

## 4 Fun Ways to Enjoy a Balanced Fitness Routine

Just like balanced eating involves different food groups, a balanced fitness routine includes several interrelated components. Optimal fitness develops when you include some activities from all four components in your fitness routine. There is no need to do all activities every day of the week. In fact, rest is very important part of a balanced fitness routine. The goal for both children and adults is to include each fitness component at least a couple of times per week. The key to success, for all age groups, is to put **FUN** into every fitness activity. When you do physical activities that you enjoy, you are more likely to continue doing them.

### **Get your heart pumping with aerobic activities.**

When many people think 'exercise', they think of an aerobic activity, like running or biking. While both are excellent aerobic activities and some people really enjoy them, they are just two of the many ways to get your heart pumping. An aerobic activity is any activity that makes you breathe faster and more deeply, like brisk walking, playing basketball, dancing, or skipping down the sidewalk. Aim for a total of 30 to 60 minutes per day, at least 5 days out of the week.

### **Build up your muscles with strength activities.**

Strength training isn't just for muscle men with gigantic barbells anymore. Age-appropriate strength training is vital from our first steps through old age. Research shows that even people in their 90's can improve muscular fitness. There are many different ways to improve strength - at the gym or fitness center (free weights or machines) and at home (resistance bands or water bottles). Aim for some strengthening activities 2 to 3 times per week, with a rest day in between.

### **Keep yourself flexible with stretching activities.**

While aerobic and strength activities allow muscles to contract and flex, stretching activities provide the balance that muscles need to remain strong and flexible. Ideally, some stretching can be done every time you do some other activity, like a few arm stretches after lifting weights or some leg stretches after walking or running. Yoga and tai chi classes (or videos for home use) are excellent ways to enjoy the benefits of a full-body stretch.

### **Maintain your core stability with balance activities.**

Being able to maintain your body's balance is important at all ages, but becomes even more critical as we get older. Losing one's balance is one of the most frequent causes of injuries. Your core muscles - in your back, abdomen, and pelvis - provide the core stability for everyday balance. Like all muscles, your core muscles need strength, stretching, and practice to work properly. Yoga, Pilates, and stability balls activities are all excellent ways to practice balance and build a strong core.

**THINK SAFETY FIRST:** In all physical activities, safety should be your number one consideration. An accident or injury can sideline you quickly - and put the best laid fitness plans on hold. If you have any concerns about your ability to participate in an activity, always check with your health care provider first. If you are a novice at any activity, get some instruction from a certified trainer or coach before you get going. Need some free tips to get started on a 2008 plan? Visit the Mayo Clinic Web site for doctor-approved advice at [www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness-training/HQ01305](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness-training/HQ01305)