Becoming physically active is one of the most important steps you can take to improving your health and the quality of your life. In fact, it’s been estimated that a total lack of physical activity is as bad for your health as smoking a pack of cigarettes each day. But now that you’ve decided to get physically active, you’ll soon be experiencing the powerful benefits that exercise provides. By exercising, you’re improving the quality of your life, improving your overall health status, and reducing your risk for disease that may cut your life short.

But before you jump headfirst into making exercise a new part of your life, there are a few things that you should be aware of and pay attention to that will increase your chances of sticking with your new healthy lifestyle. There’s no doubt that making exercise a part of your life is a challenging undertaking, but having a firm grasp on the issues discussed in this brochure will help to ensure that your journey to a healthier you is safe, fun, and successful.
Preparing For Fitness: Five Steps For Success

Making physical activity a part of your daily life isn’t an easy undertaking. It takes dedication, will power, patience, and a lot of hard work. But believe it or not, it’s not as hard as it may first appear, and you might even be surprised to find that you enjoy your newfound lifestyle and the benefits it offers. But before we jump right in we’ll want to look at five steps that will help you stay safe, have fun, and be successful at getting fit. Let’s take a look at these five rules.

Step #1—Talk With Your Doc.
It’s important to talk with your healthcare provider to identify whether your plans for physical activity are safe and right for you. Factors to consider include your blood pressure, past health problems, and current health conditions like diabetes or arthritis. All of these factors can have an impact on your exercise routine, and your health. Talking with your doc can help you identify issues that could harm or injure you while exercising, as well as help you put together a plan to work around those issues safely.

Step #2—Identify Your Barriers.
Beginning an exercise routine, especially if you’ve never been all that physically active, may seem a little frightening at first. So, by identifying barriers, you can confront them head on and prevent them from getting in your way. Common barriers include a fear of discomfort, a lack of time, or risk of injury. Begin by examining what barriers have prevented you from being physically active in the past, and find ways to address them. Ask questions like, “Do I really not have time to exercise, or am I just not making time for exercise?”

Step #3—Choose Your Weapon.
Identify what you’re going to do to get physically active. Are you going to join a gym, start by walking, take on a new sport, or sign up for an aerobic or other fitness class? Start by taking an inventory of the things you like to do or maybe the things you’re good at. If you’re of the mindset that you only run when being chased, choosing an activity like jogging probably isn’t going to help you get and stay active. You’ll also want to give some consideration to any special equipment or clothing you may need for the activity of your choice. The proper gear may not only make your activity more enjoyable, but also, in some cases, help protect you from injury or discomfort.

Step #4—Set Your Goals.
Goals are actually one of the most important parts of your plan to get physically active. In many ways, they provide the roadmap for your success. Basically, you can’t get to where you want to go if you don’t know where you’re going. Begin by identifying what you want to accomplish by getting active. Maybe you want to lose 33 pounds, or maybe you want to fit into your favorite swimming suit by summer. Write down your goals and make them public. Doing so can help keep you motivated as you set out on your journey. Also, try setting mini goals that lead towards your main goal. If you want to lose 30 pounds in 4 months, set a goal of losing 8 pounds per month. And lastly, reward yourself each time you accomplish one of your goals—especially the big ones.

Step #5—Get Motivated.
Motivation will be a key factor in your success towards getting fit. Because exercising—at least at first—can be a little uncomfortable, it can be hard to stay motivated. Always keep in mind why you started exercising to begin with. What goals did you set? Keep in mind the benefits of your exercise program versus the consequences of giving up. Also, try to find someone who will support you—or—even better—exercise with you. Having someone to keep you on track when you feel like loafing may just make the difference between success and starting over next year.

Play it Safe: Start Slowly And Build
There’s probably nothing that can spoil your plans for getting physically fit faster, or more painfully, than getting injured. Before beginning any new activity, the most important thing to remember is to start slowly and build. Taking on too much, too fast dramatically increases the chances that you’ll get hurt in your quest to get well. Injury is a major reason many people never successfully reach their fitness goals. Starting slowly and building is the best way to play it safe, and perform better at your chosen activity.

Also, keep the following recommendations in mind as you begin your exercise routine.

1. Learn and understand the inherent risk of the activity you’re taking part in. What muscles are you more likely to pull, or what other ways could you be injured?
2. Use the recommended safety gear for your activity. Walking or jogging in the wrong shoes could be just as dangerous as playing ice hockey without a helmet.
3. Learn the proper technique for what you’re doing. While learning to walk properly is probably easier than learning to golf, understanding the basics involved in your activity will not only help you perform better, but also minimize the chances that you will get injured.
4. Always, always, always, listen to your body. No matter how strenuous or mild your chosen activity is, you should never experience pain! Pain is a sign that something is wrong and that you need to stop!

Preparing For Success

Stretching Your Way To Fitness: Dos and Don’ts
In addition to taking on too much to quickly, one of the most important things you can do to ensure that you’re successful in reaching your fitness goals is stretching. In fact, most sports and exercise injuries stem from not stretching and not warming up or cooling down properly. The bottom line: Stretching decreases that chance that you’ll get injured while being physically active.

And in addition to preventing injuries, stretching can also help you relieve back and muscle pain, can help you relax, can improve your posture, as well as increase your flexibility—a key component of being physically fit. But at the same time that stretching protects you from injuries; if done improperly, they can also be the cause of them. Keeping the following dos and don’ts in mind will help you stretch your way to fitness.

Dos
- Always give your muscles a good warm up before stretching them out. Try doing a few minutes of jumping jacks or walking to get them going.
- Breathe normally while stretching, and execute your stretches in a controlled way.
- Hold each stretch for between 20 and 40 seconds, and always perform stretches on both parts of your body equally.

Don’ts
- Never bounce during your stretches, it leads to injuries. Remember to stretch slowly and always be in control.
- If you’re injured a muscle in a previous activity, never stretch it unless told so by your healthcare provider.
- Stretching an injured muscle can prolong the injury.
- Never force your stretches. The more you stretch your muscles correctly the more flexible you will become. Stretching takes time, and by trying to force your stretches, you’ll increase the chances that you’ll get injured before you even get active.