



Things to remember when starting a fitness programme

By all accounts our bodies are temples, but if 2020 is anything to go by, many of us haven't treated them in that way. When it comes to taking up any kind of fitness programme, shadow boxing included, we need to remember that less is more and will have a better long term effect if we get into it safely, so we're not put off all over again by the aches and pains that may follow. Start slowly, build it up gradually and maintain at a level that suits you.. erase those months of inactivity from your memory and start again..

If it's any comfort, having been reasonably fit pre lockdown with brisk walks to and from the station, bus stop etc being my main form of exercise, I became so deconditioned while I worked from home and through such simple change in habits, that after the first lockdown lifted, the friend I was with was worried about how quickly I became breathless, but we all felt better when our other previously always fitter friend turned up in a similar state!

It's really important to go at your own pace and the regularly heard 'listen to your body' statement. If it's asking you to stop or you don't bend that way, chances are you're not meant to! Warming up and cooling down are so important as is keeping hydrated, cool and comfortable.

Also remember the 'can you talk?' rule.. if you are so breathless you can't, you're probably overdoing it..

So now it looks as if things are (hopefully) going to get back to some kind of new normal and stay that way, which means gym goers and swimmers can breathe a sigh of relief and go back to doing what they know best and enjoy. Then again there's also the other thing the government's chief medical officers told us to do before their lives became somewhat focussed elsewhere... remember the 150 minutes anyone? The lovely posters and how physical activity reduces risk of disease, obesity and falls... that's what I'm about..

If you're new to exercise or feel unsure, have a chat with your GP or practice nurse to make sure the type of exercise you want to do won't have detrimental effects. We want to be in this for the long haul, not fall at the first hurdle.. If you have underlying medical conditions such as asthma, uncontrolled diabetes, heart problems or musculo skeletal conditions check with your specialist as well.

The practical stuff

Don't hold your breath! Oxygen.. we need lots of oxygen.. by breathing steadily and deeply when you exercise you'll reap the benefits of oxygen being drawn into your body where it can do all its vital work and get to every cell in your body. What's not to love?

You'll benefit more if you exercise regularly- remember the 150 minutes again? It's fine to space them out. Doing one massive workout once a week means your body will only benefit at that time and will then need reminding the next time when you have to start all over again- the body's muscles have their own special memory, so the more regularly you exercise, the more benefit and less pain, more gain you will see.

Don't exercise if you're unwell- your body needs to recover and contrary to popular belief sweating it out isn't the way to go..

Avoid heavy meals and alcohol- for a couple of hours before embarking on your fitness session. The gut needs time to digest food, so give it that privilege rather than fighting it. Alcohol coursing through your bloodstream not a good idea either- I hope I don't need to spell that one out?

Do something you enjoy- even if it's just a brisk walk- we release the happy hormones- endorphins which is why we feel so much better after exercise even if it was really the last thing you wanted to do before- better for mental health as well as keeping blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugar, weight management under control... the list goes on..