

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of January 2, 2012- New Year's Resolutions

It's the New Year and like so many millions of people, you decided to make a New Year's Resolution. Some of the most common promises people make to themselves this time of the year focus on their personal health. Typically that involves eating better, eating less and making a commitment to get into shape. Getting into shape? That means different things to different people. To some, it means getting rid of the excess mass that has been accumulating around the mid-section, thighs, or...well, we all get the idea. To others it means getting ready to try out for the Mr. or Ms. Universe contest. Still others are just looking to do something to improve their overall health. This last categorical desire is probably the most realistic way to start on your way towards a better you. After all, trying to look like Arnold Schwarzenegger from his pre-Governor days is a pretty hefty commitment; especially if one is not in their 20's. However, if one decides to start a regular exercise routine for the purpose of improving health, your obstacles are few and your goals quite obtainable. Once you get used to an established exercise routine, you can modify your goals – whether that means to train for the Iron Man event in Hawaii or to develop muscles that are the size of a Volkswagen, you have placed yourself in a direction that can help you achieve these dreams. Just remember when you first start out and decide to make those daily visits to the gym (and yes I mean daily visits), you need to start out slowly and cautiously. That's because, if it has been years since you last exercised regularly, you do not know what your body is capable or not capable of doing. This is why so many people get hurt during the first stages of their exercise commitment.

First things first - you start with a sedentary activity—answering a few short questions, that is. The PAR-Q (Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire) is the gold standard in fitness safety, used by doctors, trainers and health clubs the world over. Usually comprised of 5-7 questions, it can help rule out any underlying health concerns that could worsen with exercise. Answer yes or no to the following questions.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition *and* that you should only do physical activity recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest when you do physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance because of dizziness or do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem (for example, back, knee, or hip) that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs (for example, water pills) for your blood pressure or heart condition?
- Do you know of any other reason why you should not do physical activity?

Many injuries and setbacks occur because people don't take the time to get themselves well-equipped for their exercise. Therefore it is important that you do the following things:

- Wear shoes that fit well and are capable of providing the right kind of support for your activity and body type. If you're a runner or walker, get your feet and gait analyzed, and get the right type of shoe for you—this service is usually provided free by stores that specialize in running shoes. And of, course, don't wear sandals or go barefoot when exercising – especially if you are going to use cardio machines like a stair stepper or tread mill. This is a sure formula for increasing your risk for a serious injury.
- Wear appropriate exercise clothing. Fabrics that absorb sweat and remove it from your skin are best; loose-fitting, light weight cotton is also fine. Women should wear supportive sports bras. But no one

should EVER wear rubber or plastic suits or belts—these prevent your body from dissipating heat properly and can lead to serious health risks from overheating and dehydration.

- Use protective gear: helmets for biking or high-contact sports; knee and elbow pads for skating; reflective clothing and/or lights for evening exercise; sunglasses, sunscreen, and hats for outdoor exercise.
- While many people wear additional weights, such as ankle and wrist weights, exercise professionals frown on these as they can alter your normal movement patterns and increase the risk of injury. If you must add weight to your workout, a weighted vest helps distribute weight more evenly and allows you to move more freely and normally than weights attached to your extremities.

A certain amount of discomfort during exercise is normal and inevitable—after all, you are challenging your body to do more than it is accustomed to. And you can expect to have some sore muscles after a vigorous workout; often the soreness doesn't show up until a day or two later, especially with strength training. However, pain and other symptoms that occur *during* exercise can be warning signs that something is wrong. You should stop exercising right away if you:

- Have pain or pressure in the left or middle part of your chest, or in the left side of your neck, left shoulder or left arm
- Feel dizzy or sick
- Break out in a cold sweat
- Have muscle cramps
- Feel sharp pain in your joints, feet, ankles, or bones
- Notice that your heart starts racing or beating irregularly

If you start to experience these problems during high intensity aerobic exercise, it is best to immediately slow down. Allow your heart rate to drop gradually before stopping completely, since an abrupt stop can cause problems with blood circulation and fainting. However, in cases of severe and sudden pain, stop immediately, seek help, and follow up with your doctor.

If you do some of your exercise in the gym, whether on your own, in group classes, or with a personal trainer, there are some simple precautions you can take to keep yourself safe:

- Make sure the gym's trainers and instructors have been trained and certified by a reputable, national certification agency, such as ACE, AFAA, ACSM or NSCA. They should also hold current CPR and first aid certifications, so they can take action if an emergency occurs.
- Ask the gym staff about the emergency action plan (every gym should have one and the employees should know its details) and equipment they have on hand, such as a basic first aid kit and an AED (Automated external defibrillator).
- Tell every personal trainer and fitness instructor who works with you about your limitations or medical conditions. Well-trained instructors should ask about this at the beginning of any group class or during your first session and be able to offer modifications.
- If you don't understand the instructions given, or the proper way to do an exercise or use a piece of equipment, always ask first. Improper technique or body position is a major cause of injury.

As a final thought, remember that if it has been a long time since you exercised regularly, don't overdo it! Your heart is your most important muscle and if all you can do at first is a simple 20-minute cardio routine, that's fine. Getting your heart conditioned is most important. Once your heart is properly conditioned, the other exercises will follow.

ALWAYS BEAR IN MIND THAT YOUR OWN RESOLUTION TO SUCCEED IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANY OTHER.

Abraham Lincoln