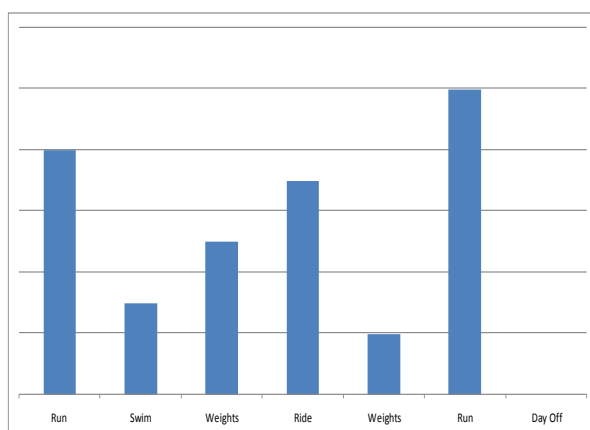
Week 1 – easy training load;

Week 2 – moderate training load;

Week 3 – heavy training load (overload);

Week 4 – recovery or very easy.

Similarly, at a day to day level, it is also important to fluctuate your training with easy, moderate, heavy and recovery days (see diagram below).



With SMART goal setting, and realistic and detailed scheduling, you can develop your own training program to achieve your fitness goals.