

# 5 TIPS FOR STARTING TO EXERCISE

From Kasey Meneely, DPT 

Regular exercise is one of the top recommended lifestyle changes to combat many ailments whether physical, mental, emotional, or social. Not only can regular exercise help to treat when something goes wrong, but it can prevent many conditions before they even occur. It is not always easy though! Here are some important considerations if you are looking to start an exercise routine to positively impact your health.

**Consult your primary care provider.** Your primary care provider knows your health history the best; they will be able to provide recommendations on not only how to appropriately start and monitor new exercise, but also provide useful suggestions that may guide what type of exercise would be most beneficial. If you've struggled with low bone density, weight lifting activities may be recommended. If they have concerns for your heart or lungs, then a progressive cardiovascular program may be best. If you have arthritis or jointpain, lower impact activities like yoga or swimming may be right for you.

**Start slow.** With any exercise program, it's important to start slowly and condition your body appropriately to avoid injuries. Couch to 5k doesn't happen overnight! Train in shorter durations, at lighter resistance, and lower intensity when starting out. It is also important to monitor your response to activity and take rest days between more challenging workouts.

**Cross train.** It is extremely helpful when starting and following through with any exercise program to mix up what activities you are doing. Not only can the same exercise get monotonous and less motivating, but it can lead to overuse injuries if you are repetitively training the same muscle groups with the same type of exercise. Try a variety of exercises! Strength train major muscle groups a few times a week, add stabilizing yoga or core workouts, or perform cardiovascular exercises like rowing, running, biking, or swimming on alternate days to reap the most benefit and decrease your risk for injury.

**Call in the experts.** There are a multitude of resources available to support any stage of your fitness journey. If you feel intimidated or don't know where to start at your local gym, ask the staff for an orientation to the equipment or for group class schedules for more guided exercise. Or, if you feel you need a more structured individual workout or critique on your form, a personal trainer can build your confidence in a routine and challenge you to meet your goals. You might also find with new exercise that pain and injuries can crop up. Did you know that most insurances offer "direct access" to physical therapy care in Iowa? This means you can be evaluated by a therapist for a sports injury or pain without having to first visit your primary care doctor; your therapist will then communicate with your physician for further authorization or treatment as needed to best treat your condition.

**Lastly, find exercise that you enjoy!** This is one of the most important considerations for lifelong health, if you don't enjoy it, you won't stick to it. Whether it's a workout buddy or group that keeps you motivated, a certain lifting routine that makes you feel strong, or a head-clearing run that is a mental and physical break, turning fitness into something that you look forward to is the key to making it a permanent part of your life. As someone who believes firmly in the lifelong pursuit of physical fitness, I hope that everyone reading can find exercise that they truly enjoy and make a positive impact on their overall health. Hope to see you out working up a sweat!

