

Don't Let These Exercise Myths Keep You From Moving

New exercise fads come and go, but exercise myths have staying power. "These can create barriers to getting active," says Bill Huff, MD. Here are a few of the most persistent exercise myths.

I need to see my doctor before start.

"The average, reasonably healthy person who's starting light to moderate activity usually doesn't need to see a doctor before beginning exercise unless they have concerns," says Dr. Huff. It is important to start new exercise slowly and build up gradually—don't go straight from your couch to a 10-mile run. If "exercise" sounds daunting think in terms of being active. Walk to work, take the stairs, chase after your child or dog, or swim.

You should check with a doctor first if you have a chronic condition, such as heart disease or diabetes, lung disease with difficulty breathing, osteoporosis, or cancer. But in most cases, regular activity is a health boost even for people with serious illnesses.

I need a sports drink after I exercise.

"The vast majority of people outside of endurance athletes do not need a sports drink," says Dr. Huff. "It's marketing hype." Few of us need the added sugar in these drinks. The best way to hydrate is to drink water 20-30 minutes before activity, during activity on very hot days, and after you've exercised.

I need to stretch to warm-up.

Static stretching doesn't prepare the muscle for work. A good warm-up would be walking before you run, doing gentle yoga, tai chi, or anything else that gets your blood flowing and your muscles loosened up, and dynamic stretching where range of motion is gained through movements. Some evidence suggests stretching after exercise may reduce muscle soreness.

No pain, no gain.

"Not true," says Dr. Huff. A little physical discomfort is fine, but shouldn't be the rule. As you increase duration or difficulty, you may feel sore during or after activity. If the soreness lasts more than 2-3 days, you've probably overstressed your body. The bottom line: You don't need to hurt to get healthy. Walk to work, take the stairs, chase after your child or dog, or swim. The most important thing for long-term health is consistency—ideally, activity such as walking, swimming, gardening, or throwing a Frisbee for at least 30 minutes, 5 times a week.

I'm too old to exercise.

You're never too old for some level of exercise and activity. If you overdo it, there's some risk but staying active offers protections that often outweigh those risks if done right. It can slow dementia, help protect bone mass, build muscle, and lower risk of disease.

And finally, there's the myth we all tell ourselves: I don't have time to exercise.

"Make time just as you do for other daily routines," says Dr. Huff. Schedule your workouts each week by putting them on a calendar just as any other appointment.

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