***Chapter 2***

Getting Started with a Walking/Jogging Program

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ften, the hardest thing to do in regards to beginning a new routine is simply starting the new routine. Old habits, insufficient motivation, support from others, etc. all play a role in whether or not you successfully begin a new exercise program. Success, in this case, is measured by your ability to consistently participate in the program to reap the fitness benefits associated with the activity.

This chapter will cover the basics of beginning a walking or jogging program in order to give you the best chance of being successful.

**Think Lifestyle**

Beginning a walking or jogging program can be a daunting task. To illustrate the concept of lifestyle, take a moment and consider your local gym. You may notice the attendance there in the month of January increases dramatically. Some estimates suggest as many as 80% of the registrants have stopped coming by the second week of February. Regardless, February and March approach, and attendance steadily declines eventually falling back to pre-January levels. Why does this occur? Why aren’t these new customers able to continue the routine for the entire year? One possible explanation: patrons are unsuccessful at viewing their routine as a lifestyle. The new year brings resolutions, goals and aspirations intended to reach an endpoint in a short period of time. The idea of returning to teen level weight and/or fitness drive the new behavior to the point of attempting to do too much too soon. While alluring and well-intended, the aspiration of a teen level physique is simply unrealistic for most adults. The physical demands and time constraints associated with the adult life stage must be taken in to consideration in order to be successful. If not, goals remain dreams (at least until the next year).

Both walking and jogging are simple activities that promote health and fitness, as previously discussed. Like any other lifestyle habit, optimal health and fitness do not occur over night. Time and more importantly, consistency, drive health and fitness outcomes. So, as you begin your program focus on what will make you consistent. The term lifestyle implies “habits, attitudes…standards…that together constitute the mode of living” or behavior that is imbedded into your daily and weekly routine. You’re not only trying to change physically, but rather modify your mental perceptions to promote long term health.1

The steps below should guide you through this process. Before getting to the point of beginning your program, you should understand the safety concerns associated with exercise.

**Safety First**

The physical challenges of beginning a new exercise program can place you at a greater risk of injury, illness or even death. Results from various studies suggest vigorous activity increases the risk of acute cardiac heart attacks and/or sudden cardiac death.2 While that may seem contradictory to the previously suggested benefits of walking and jogging, the long-term benefits of exercise unequivocally outweigh the risks during exercise. In active young adults (younger than 35), incidence of cardiac events are still rare, affecting 1 in 133,000 in men and 1 in 769,000 in women. In older individuals, 1 in 18,000 cardiac events occur. 3

Of those rare cardiac incidents that do occur, the presence of preexisting heart disease is the common thread, specifically atherosclerosis. **Atherosclerosis** causes arteries to harden and become clogged with plaque which can break apart, move to other parts of the body, and clog smaller blood vessels. In light of this, it is important to screen individuals for risk factors associated with heart disease before they begin an exercise program.

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends a thorough pre-screening to identify any risk of heart disease. The 7 major risk factors looking to be identified are: 4,5

1. Family history-if a cardiac event has occurred with your father or first-degree male relative before the age of 55, or mother or first-degree female relative before 65, there could be a genetic predisposition to heart disease.
2. Cigarette smoking- currently smoke, or have quit in the past 6 months
3. Hypertension-Blood pressure at or above 140 mm/HG systolic, 90 mm/Hg diastolic
4. Dyslipidemia-cholesterol levels that exceed recommendations (130 mg/dL, HDL below 40 mg/dL, or total cholesterol of greater than 200 mg/dL)
5. Impaired fasting glucose (diabetes)-blood sugar should be within the recommended ranges
6. Obesity-Body mass index of >30, waist circumference of >102 cm men, >88 cm women, or waist to hip ratio of >0.95 men, >0.86 women
7. Sedentary lifestyle-persons not meeting physical activity guidelines set by US Surgeon General’s Report

In addition to identifying your risk factors, you should also complete a Physical Activity Readiness Questionnaire (PAR-Q). The PAR-Q asks yes or no questions about symptoms associated with heart disease.

Based on your risk factors, and your responses in the PAR-Q, you are then placed into a risk category: low, moderate, high.

* Low risk persons are men younger than 45, women younger than 55 who answer no to all of the PAR-Q questions and have one or no risk factors. Although still a good idea, further screening such as getting physician’s approval isn’t necessary.
* Moderate risk persons are men of or greater than 45, women 55 OR those who have two or more risk factors. Because of the connection between cardiac disease, the seven risk factors, and risk during exercise, it is recommended you get physicians approval before beginning an exercise program.
* High risk persons answer yes to one or more of the questions on the PAR-Q. Physician’s approval is required before beginning a program.

Once you have determined you’re healthy enough to safely perform the demands of walking and jogging, you are now ready to move to the next steps in the process of beginning your program. Other safety concerns, such as where you walk and jog, how to be safe during your workout, and environmental conditions which will be addressed at a later time.

As you look at the remaining steps, a simple analogy may help to better conceptualize the process.

Imagine you are looking at a map because you are traveling to a particular location and you’d like to determine the best route for your journey. To get there, you must first determine your current location and then find the roads that will take you to your desired location. You must also consider roads that will present the least amount of resistance, provide a reasonably direct route, and don’t present any safety hazards along the way. Of course, planning the trip, while extremely important, isn’t the final step. You must now actually drive the route, monitor your automobile for fuel and/or malfunction, etc., and be prepared to reroute should obstacles arise.

Preparing yourself for a walking and jogging program and ultimately, trying to adapt a lifestyle approach to exercise, requires similar preparation. You will need to:

* Assess your current fitness (where are you on the map?)
* Set goals (what is your destination’s location?)
* Create a plan (what route will you choose?)
* Follow Through (start driving!)
* Adapt to current situations (be prepared for detours and/or reroutes!)

**Assess Your Condition**

In order to adequately prepare for starting your personal walking and jogging program, you will need to take a hard look at your current level of fitness. With multiple methods of assessing your fitness, you should select the one that best applies to you. Understand, however, that each walking/jogging assessment discussed here is attempting to estimate a key physiological marker, your maximal oxygen consumption. Your **maximal oxygen consumption**, **or VO2max**, measures your body’s ability to take in and utilize oxygen which directly correlates to your overall health and fitness. Obtaining a good estimate of your VO2max will provide you a one-time glance at your baseline fitness and health, provide a baseline measurement and help you gauge the efficacy of your fitness program in subsequent reassessments.

Some of the most common walking/jogging assessments used to estimate your VO2max include the 12-minute Walk, 1.5-mile Run-Walk Test, and 1-mile walk test. Unfortunately, these field assessments, although practical and inexpensive, only provide good estimations. For a more accurate assessment, you would need to perform a lab-based VO2max test using equipment that measures the volume of oxygen and carbon dioxide being moved in and out of the lungs during exercise. While more accurate, the expense and availability make it impractical for most. Unlike the lab test, the field assessments are basically cost free, user friendly and require very little expertise to conduct or perform. In addition, the key point of the assessment is measuring differences rather than absolute values and the field tests can accurately meet that objective.

In addition to walking and jogging assessments, other measurements can be helpful in measuring the success of your activities. Given the top reasons both males and females exercise, weight management and musculature, measuring body fat and weight along with **anthropometric** measurements will help determine if these areas are being affected by your walking and jogging routine.

**Set Goals**

Using the map analogy, now that you know your current location, you must determine your destination and the best route for getting there. You can start by setting goals.

In his bestselling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, author Stephen Covey suggests you should “Begin with the end in mind.”7 While Covey’s words may not be directly aimed at those seeking to complete a fitness program, his advice is useful to anyone making a significant lifestyle change. To be successful, you must develop a clear vision of your destination. Setting specific goals about how you want to feel and look, increases your chances of success. Without specific goals to measure the success of your efforts, you could possibly exceed your target and believe you failed.

The art of setting goals includes stating them in a clearly defined and measurable way. Consider exactly what you would like to accomplish, make certain your goals can be measured, and establish a reasonable timeframe in which to achieve your goals. Goals that meet these guidelines are referred to as S.M.A.R.T. goals.

* **S**pecific   
  Be as specific and detailed as possible in creating your goal.
* **M**easurable: If your goal cannot be measured, you will not know when you have successfully completed the goal.
* **A**ttainable  
  Consider whether you have the resources—such as time, family support, and financial means—to obtain your goal.
* **R**ealistic  
  While your goal should be challenging, it should not exceed reasonable expectations.
* **T**imeframe  
  Set a deadline to accomplish your goal.

A well-stated goal contains all of the SMART components listed above. Take a look at the well-stated example below:

I will improve my 12-minute distance by 10% within 2 months of the first assessment.

Note, all the ingredients of a well-stated goal are present. It is specific (improve 12-minute distance by 10%), measurable (10% improvement), attainable and realistic (the degree of improvement is reasonable in that time frame), and includes a time frame (a clear deadline of 2 months).

Less effective goals would be stated like this:

* I will run farther next time I assess my fitness.
* I want to jog faster.
* I will lose weight

And a common one:

* I will exercise 3 days a week at 60% max heart rate for 45 minutes per session for 2 months.

At a closer glance, none of these examples contain all of the ingredients of a well-stated goal. How can “faster” be measured? “Farther” is not specific enough, nor is “lose weight.” In the last example, this is not a goal at all. It is a plan to achieve a goal that has not been stated.

In the end, setting up well-stated goals will give you the best chance to convert good intentions into a healthier lifestyle.

To complete this step, write down 2-3 personal goals, stated in the SMART format, and put them in a place you will see them frequently.

**Create a Plan**

Once you know exactly what you want to achieve, generate a strategy that will help you reach your goals. As you strategize, your goal is to determine the frequency, the intensity, and the duration of your exercise sessions. While doing this, it is imperative to keep in mind a few key principles.

First, use your goals as the foundation for your program. If your goal is related to weight loss, this should drive the frequency, duration, and intensity of your daily workouts as these variables will influence your body’s use of fat for fuel and the number of calories burned. If you feel more interested in improving your speed, you will need to dedicate more workout time to achieving those results.

Another key principle is the importance of safety. The importance of designing a program that is safe and effective cannot be overstated. You can minimize any risks by relying on the expert recommendations of the US Department of Health and Human Services and the American College of Sports Medicine previously outlined and linked [here](#_Activity_Guidelines). These highly reputable organizations have gathered extensive amounts of research to discover the optimal frequency, intensity, and duration for exercise.

**Follow Through**

Once you have assessed your current fitness levels, set goals using the SMART guidelines, and created your personalized fitness plan, you should feel very proud of yourself! You have made significant progress toward achieving a healthier lifestyle. Now is when the “rubber hits the road.” Now that you have invested time and energy to develop a thoughtful, well-designed fitness program, it is time to reap the returns of good execution. The assessment, planning and preparation are really the hardest parts. Once you know what to do and how to do it, success is simply a matter of doing it.

Unfortunately, the ability to stick with a program proves difficult for most. To prevent getting derailed from your program, identify barriers that may prevent you from consistently following through. One of the most common challenges cited is a shortage of time. Work schedules, school, child care, and the activities of daily living can leave you with little time to pursue your goals. Make a list of the items that prevent you from regularly exercising and then analyze your schedule and find a time for squeezing in your exercise routine. Regardless of when you schedule your exercise, be certain to exercise consistently. Below are a few additional tips for achieving consistency in your daily fitness program:

* *Think long term; think lifestyle.*  
  The goal is to make exercise an activity you enjoy every day throughout your life. Cultivating a love for exercise will not occur overnight and developing your ideal routine will take time. Begin with this knowledge in mind and be patient as you work through the challenges of making exercise a consistent part of your life.
* *Start out slowly.*  
  Again, you are in this for the long haul. No need to overdo it in the first week. Plan for low intensity activity, for 2–3 days per week, and for realistic periods of time (20–30 minutes per session).
* *Begin with low Intensity/low volume.*  
  As fitness improves, you will want to gradually increase your efforts in terms of quantity and quality. You can do this with more time and frequency (called volume) or you can increase your intensity. In beginning a program, do not change both at the same time.
* *Keep track*.  
  Results from a program often occur slowly, subtly, and in a very anti-climactic way. As a result, participants become discouraged when immediate improvements are not visible. Keeping track of your consistent efforts, body composition, and fitness test results and seeing those subtle improvements will encourage and motivate you to continue.
* *Seek support*.  
  Look for friends, family members, clubs, or even virtual support using apps and other online forums. Support is imperative as it provides motivation, accountability, encouragement, and people who share a common interest, all of which are factors in your ability to persist in your fitness program.
* *Vary your activities from time to time*.  
  Your overall goals are to be consistent, build your fitness, and reap the health benefits associated with your fitness program. Varying your activities occasionally will prevent boredom. Instead of walking, play basketball or ride a bike. Vary the location of your workout by discovering new hiking trails, parks or walking paths.
* *Have fun*.  
  If you enjoy your activities, you are far more likely to achieve a lasting lifestyle change. While you cannot expect to be exhilarated about exercising every day, you should not dread your daily exercise regimen. If you do, consider varying your activities more, or finding a new routine you find more enjoyable.
* *Eat healthier*.  
  Nothing can be more frustrating than being consistent in your efforts without seeing the results on the scale. Eating a balanced diet will accelerate your results and allow you to feel more successful throughout your activities.

**Additional Safety Concerns**

As activity rates among Americans increase, specifically outdoor activities, safety concerns also rise. Unfortunately, the physical infrastructure of many American cities does not accommodate active lifestyles. Limited financial resources and de-emphasis on public health means local and state governments are unlikely to allocate funds for building roads with sidewalks, creating walking trails that surround parks, or adding bike lanes. In addition, time constraints and inconvenience make it challenging for participants to travel to areas where these amenities are available. As a result, exercise participants share roads and use isolated trails/pathways, inherently increasing the safety risks of being active.

A key principle in outdoor safety is to recognize and avoid the extremes. For example, avoid roads that experience heavy traffic or are extremely isolated. Avoid heavy populated areas as well as places where no one is around. Do not exercise in the early morning or late at night, during extreme cold or extreme heat. To minimize safety risks during these types of environmental conditions, do not use headphones that could prevent you from hearing well and remaining alert, do not exercise alone, prepare for adequate hydration in the heat, and use warm clothing in extreme cold to avoid frostbite. Extreme conditions require extra vigilance on your part.

A second key principle, whether outdoor or indoor, is to simply use common sense. While this caveat seems obvious, it gets ignored far too often. Always remember the purpose of your exercise is for enjoyment and improved health. If these objectives could be compromised by going for a run at noon in 95-degree heat, you should reconsider your plan. Before exercising in what could be risky conditions, ask yourself, “Is there a safer option available?”

Lastly, be aware of the terrain and weather conditions. Walking or jogging on trails is a wonderful way to enjoy nature, but exposed roots and rocks present a hazard for staying upright. Wet, muddy, or icy conditions are additional variables to avoid in order to complete your exercise session without an accident.

The document linked below from the University of Texas at San Antonio Police Department outlines specific safety tips that will help you stay safe in your activities.

[Safety Tips for Runners, Walkers, and Joggers](https://www.utsa.edu/utsapd/Crime_Prevention/Crime_prevention%20pdf/Safety%20Tips%20for%20Runners.pdf)

**Environmental Conditions**

When exercising outdoors, you must consider the elements and other factors that could place you at increased risk of injury or illness.

**Heat-Related Illness**

Heat-related illnesses, such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke, contributed to 7,233 deaths in the United States between 1999 and 2009. A 2013 report released by the Center for Disease Control stated that about 658 deaths from heat-related illnesses occurred every year which account for more deaths than tornadoes, hurricanes, and lightning combined. Of those deaths, most were male, older adults.7

The number one risk factor associated with heat-related illness is hydration, the starting point of all heat-related illness. Unfortunately, sweat loss can occur at a faster rate than a person can replace with fluids during exercise, especially at high intensities. Even when trying to hydrate, ingestion of large amounts of fluids during exercise can lead to stomach discomfort. What does this mean? Hydration must begin before exercise and must become part of your daily routine.

Several practical methods of monitoring hydration levels can assist in preventing illness. One simple method, while not full proof, is to simply monitor the color of your urine. In a hydrated state, urination will occur frequently (every 2–3 hours) and urine will have very little color. In a dehydrated state, urination occurs infrequently in low volume and will become more yellow in color.

Another simple method involves weighing yourself before and after a workout. This is a great way to see firsthand how much water weight is lost during an exercise session primarily as a result of sweat. Your goal is to maintain your pre- and post-body weight by drinking fluids during and after the workout to restore what was lost. This method, when combined with urine-monitoring, can provide a fairly accurate assessment of hydration levels.

The best preventative measure for maintaining a hydrated state is simply drinking plenty of water throughout the day. In previous years, recommendations for the amount of water to drink were a one size fits all of about 48–64 oz. per day, per person. In an effort to individualize hydration, experts now recommend basing fluid intake on individual size, gender, activity levels, and climate. Generally, half an ounce (fluid ounces) to 1 ounce per pound of body weight is recommended.8 For a 150-pound individual, this would mean 75–150 ounces of water per day! While there is still considerable debate over the exact amounts, no one disputes the importance of continually monitoring your hydration using one of the techniques described previously. Insufficient hydration leads to poor performance, poor health, and potentially serious illness.

It should be noted that electrolyte “sport” drinks, such as Gatorade and PowerAde, are often used to maintain hydration. While they can be effective, these types of drinks were designed to replace electrolytes (potassium, sodium, chloride) that are lost through sweating during physical activity. In addition, they contain carbohydrates to assist in maintaining energy during activities of long duration. If the activity planned is shorter than 60 minutes in duration, water is still the recommended fluid. For activities beyond 60 minutes, a sports drink should be used.

**Cold-Related Illnesses**

Much like extremely hot environmental conditions, cold weather can create conditions equally as dangerous if you fail to take proper precautions. To minimize the risk of cold-related illness, you must prevent the loss of too much body heat. The three major concerns related to cold-related illnesses are hypothermia, frost-nip, and frost bite.

As with heat-related illness, the objective of preventing cold-related illness is to maintain the proper body temperature of between 98.6 and 99.9 degrees Fahrenheit. If body temperature falls below 98.6 F, multiple symptoms may appear, indicating the need to take action. Some of those symptoms include:

* shivering
* numbness and stiffness of joints and appendages
* loss of dexterity and/or poor coordination
* peeling or blistering of skin, especially to exposed areas
* discoloration of the skin in the extremities

When walking or jogging in the cold, it is important to take the necessary steps to avoid problems that can arise from the environmental conditions.

* *Hydration is key*.  
  Cold air is usually drier air, which leads to moisture loss through breathing and evaporation. Staying hydrated is key in maintaining blood flow and regulating temperature.
* *Stay dry.*  
  Heat loss occurs 25x faster in water than on dry land. As such, keeping shoes and socks dry and clothing from accumulating too much sweat will allow for more effective body temperature regulation.
* *Dress appropriately.*Because of the movement involved, the body will produce heat during the exercise session. Therefore, the key point is to direct moisture (sweat) away from the skin. This is controlled most effectively by layering your clothing. A base layer of moisture-wicking fabric should be used against the skin while additional layers should be breathable. This will channel moisture away from the skin, and any additional layers of clothing, without it becoming saturated in sweat. If exercising on a windy day,

use clothing that protects from the  
wind and is adjustable so you can breathe.

* *Cover the extremities*.   
  Those parts of the body farthest away from the heart (toes, fingers, and ears) tend to get coldest first. Take the appropriate steps to cover those areas by using gloves, moisture-wicking socks, and a winter cap to cover your head.

**Key Terms**

**Atherosclerosis-**the progressive condition of fatty substances depositing on arterial walls, leading to the development of plaque and hardening of arterial walls.

**Maximal Oxygen Consumption (VO2 max)-**the maximum capacity to take in and utilize oxygen. A measurement of health and performance.

**Anthropometric measurements*****(anthropometry)-***the scientific measurement of the body. Done by using a simple tape measure to determine the circumference of large muscle groups, the waist, and hips.

**Test Your Knowledge**

1. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends a thorough pre-screening to identify any risk of heart disease before beginning an exercise program. Two of the 7 major risk factors for heart disease that are identified through the screening are:

a. Cigarette smoking and low blood pressure

b. Family history and a Body Mass Index between 18-23

c. Cigarette smoking and dyslipidemia

d. High blood pressure and HDL above 60 mg/dL

2. All of the following are true about VO2max EXCEPT:

a. VO2max measurements directly correlate with overall health

b. VO2max measurements directly correlate with overall fitness

c. VO2max measures your body’s ability to take in and utilize oxygen

d. VO2max can be accurately measured using a 2-mile run test

3. “I will improve my 12-minute distance by 50% within 2 weeks of the first assessment” does not meet the criteria of a SMART goal because:

a. It is not Realistic

b. It is not Measurable

c. It is not Specific

d. The goal meets all of the SMART goal criteria

4. One of the most common barriers cited for not following through with an exercise program is said to be:

a. Lack of places to exercise safely

b. Shortage of time

c. Fear of injury

d. Lack of support from peers or family

5. Staying hydrated during cold-weather exercise will help to maintain blood flow and regulate temperature.

True or False

Answer Key:

1. c.
2. d.
3. a.
4. b.
5. True

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