

# Fit For Summer

Spring is here along with its usual wonderful fluctuations in weather: Snow, sun, rain, sleet, and hail, and all in the same day. However, we are marching inexorably towards the warmth that comes with summer. Along with the warmth of summer comes an increase in outdoor physical activity for most people. Some examples of summer outdoor activities include cleaning out the garage, tending the garden, mowing the lawn, trimming the bushes, and planting flowers. Recreational and sporting activities include softball, biking, walking/hiking, water skiing, tennis, and golf. However, along with an increase in outdoor physical activity comes the risk of injury. The chance of sprains, strains, tears, fractures, repetitive stress injury, and other musculoskeletal injuries increase with physical activity. It is important to prepare the body for this increased physical activity to minimize and help prevent these musculoskeletal injuries.

When first starting physical activity, it is important to consider several factors. A proper warm-up is crucial in preparing the body for movement. A 5-10 minute warm-up such as walking or performing a less intense version of the activity you will be doing, is a good way to prepare the body for the activity. Muscles that have not been properly and sufficiently warmed up are less flexible, and thus are at increased risk for being sprained, strained, or torn. Also, consider the duration and intensity of physical activity. If you have been inactive for any significant period of time, your body has adapted to that inactivity, resulting in muscle atrophy, weakness, and/or tightness. Your body also needs time to adapt to the duration and intensity of physical activity. When beginning activity, you should pace yourself. Initially, keep the duration and intensity low, and then

gradually increase it over time. For example, start by walking 10 minutes a day for the first week, 15 minutes the next week, and 20 minutes the next week. This gradual progression will give your muscles a chance to adapt to the demands being placed upon them, and will decrease the chance of muscle injury and soreness. Next, consider a proper cool-down after physical activity. Just like a warm-up prepares the body for movement, a cool-down after activity prepares the body for decreased movement. A proper cool-down should be 5-10 minutes, and consist of a gradual decrease in the intensity of physical activity. Walking after jogging, or performing a less intense version of the activity are examples of cool-downs. A cool-down helps prevent blood from pooling or gathering in the legs, decreases the chance of muscle spasms and cramps, and helps return the muscles to their previously inactive state.

Stretching is a great way to help minimize and prevent muscle injuries. Stretching also reduces pain and soreness after physical activity, improves circulation, decreases muscle tension, and improves your ability to relax. Ideally, an individual should stretch 3-5x/week. A common misconception is that you should stretch before beginning physical activity. Actually, you should warm-up the body before physical activity, but stretching should occur either after the warm-up, or after the physical activity is finished. At this time the muscles are warm and flexible, and have less chance of being strained or torn. Also, a better stretch will be achieved when a muscle is warm and flexible. There are several important factors to consider when you stretch:

- \* hold the stretch position for 30 seconds and repeat 2-3x
- \* feel the muscle lengthen, but there should be no pain
- \* don't bounce

- \* don't hold your breath
- \* focus on relaxing the body through slow exhalations
- \* stretch all the major muscle groups of the body
  - i.e quadriceps/hamstrings/gluteals/calves/pectorals/latissimus dorsi

Summer is a great time to get out and enjoy a variety of physical activities. By using common sense and properly preparing your body, you can minimize your chances of muscle injury and stay healthy enough to enjoy the great outdoors all season long.