The secret to a healthy life isn’t much of a secret at all: when we eat healthy and engage in regular physical activity, we feel and look better. Fitting regular exercise into your schedule may seem unlikely, but you can get on the path to a lifetime of physical fitness and activity in just six steps!
For many years now, health professionals have warned us of the serious and costly health complications tied directly to obesity. Obesity increases the risk of hypertension or high blood pressure, adverse lipid concentrations and type 2 diabetes, according to a NCHS Data Brief.

Yet Americans continue to pack on the pounds.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there was a dramatic increase in obesity in the U.S. for adults from 1990 to present. The statistics for obesity in our country today are daunting:

- 29.6% of children and adolescents ages 2-19 in the U.S. are obese
- 29.6% of Ohio adults reported themselves as obese in 2011
- 35.7% of U.S. adults are obese
Obesity tends to be most prevalent in individuals with low income and less education, especially when it comes to women and children: Women with college degrees are less likely to be obese compared with less educated women, and one out of every seven low-income, preschool-aged child is obese. However, higher income doesn’t guarantee healthier living. In fact, among non-Hispanic, black and Mexican-American men, those with higher incomes are more likely to be obese than those with low income, according to the CDC.

Regular physical activity, along with healthy eating, helps improve the overall health and fitness for both children and adults and reduces their risk for obesity and many chronic diseases.

According to the CDC, adults need to complete at least the following to achieve their weekly physical activity requirements:

- **Two hours and 30 minutes** of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (like brisk walking, water aerobics or riding a bike on level ground) and muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week
- **One hour and 15 minutes** of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity (like jogging, swimming laps or playing basketball) and muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week
- **An equivalent mix** of moderate and vigorous-intensity aerobic activity and muscle-strengthening activities on two or more days a week

Muscle-strengthening activities should work all major muscle groups, including legs, hips, back, chest, abdomen, shoulders and arms. You should do at least one set (8 to 12 repetitions) of a muscle-strengthening activity per muscle group. To gain even more benefits from your muscle-strengthening exercises, do at least two or three sets. You can also increase your moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic activity for even greater health benefits.

All this aerobic activity in one week seems like a big chunk of time, but you don’t need to complete all of your activity at once. In fact, it’s best to spread your activity out throughout the week. You can even break it up into smaller chunks of time during the day as long as you’re completing your activity at a moderate or vigorous level for at least 10 minutes at a time.

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Realize the Benefits of Getting Fit

Physical activity can make you feel better, give you more energy and perhaps even add years to your life (or at least more life to your years)! The benefits of getting fit can be realized by anyone, regardless of age, sex or physical ability.

Check out these top benefits of getting fit:

- **Weight Control**
  Exercise can help prevent weight gain or help maintain weight loss. The more intense your activity, the more calories burned, the more weight is lost.

- **Mood Improvement**
  According to the Mayo Clinic, physical activity stimulates various brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed. You may also feel better about your appearance and yourself when you exercise regularly.

- **Energy Boost**
  Regular physical activity can improve your muscle strength and boost your endurance, helping your cardiovascular system work more efficiently. When your heart and lungs work more efficiently, you have more energy to go about your daily activity.

- **Better Sleep**
  As long as you don’t exercise too close to bedtime, regular physical activity can help you fall asleep faster and deepen your sleep, according to the Mayo Clinic.

- **Improved Mental Wellness**
  According to the American Heart Association, regular physical activity can relieve tension, anxiety, depression and anger. Most people notice a “feel good sensation” in general well being over time.

- **Stronger Immunity**
  Being active boosts “good” cholesterol and decreases unhealthy triglycerides, according to the Mayo Clinic, strengthening your immune system and decreasing your risk of developing chronic and other diseases.

- **Prolonged Optimal Health**
  The body slowly loses its strength, stamina and ability to function well without regular physical activity. But according to the American Heart Association, for each hour of regular exercise you get, you’ll gain about two hours of additional life expectancy, even if you don’t begin regular exercise until middle age.
Ease Yourself into Exercising

Realizing the need to exercise and the benefits of exercise is easy; beginning a regular exercise routine can be another story, especially if it’s been many years since you’ve laced up your gym shoes. But it doesn’t have to be so difficult!

Follow these 7 tips for easing yourself into exercising:

**Get a fitness evaluation.**

Like with all aspects regarding your wellness, it’s imperative to consult your doctor before beginning a new fitness routine. The physicians at North Ohio Heart and Ohio Medical Group can advise you on ideal exercise programs specific to your age, sex, weight and more and provide medical clearance for men or women with major health risks. You can also consult with a personal trainer at your local gym if desired.

**Set fitness goals.**

Think carefully what it is you want to achieve with your regular exercise routine. Do you want to maintain your weight? Do you desire to run a 5K? Or do you simply want to be able to navigate the grocery store on a busy Sunday morning without getting winded? Ensure your goals are clear, measurable, time-bound and, most importantly, realistic. Setting goals too high is a sure-fire way to either become injured or discouraged when aggressive change doesn’t produced instant results.

**Design your fitness program.**

Create a balanced routine based on your goals and recommended time and activities (see Step 1: Understand Obesity Facts and Exercise Requirements). Be sure to include different activities to keep yourself from growing bored and your body from growing accustomed to the strain. Also, remember to allow time for your body to recover. Working out too long or with too much zeal is a quick way to become sore, tired and uninterested.
Assemble your equipment.

Regular exercise doesn’t require name brand athletic gear (though it’s certainly okay if you want to purchase new gear), but at the very least, you may need a new pair of gym shoes. Research online or go to your local shoe store and talk to the salesman about the type of activity you’re looking to engage in. Either source will be able to provide helpful information about the type of shoe you should purchase. Assembling your equipment also entails deciding if you want to purchase a gym membership, purchase your own home equipment or forgo modern equipment entirely.

Find your buddy.

Having a friend to work out with can make or break your regular exercise routine, especially if motivating yourself isn’t your forte. *Men’s Fitness* lists several reasons why working out with a friend is a good idea for either gender, including increased motivation, more fun while exercising and finally being able to afford that personal trainer.

Get started!

Once all of your initial planning is done, it’s time to get started! Remember to start slowly and build up gradually. Give yourself plenty of time to warm up and cool down with easy walking and gentle stretching. Be prepared to make changes if the exercise routine you planned becomes too monotonous or is more difficult than you anticipated. And stick with it! You can certainly be flexible with your routine on days you don’t feel well or if you become injured, but don’t give up!

Monitor your progress.

The *Mayo Clinic* advises you to retake your personal fitness assessment six weeks after you begin your program and again every three to six months. You can also weigh yourself if weight loss is a goal, just as long as it’s not too often. *FitWatch* suggests weighing yourself only one day per week to avoid panicking over daily fluctuations in weight. If you’re falling behind on reaching your goals, reevaluate your routine or speak with your doctor about other steps you can take to help achieve your desired results.
Explore Alternative Exercises for Your Busy Lifestyle

For many people, regular exercise just seems out of the question. Work, running errands, preparing meals, and chauffeuring kids around to and from friends’ homes and extra curricular activities monopolizes any time they’d like to dedicate to hitting the gym.

The good news is that physical activity isn’t limited to just running on the treadmill or exercising on the elliptical. Physical activity is anything that increases your heart rate and gets your body moving.

Check out these alternative ways to get your exercise in:

- **Walk your dog**
  This is a wonderful activity that not only improves your heart health but also your relationship with your beloved animal.

- **Go for a stroll**
  Hit the local high school track or even the roads around your home! You can even go for brisk walks inside the mall if it’s too hot or cold outside.

- **Park further away**
  Instead of stressing over finding the open parking spot closest to the doors of your destination, park your vehicle further away and get an extra jolt of exercise in.
Take the stairs  
Is your office located on the third floor? Opt to take the stairs instead of the elevator!

Exercise during leisure activities  
Do you have a favorite evening TV show you just can’t miss? Or do you enjoy reading for pleasure every evening? There’s no reason you can’t walk on a treadmill while partaking in your leisure activity of choice.

Walk and talk  
Take a leisurely stroll around your home any time you engage in a long conversation on the phone.

The Mayo Clinic even has tips for making the most of the workday for sedentary office workers:

Make the most of your commute by walking or biking. If you take the bus or subway, get off a few stops earlier than usual and walk the rest of the way. If you drive, park your car in a far space and take the stairs when you get inside.

Look for opportunities to stand. Stand while you’re talking on the phone or even ask your boss to invest in standing desks, which according to Forbes, have several benefits like better posture and increased core strength.

Take fitness breaks. Skip lounging in the kitchen with a coffee and go for a quick walk instead! If you’re granted a long lunch, why not hit the gym?

Trade your office chair for a fitness ball. You can improve balance and core muscle strength just by swapping your office chair for a fitness or stability ball.

Conduct meetings on the go. Do you have daily or weekly brainstorming meetings where everyone just sits around the conference room table for an hour? Why not have your group take laps inside your building or, if the weather cooperates, outside? Think of how the exercise will get the creative juices flowing!
Prevent Injury

Nothing derails a regular exercise routine quite like injury. Every year, about four million people in the U.S. visit emergency rooms for sports-related injuries. Just because your exercise routine doesn’t include partaking in organized sports doesn’t mean you can’t experience similar injuries, including ankle sprains, hamstring strain, wrist fracture and lower back pain.

There’s no guarantee you won’t sustain injuries while exercising, but taking preventative measures can reduce your risk significantly.

Here are four tips to preventing injury from Ohio Medical Group Sports Medicine Specialist Matthew S. Schaeffer, MD:

1. **Warm up** at least 10 minutes before you begin exercising. Start by walking or jogging for a few minutes, increasing the speed gradually. Then, stretch any muscles you will use extensively in your physical activity. For example, if you plan to jog, focus heavily on stretching your ankles, calves and thighs.

2. **Don’t overdo it.** If you’re just beginning an exercise program after being inactive for a few years, remember to start slow and gradually increase your intensity.

3. **Prevent Dehydration.** Muscle cells aren’t able to function properly when they do not receive enough water. To keep your body functioning at its peak during exercise, drink four to six ounces of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes during in addition to the recommended intake of six to eight glasses per day. Exercising outdoors in warm weather requires even more water intake.

4. **Use the right technique and equipment.** If you’re unsure how to use a fitness machine or if you’re attempting a new exercise that just doesn’t feel right, consult a qualified fitness instructor.
Stay Fit for Life

You’ve eased yourself into exercise, following all the tips to prevent injury and keep your routine exciting, and then it happens: You miss a day at the gym. One day turns into one week, one week turns into one month until finally you realize you need more caffeine in the morning to wake up and it’s growing increasingly difficult to carry the groceries from the car to the kitchen.

At one time or another, we’ve all experienced exercise relapse. Getting back into your exercise routine can seem impossible. The key to staying fit for life is to forgive relapses and jump back on the horse with new vigor.

If you ever find yourself relapsing from your regular exercise routine, read this guide from beginning to end, then remind yourself of how it feels to be fit and healthy. Examine and correct what caused your misstep when you relapsed, then get back into exercise, one step at a time.
Benefits for Our Patients

Online Appointments & Prescription Refills

As a patient, you can easily request appointments and fill your prescriptions online at your convenience 24 hours a day.

Same Day Appointments at our Ohio Medical Group Locations

We’ll schedule an appointment for an adult or pediatric primary care visit on the very same day you or your child needs immediate care.

Informative Healthy Lifestyle Blog

The informative blog on our website provides healthy lifestyle tips and information on how to improve overall heart health and well-being. Visit our blog>

This guide gives tips to getting fit and active, helping you achieve a lifetime of physical fitness and activity in just six steps. It was created using information from North Ohio Heart (NOH) and Ohio Medical Group (OMG) as well as the Mayo Clinic, the American Heart Association and other sources. While intended to help adults in crafting regular exercise routines, it should not be used as a replacement for your physician’s recommendations.

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