

Personalize Your Fitness Plan: Write an Exercise Prescription

As an integrative chiropractor, I design flexible fitness routines to factor in variety, self-compassion and real-world considerations, along with personal needs and preferences. It's also something you can do for yourself with motivation and a few guidelines.

Motivate

There is a long list of reasons people reject fitness plans: no time, lack of confidence in the exercises, no convenient exercise facilities, too costly, too painful, embarrassing, too tiring and the list goes on. The personalized plan removes barriers—you choose exercises you can do, begin where you are and adjust as you go.

Need some motivation? Exercise generally leads to a longer and potentially healthier life, decreasing the risk for a range of cancers, obesity, diabetes and mood disorders such as depression and anxiety. Research also shows that exercise increases a sense of well-being and improves sleep function, brain function and cognition.

Customize

The prescription I suggest has three categories of exercises: cardiovascular, strength and flexibility. For each of these categories, you will also factor in frequency, intensity and duration.

With **cardiovascular**, you want an exercise you can do on a routine basis, such as brisk walking. It can be done often (3 days a week) with a low risk of injury. If walking isn't your thing, you can pick other types of cardiovascular exercise like riding a stationary bike, swimming or jogging. For cardio, your intensity is how many beats per minute you're going to maintain while doing your exercise. If you walk briskly for a mile and your heart rate goes to 110, write that down as your intensity. Over time, you will modify the intensity by walking faster to increase your heart rate.

(The easiest way to check your heart rate is to put your fingers on your carotid artery, count the beats for 30 seconds and multiply that number by two. The total is your heart rate.)

Strength could mean lifting free weights at home or using machines at a gym. If you're just beginning strength training, I would recommend starting with one day a week. For more experienced weightlifters, two days a week is adequate. When it comes to strength intensity, start with light weights and resistance. For duration, think about how many sets you're doing, how many repetitions in a set and the type of exercise (free weights, resistance bands, machines or body weight).

Flexibility includes exercises like stretching, yoga, qigong, tai chi or any other form of balance-based movement practice. Your flexibility frequency can be high, maybe every day, and your intensity should be pretty mellow. You will probably note the amount of time you hold a stretch or do a yoga pose for duration.

Modify

Put your prescription where you can see it—ideally, you're going to reference it on a regular basis. Every week, check in and tinker away. You don't want it to be static for very long. Instead, you want to be improving things and switching them up as time goes on.

An effective personal exercise prescription evolves with an individual's needs, motivations and barriers. The idea is to end up with a realistic and manageable prescription to guide fitness habits (with constant adjustments) for a lifetime.



Scott Larsen, D.C., provides holistic chiropractic care to patients of all ages. His practice emphasizes pain reduction and restoration of normal function using gentle chiropractic adjustments and related modalities. He also coaches patients toward a healthier lifestyle through improved posture, stretching, nutraceuticals and stress reduction.

An avid surfer, snowboarder and mountain biker, Scott helps patients of all fitness levels to find new ways to exercise in order to sustain good health, avoid injury and maximize joy.

To learn more about the Institute for Health & Healing or request an appointment, visit myhealthandhealing.org.