

## Getting into Shape

Spring and summer are just around the corner and for many it's time to get into shape. By "getting into shape", I mean losing fat and improving muscle tone and fitness level. There certainly are many ways and methods to change our bodies. However, the intelligent approach is often put aside for the "quick results with no exercise required" promises. These gimmicks are ill-advised and should be avoided. The wisdom behind the phrase, "use-it-or-lose-it" is true. And an even better phrase might be, "move-it-or-lose-it". The easiest way to get out of shape and lose fitness is to do nothing!

The smart person should choose reasonable, safe, effective, and efficient methods that can be maintained indefinitely to achieve their body-changing goals. Many will attempt their body-changing transformation by taking up running. The problem with this strategy is that for most, especially those carrying a few or more extra pounds, running is not an activity that is suited for them in their increased body mass state. I like to use the phrase, "get in shape to run, don't run to get into shape". Using this thought process will spare many the inevitable injuries that come to those that start running before they are prepared to safely do so.

So what is a person to do to begin their body-transformation process? Well, considering movement is essential to a healthy lifestyle, an activity like walking is a good start for most. It is generally well-tolerated, can be done almost anywhere, requires little equipment other than a pair of shoes, and will result in improved fitness. In situations where the weather is inclement or the person doesn't want to walk outside then I recommend walking up and down steps if they are available. Walking in a mall or shopping center is also a good place to work on fitness so long as the person doesn't stop too often to shop!

For those that want "quick" changes, I recommend performing activities and exercises that use as much muscle as possible and use the person's own body weight as a form of resistance. For example, if equipment is available, using a device like an elliptical trainer, where the person is bearing their entire body weight and using their upper as well as lower body, would use more muscle mass than a stationary bicycle, and for a given time spent exercising, would burn more

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calories and stimulate faster changes. If no equipment is available, simple old-fashioned calisthenics such as squat thrusts, squats, lunges, pushups, rowing movements, and so on are wonderful for improving fitness levels.

Another no-equipment-available option is to use a common item like a towel to create many upper body exercises that may be coordinated with lower body movements. The benefits of using a towel or other resilient item like a rope are that the person is in control of the motion, resistance – which comes from their own muscles, and speed of motion. I personally have used this method of training for many years with great success. It can be used with beginners as well as the advanced athlete.

Regardless of what methods you choose to use in your personal fitness quest, make sure you train based on the motto “safety first” and then gradually increase your efforts, giving your body time to change. There’s not much worse than working too hard too soon and hurting yourself... so whatever you do, train intelligently and be patient, otherwise you’ll end up as a patient!