



10 Tips for Starting a Spring Fitness Program

1. Check with your doctor if you are starting a new exercise routine. This is especially important if you haven't exercised in more than two years, or have any underlying medical conditions.
2. Start slowly! (Doing about half of what you think you should do is probably a good way to start!) If you are starting a running program, run no more than three times per week. If you are walking, four to five times per week is OK. You can cross-train a couple other days if desired - combine biking, elliptical, swimming, weight training, etc. It is helpful to use a training diary to track your time or distances and make sure you don't do too much too soon.
3. Get the right equipment. It is important to get the correct shoes for running or walking. Generally, a running shoe will work best for either activity. Many "walking" shoes have a lower heel position that can create increased stress on your lower leg and lower back after sustained activity. There are also many more options for running shoes with regard to specific needs for your foot type and biomechanics. Department stores generally do not carry higher-level running shoes. The lower-level shoes do not provide the same levels of cushion, nor the support options, that are available in the upper-level shoes. Department store shoes are roughly \$40-\$60 while the upper-level shoes typically start around \$80 and are best fit by a specialty running shoe store. If your foot needs a specific type of support, it might not be available in a department store shoe selection where you are left on your own to decide what to buy.
4. Don't sweat the scale. If you are focusing your exercise for weight loss benefits, don't get on a scale until your exercise habit is well established -- at least three weeks. Also, the real weight loss benefits may not be realized for two to three months, so don't be discouraged and stay consistent.
5. Work out with a friend, or find a running / walking group. Working out with a partner can help you stay motivated.
6. Protect yourself from the sun. Sunscreen is important all of the time, and coming into the warmer seasons it is even more so. Use a sweat resistant sunscreen, especially during peak sun times -- between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
7. Set a goal. Training for a specific event can be highly motivating. Pick a run, a walk or a bike event and prepare for it. Be sure to track your progress. Both the journey to the event and the event itself are very rewarding and beneficial to your health.
8. Don't push through pain. If you have pain, it is recommended that you stop activity for at least two to three days. Icing over the painful area for 15-20 minutes, two to three times per day, can be helpful. If it resolves, start up again at half distance and see if it recurs. If it does, ask for advice. Pain that persists for more than a week should be evaluated. See a physical therapist or your doctor. Make sure they are motivated to help you return to your training.
9. Stretch! Flexibility and strengthening exercises can help prevent imbalances that occur with the repetitive and limited motion activity of running and walking. Stretches for your calves, hamstrings, thighs and hips are the most important ones to start with. Or, try a yoga class. This will incorporate flexibility and strengthening activity together to benefit your training.
10. Have Fun. Stick with your routine. As you get fit, it will become easier and more fun. This will help you continue for the long run (or long walk).