

THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF EXERCISE

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Regular exercise has long been identified as an essential element of good health. Below is a brief summary regarding some of the basic characteristics of a balanced exercise program.

- **Cardiovascular** exercise improves the body's capacity to deliver oxygen to working muscles and organs. It is also a great way to help lose weight and control blood sugar levels. Swimming, interval training, cycling, jogging, and power walking are a few examples. It is recommended that an individual engage in a minimum of 15-30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise at least three times per week.
- **Resistance or strengthening** exercise enhances a muscle's ability to contract and do work. Strengthening exercises can vary from using fitness machines, simple dumbbells at home, rubber bands, or your own body weight. Improving or maintaining strength is important for preserving and building bone density. This can assist in preventing osteoporosis and decrease the risk of fracture from falls. Strengthening exercises can also boost metabolism and help keep a healthy body weight.
- **Flexibility** exercise helps to maintain a joint's complete range of motion. Stretching is the most familiar form of this type of exercise but it can also include activities such as Tai Chi, Pilates, and Yoga. Individuals with arthritic conditions can find this type of exercise extremely beneficial in helping them cope with stiff and painful joints. This type of exercise can also prepare the body for physical activity to help minimize the risk of injury.



The exercise components of **intensity**, **duration**, and **frequency** will influence how one progresses through an exercise program. For example, someone performing the cardiovascular portion of their exercise program of walking will find that after a short while they are able to walk quicker (**intensity**), longer (**duration**), and 5 days a week instead of 3 (**frequency**).



This same person also finds that they are progressing in their resistance program because they can now lift a heavier dumbbell (**intensity**), 10 times instead of 6 (**duration**), and 4 times a week instead of 2 (**frequency**). A simple explanation for all of this is that your body is learning through exercise how to adapt to these positive stresses being placed upon it. In order to keep progressing, the body must have a new stimulus placed on it every once in a while. Of course there

are limits to this, and sometimes switching the nature of the exercise you perform can be an adequate change in stimulus, resulting in continued health benefits from exercise.

A lifetime of regular **cardiovascular**, **resistance**, and **flexibility** exercise is ideal, but it is never too late to start! If you are over 35, have been sedentary for some time, or have a specific health condition or limitation, consult with a knowledgeable health care provider before beginning any new exercise program. For more information, visit www.nhwc.ca.

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