



5 Smart Ways to Get in Great Shape This Year

Everyone knows the bottom line: **Getting plenty of physical activity is basically one of the smartest moves you can make.** Getting fit lowers your risk of serious diseases and reduces your need for medications, while improving your performance at work or school and your outlook on life. Here's how to get the incredible benefits of fitness.

1. Get into fun aerobics with some friends.

Aerobics are any activities that get your heart pumping. Adults need at least 30-60 minutes a day for optimal health and well-being. How you get those minutes is up to you! You can get active in any way that you enjoy: walking, dancing, swimming, biking, or running, as well as team sports like basketball or volleyball. Just do it with friends - for the fun and the support!

2. Pump those muscles with some weight.

It's never too late to get stronger: People in their 80s and 90s can still build muscles! While weight training in a gym or with a personal trainer is great, you can also get strong with simple equipment and activities at home. Make a commitment to pump some weight 2-3 times a week with small hand weights, a resistance band, leg lifts, squats, or wall pushups.

3. Stretch flexibility in new directions.

Flexibility is one of the most essential, but often neglected, fitness basics. Flexibility is the key to injury prevention, as well as to feeling and looking young and energetic. You can get and stay flexible with simple stretches and twists, like on the floor while watching TV. Yoga, Tai Chi, and Pilates classes are also excellent ways to learn and practice daily flexibility.

4. Strengthen the core with balance activities.

While core strength seems like a recent buzz word, the basic concept has been fundamental to fitness forever. When the muscles in your abdomen and lower back are strong and flexible, you stand taller, look better, and have less back pain. While all physical activities contribute to a stronger core, balance activities - like those using a stability ball - are especially helpful.

5. Make play part of every exercise routine.

If you want to get into great shape, listen to your inner child and focus on play. If you hate to exercise, choose those activities that you really enjoy. If you hate to go to the gym, borrow a treadmill with fur (aka a dog) and explore your neighborhood parks and trails. If you have trouble being active alone, sign up with a buddy. Playtime is always more fun with friends!