

7 STEPS

Seven steps to safer exercise

Whether you exercise for fitness or fun, the last thing you want is to be sidelined with an injury or held back by sore muscles. Following these simple tips can help you play, train and compete safely so you're ready to hit the ground running again tomorrow and the next day.



1 Start sensibly

Being new to a particular form of exercise (or new to exercise in general) makes you more susceptible to injury and soreness. At the outset, train at low or medium intensity, especially if your new exercise regime uses muscle groups you haven't previously been working hard. Even more importantly, if you're over 40 years old, suffer from any health problems, are overweight, or haven't exercised for a while, see your health practitioner for a check-up before starting a new exercise program.

2 Warm up wisely

Watch any elite sportsperson prior to a competition and you'll notice that they always make time to warm up – so make sure you do too! Starting gently increases blood flow to your muscles, makes them more flexible, prepares your airways for aerobic activity and gets your body ready to exercise at peak intensity.

3 Pay attention to your posture

To improve strength and flexibility, good form is essential. On the other hand, strengthening your muscles using poor technique can exacerbate joint problems and postural imbalance, increasing your risk of injury. In many cases, improving your core strength (for example by doing Pilates) can help improve your posture during training, ultimately leading to improved performance in your chosen sport.

4 Avoid dehydration

Maintaining hydration is essential for general health and wellbeing, and becomes even more crucial if you're exercising intensely or in hot or humid conditions. In severe circumstances, dehydration can cause low blood pressure, delirium and unconsciousness, but even minor dehydration can lead to muscle cramps and reduce physical performance. As a basic rule of thumb, aim for two litres of water per day, over and above the water you drink during your exercise session.

5 Stretch

Recent research suggests stretching is beneficial, especially in terms of reducing injuries to the muscles and tendons, and over the long term may also enhance movement and technique. For example, when rugby league players stretched their hamstrings four times a week for five weeks, their running benefited from improved hip flexion and increased stride length.

6 Massage sore muscles

Muscle soreness that occurs 12-24 hours after exercise is particularly common in people who are unaccustomed to training and in those who engage in strength-training regimes (eg. weight lifting). Research suggests that massage after exercise might decrease myalgia (muscle pain) by as much as 25-50 per cent. Using a massage oil containing herbs such as arnica and birch may enhance this effect as these herbs have a long history of use as topical applications to reduce sore, tender joints and muscles. Birch is traditionally used topically to relieve muscular stiffness, while arnica contains anti-inflammatory compounds and is traditionally applied to sprains, strains and bruises. Regular use of topical arnica may be particularly beneficial for those who experience pain, stiffness and inflammation in osteoarthritic joints.

7 Support recovery internally with arnica

Arnica is also traditionally taken internally in the form of pilules, drops or spray to help reduce muscle soreness after exercise and aid the repair of minor injuries such as sprains, strains and bruising. These traditional indications are supported by clinical research in which marathon runners who took arnica before and after a race experienced less muscle soreness than those that took a placebo. 🌿

