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Introduction

It is a fact of modern life that most people do not exercise enough. This , allied to a diet which is heavy on sugar and fat laden fast foods, has led to a tidal wave of overweight and obese people in most Western countries, a tidal wave that is becoming increasingly difficult to turn back.

The problem is that, for most people, it is all too easy and convenient not to take exercise.

If you need the basic everyday groceries – even if it is only a carton of milk or a loaf of bread – it is quicker and more convenient to hop in the car and drive to the store than walk.

If you have to get to the third or fourth floor when you go to the office, it is easier (although not always quicker) to take the elevator as opposed to the stairs.

Yet many people are willing to pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars every year to be a member of a gymnasium or a fashionable fitness club in order to stay in shape.

That really does not make a great deal of sense, so this book is here to tell you that it does not have to be that way!

I am going to show you how to keep your money in your pocket and exercise the natural way, in a way that you don't even really notice.

Mankind managed to survive for thousands of years before anyone ever came up with the idea of 'working out at the gym'.

Sure, the life expectancy of modern man has increased significantly over the past couple of hundred years, but I suspect that this has little to do with the proliferation of fancy fitness clubs and expensive gymnasia.

The good news is that exercise can be taken naturally every day. With a little thought, it is not difficult to think of lots of opportunities for taking exercise without resorting to spending your hard earned cash on fitness club fees.

Let us start by looking at why exercise is so important in modern life.

Why is exercise important?

For most people, taking or indulging in exercise tends to be a reactive thing. That is, there has to be something that happens in their life that forces them to re-assess what they are doing. Something happens that makes them realize that they need to exercise more as a way of changing things that are going wrong in their life.

For instance, many people come to a point in their life where they finally acknowledge what they have, in reality, known for a long time, that they are overweight or obese. Perhaps more importantly, having finally accepted that their weight truly does represent a problem, they actually make a conscious decision to do something about it. So, they go on a weight loss diet of some description and, for most people, taking exercise is part of the weight loss process.

The saddest part is that, if such overweight or obese people had regulated their calorie intake and taken regular exercise beforehand, they would never have got to be in the state that necessitates such drastic action.

Other people might decide to begin exercising in an effort to slow down the aging process, often at a point in their lives where they finally understand that the arrival of the grim reaper is a lot nearer than they previously imagined.

This is a good thing, but it is also a classic case of 'better late than never'. The fact is that if people who take up exercise late in life had only done so twenty or thirty years earlier, their efforts to delay the inevitable would have been more effective.

There lies the point about exercise that many people ignore. Exercise should not be something that is done reactively, at a point where it has to be done in an attempt to reverse something that has already happened.

Exercise should be viewed as a proactive step that everyone can indulge in as one of the best preventative measures that they can take.

Increased physical activity will increase your heart rate as well as strengthening all of the muscles of your body. The heart is after all only a muscle and all muscles get stronger the more often they are worked. This resultant increase in heart activity will automatically speed up the blood circulation throughout your body, which will in turn deliver increased oxygen and nutrients to all your organs.

Regular exercise helps to increase the capacity of your lungs to absorb and utilize oxygen, is effective at reducing body fat, and lowers the levels of sugars and 'bad' cholesterol in the blood.

A program of regular exercise (if begun early enough) can help to slow down the inevitable aging process too.

Exercise will make the body stronger, and that equates to a body that is more resistant to illness and injury.

Taking regular exercise improves your overall quality of life as well. It makes you feel better physically and mentally.

It allows you to enjoy everything that you do much more than you previously did, because you have increased energy and vitality and that enables you to become more involved in whatever is going on.

These are all benefits that you can enjoy simply by starting taking exercise now, rather than waiting until you 'have to' for some reason or another.

So, am I advocating enrolling in one of the aforementioned 'fancy fitness clubs' or joining (and paying for) an expensive gym? Absolutely not!

There are dozens of opportunities to 'work out' during the course of the average day, and it really is only a question of making the correct choices, as you will see.

In some parts of the world, exercise is a natural part of life, because people in many places simply do not have the choices that those who live in the affluent countries of the West have.

For example, they do not eat burgers or fries every couple of days, because there is no fast food shop in the local mall (there is, in fact, no local mall).

They do not jump in the car to drive everywhere, because they do not have a car, and, as there are no buses either, they walk everywhere they go.

These people are forced to adopt a lifestyle that is in many ways healthier than that which most people in developed Western countries are used to, because they have no choice.

You do have a choice, and it is up to you to choose to live in a way that benefits you and your health, as opposed to harming it.

Part of that choice is taking regular exercise, and the sooner you start working your body a little more than you are at present, the better it will be.

Some sensible precautions

Exercise is good for you, but you need to make sure that you are in a condition to handle whatever you plan to do before you start.

Especially if you have not taken regular exercise for some time, it makes sense to get a thorough physical check-up before you begin with any exercise regime.

Tell your physician why you are having the check-up and what you plan to do, because they may have some advice or input that will help you rationalize your plans.

Understand also that the majority of people who have not exercised for some time should start off slowly, no matter what form of exercise they plan to follow.

Trying to do too much, too quickly could potentially be even more harmful than doing nothing at all, because the strain that it places on your body may be too much. The risk of injury or even worse is that much greater if you try to do things too quickly.

Another thing that you should do before beginning any regime of exercise is to acknowledge and accept your age and general physical condition. While we all like to believe that we can still do things that we could do in our teens and twenties, when you reach the second half of your life the truth is, you simply cannot do what you could at one time.

Accept that and try to avoid seeing it as a challenge that has to be overcome. Doing so is likely to lead you to try to do too much, and again, that can significantly increase the risk of injury.

Getting injured is one of the surest ways of stopping your exercise program dead in its tracks, so the increased risk inherent in doing too much, too soon is really not worth it.

Walking is a good start

When was the last time that you walked anywhere?

I am not talking here about hiking over mountains and trudging down into deep sided valleys. I am not referring to route marches either.

Think about it. When was the last time that you made the effort to walk, rather than jumping in the car or hopping on the subway train?

Walking is one of the easiest and most effective forms of aerobic exercise (exercise that increases your heart rate and therefore your blood circulation) that there is and it is something that is available to everyone at no cost.

In fact, walking will actually save you money, as well as helping to protect the world that we live in.

It saves money on your gasoline bill and reduces the amount of automobile generated pollutants that are pumped into the atmosphere that we all breathe, for example.

Taking a regular walk helps lower the risk of heart disease, osteoporosis and some cancers, as well as reducing your body fat and lowering your blood pressure. Unlike many other forms of exercise (e.g. jogging), walking is low impact and low intensity, so the risk of injury is minimized as well.

If you walk a couple of kilometers to the store instead of taking the bus or subway, then you do yourself some good as well as keeping a dollar or two in your pocket.

Walking is something that you can do anytime, anywhere and at absolutely zero cost. All that you need are a pair of comfortable shoes, preferably with cushioned soles to protect your feet and leather uppers (or ones made of other natural materials such as canvas) that will allow your feet to breathe. Many modern athletic shoes are constructed entirely of synthetic materials (generally, some form of plastic) and wearing them therefore leads to an unhealthy build up of sweat. This can lead to fungal conditions like athlete's foot, and having such a condition would seriously curtail your exercise program, so wearing the right shoes from the beginning is extremely important.

Perhaps you think that you have no time or opportunity to walk?

Let me tell you, that is just an excuse.

Everyone has the opportunity to walk if they are willing to make minor adjustments to the way they live their everyday life.

For example, if you take public transport to work every day – the subway train or bus – how about getting off a couple of stops early and walking the

rest of the way? It will add five minutes to your journey time, but if that can add a couple of extra years to your life, wouldn't you consider that to be a reasonable trade-off?

Have you ever thought of walking the children to school, rather than piling them into the back of the SUV and driving them the one kilometer that it takes? Walking it would not only be good for you, but it also teaches your children good habits from an early age, and there is research which indicates that children who are taught that walking is a good idea when they are young tend to continue doing it throughout their later life.

You protect your own health and that of your children for years to come with just one small change in your daily routine.

What about taking the dog for a walk in the morning and once again, last thing at night?

You don't have a dog? You don't need a pooch with a pedigree, so go to the local dog rescue center or shelter and find yourself a new four legged friend. Walking the dog in this manner might mean getting out of bed ten minutes earlier, but, as I suggested earlier, isn't that a reasonable trade off for a few extra years?

Sometimes, no matter how good your intentions are, you will have to use the car. If, for example, you work in a remote place without adequate public transport, or you need to go to the local mall for a full weeks' grocery shopping, then you probably have little choice but to drive.

In this situation, how about parking the car in the car park at the furthest point from your destination, and walking a few hundred meters?

If you are shopping, you are going to push a trolley with all of your groceries in it from the store to your car, so that adds a bit of extra effort (i.e. exercise) to what you are doing, and if you are working, then you are not going to be carrying anything heavy every day, so there is no excuse for not doing this!

How much walking should I do?

The answer to that question is, the more walking you can do, the better it is likely to be and the more your health will benefit.

At the beginning at least, take it reasonably easy with short ten minute periods of walking. Start each walk relatively slowly and gently, speeding up in the middle, and finish with a brief 'cool down' when you slow to a stroll.

Gradually (but not too gradually) build this up to walking at least 30 minutes a day at least five times a week, although it is not necessary that you exercise for the full thirty minutes in the one session. Three ten minute walks would, for example, be equally effective, so if that fits in better with your daily routine, then that is the way to go.

However, you should also appreciate that thirty minutes per day five times a week is the minimum time that you should aim to be walking, not your ultimate target. If you can manage an hour a day, that is even better!

If you are going to take your walking seriously (and remember that we are talking about your health and well-being here, so you should) then you might want to invest in a pedometer with which you can count the number of steps that you take every day.

Use this to establish how many steps you take in a normal 'non-walking' day, and then attempt to increase that number by at least 2,000 more steps as your initial target.

At a brisk walking pace, that represents a couple of extra kilometers a day, so it is a good start, but this should be considered to be a start only. Aim to increase this figure as much as you are able and your health will inevitably benefit from your efforts.

It is only natural that there will be times when you are less motivated than others to actually take your walk. This is when having a dog to exercise with can be a big motivator, or taking the kids out walking would serve a similar purpose.

Failing that, walking can be a very sociable form of exercise too, so how about trying to round up a group of friends or work colleagues to go walking together?

Some of those people are probably paying out hundreds of dollars in gym membership fees at this very moment, and if you can show them how they can get exactly the same exercise benefits for free, then they are more than likely to take you up on your challenge.

Forget the elevator

Many people, especially those who live in congested cities, work in office tower blocks. They use the elevator every day of their lives to get from the ground to whatever floor their office is on.

Still others use elevators in department stores, apartment towers and so on. Forget the elevator and take the stairs, because climbing stairs is one of the most effective forms of aerobic exercise that you can ever do.

This was clearly proven by a British study some ten years ago, when researchers discovered that for averagely sedentary people, just a few minutes climbing the stairs every day demonstrably improved their cardiovascular health.

This study was of particular interest because it supported the idea that taking several short spurts of exercise every day will make a significant difference to your health (hence the idea that you can walk for ten minutes a day three times, rather than just one thirty minute session).

The study required 20 college aged women who lived relatively sedentary lives to climb up 200 steps in less than two and a half minutes.

This represented a 'brisk but comfortable' pace according to the researchers conducting the study, but the first time that they did it, it nevertheless served to shoot the test subjects' heart rates up to around 90% of the anticipated maximum heart rate.

Despite this, the test subjects moved from making one climb per day during the first week to six per day in the sixth and seventh weeks.

This therefore meant that the test subjects were climbing stairs for around thirteen and a half minutes per day by the conclusion of the test, which (in case the point is not clear) represents less than a quarter of an hour of reasonably rigorous exercise every day.

By the end of this relatively modest (and completely free) exercise program, the women being tested were measurably fitter than they had been before. Every indicator had improved significantly. Their heart rate immediately after the climb had decreased markedly and their breathing had slowed as well, indicating that they needed to take in less oxygen to 'fuel' their efforts. On the other hand, their HDL levels had increased, which is a good thing, because high-density lipoprotein is also sometimes known as 'good' cholesterol. High levels of HDL in the blood seem to play a role in reducing the risk of heart attack, while low levels seem to do the opposite by increasing the risk of heart disease.

It is clear just how effective climbing the stairs can be as exercise, and it is even more so if you take the stairs that you are climbing two at a time.

This significantly increases the work that your leg muscles have to do, and that in itself increases the aerobic effects of your exercise by a noticeable degree.

This all goes to prove one thing.

You do not have to exercise for hours at a time to enjoy the benefits that a 'work-out' will bring. Less than 15 minutes of stair climbing a day will improve your overall aerobic health significantly, and will cost you nothing at all.

So, the next time you go to the office or the department store and feel tempted to get into a packed, hot and sweaty elevator, think about it for a moment.

Does that really seem like a better option than giving your whole body a good workout?

Working out in the house and garden

In the final analysis, exercise is nothing more than making your body work, burning energy using your muscles in order to achieve certain objectives that you set yourself.

In times gone by, when physical labor was much more common and important, man did not really need to worry about what is essentially an artificial requirement as a way of burning off energy.

Nowadays, the general Western lifestyle involves very little work-based physical labor, hence the need to think of ways to exercise.

Running a house and home does require work and effort, however, and so, whether you realize it or not, you are exercising every time you attempt any kind of task around the house.

For example, many women would find using the vacuum cleaner and dusting the house to be a tedious and tiresome chore. Cleaning the windows, ironing and doing the washing up would probably not come high on the list of enjoyable pastimes either!

Yet all these activities represent exercise that you do not even know you are doing, as evidenced by the fact that 15 minutes of vacuuming and dusting will burn an extra 40 kilocalories for a 40 year old woman who weighs 78 kilos and is 165 centimeters tall.

That is not a massive amount, but it does indicate that work is being done, and therefore exercise of a sort is being taken, even without realizing it.

Mowing the lawn, digging in the garden and pulling up the weeds will have a similarly beneficial effect, with fifteen minutes of doing this kind of activity burning off over fifty calories for the same lady.

Given that 'gardening' is an activity that many people enjoy and spend many hours involved in, there is the potential here for a serious work-out. I would suspect that most people would never consider this to be exercise, so that makes it far easier to do.

Is the car dirty? If so, forget the idea of taking it to the car wash, as hand washing it yourself has many benefits. Not only will you save the money that you would otherwise have spent on the car wash and do your bit to help the environment, you also get to stretch – you have to reach over the car roof – bend and work your muscles. These are muscles that you generally don't use if you work in a sedentary office environment.

In the case of washing the car, even going at a nice, gentle pace – it is not a race, after all – you will still be burning 150 kilocalories per hour.

Do you have kids, or does a family member who lives relatively nearby have a family? Do them a favor by walking the kids to the park for a gentle game of whatever takes your fancy – soccer, baseball, cricket, tennis - it really does not matter a great deal what sport it is.

The point is that it is good for all of you on both a physical and a spiritual level, it costs nothing and it will give you a great appetite into the bargain.

Getting there even quicker

Perhaps walking is not for you, so here is an alternative.

The next time that you jump in the car, point it at the bicycle shop and buy yourself a bike.

As a method of getting from point A to point B, cycling has almost everything going for it, and very few downsides.

For a start, cycling is terrific exercise, as well as being challenging, sociable and a whole heap of fun.

It is environmentally friendly – there are no pollutants emitted when you use pedal power – it uses all of the major muscle groups in the lower half of the body, and it gives your heart an excellent work out too.

For the many people who cannot do other sports like jogging because of the impact and pressure such a sport places on their joints, cycling is ideal. Because the bicycle supports most of the weight of your body, the impact on your joints is significantly reduced while you are on your bike, so cycling is something that almost anyone can do.

It burns calories and helps to reduce the fat levels in your body too, so if you are interested in losing weight while enjoying yourself, cycling would definitely be a sport to consider.

Another advantage of cycling is that most of us can already do it, so there is no additional special training required. This can be an advantage compared to other forms of exercise where training is needed, because the very idea of going through a training program might put you off getting involved in the first place. However, once you know how to ride a bike, it is a case of, once learned, never forgotten.

If you want to take up cycling, the first piece of advice is that, as with all forms of exercise, you should start off slowly, especially if you have done literally no exercise in the recent past (and that proviso applies to a large number of people!)

The next thing you need to do is decide what kind of bike you want. There are many different types available, such as road racing bikes, touring bikes and mountain bikes.

What do you plan to do on your bike, and where do you want to cycle? Answer that question, and that will point you in the direction of the type of bicycle that is best for you.

Not everyone has access to the same facilities and resources or will use their bicycles for the same purposes, because these factors vary country to country and sometimes area to area.

For example, not everyone cycles on the roads, because one of the few downsides of cycling is that it can be quite dangerous to do so in many places, because the standard of car driving and drivers varies so much. In some countries (the UK is a great example) there are an increasing number of cycle paths in some of the most beautiful areas of the countryside, and so you might decide to cycle off-road if you have access to such resources and facilities. This would naturally point you in the direction of a mountain bike rather than a road racing machine.

In Japan, it is a common early morning sight to see mother taking two kindergarten aged kids to the school on her bicycle! In this situation, a touring bike is the machine of choice.

Everybody will therefore choose their bike according to their specific needs, so try to establish what yours are before you invest in a cycle.

Don't be too proud to have a look at second hand shops when you are searching for a bike either. You will find some surprising bargains, and (as an avid second hand shop browser myself) it is amazing that almost every such shop that I have ever visited seems to have bikes almost permanently in stock! Also, try online resources like [Overstock](#), where new bicycles can be bought at factory clearance prices, as well as auction sites like [eBay](#).

Once you have decided to go cycling, then you need to invest in some basic equipment such as an approved safety helmet and suitable lights for your machine (both front and back).

Carrying a basic toolkit and a spare inner tube (which you should know how to change) with you is a good idea, and wearing bright and reflective clothing will help you to stay safe, no matter where you are using your bike. At first, stick to cycling on reasonably flat terrain until you have built up some stamina and resistance, and be prepared for very stiff legs the day after your first couple of rides. That tells you that you are working muscles that have not been used for some time, so it is a good thing although it will not feel like it at the time!

Once you have built up from this starting point, then start to include hills and inclines on your chosen cycle routes, as this will increase the work that you have to do while pedaling, and that increases the aerobic benefits of your cycling workout considerably.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, cycling can be a very sociable pastime, and if you want to enjoy your cycling more, why not join a local cycling club? There are plenty of online resources where information about such groups can be found online, such as [Cycling England](#), [Bicycle Tours USA](#) and [Cycling News](#).

Then there are sites that give lots of general guidance and cycling help such as the bicycling page of About.com and Why Cycle, which is a UK based site that is full of good advice and ideas that can be used when cycling anywhere.

Swim like a fish!

Another excellent low impact sport that almost anyone can take up is swimming.

Swimming is a great exercise that puts minimal stress on your body while working all of the major muscle groups throughout your whole body. Because the weight of your body is always fully supported while by the water while you are swimming, it is an exercise form that has literally no impact on your joints, so it is pretty much ideal for anyone.

It is a sport that requires only the most basic of equipment – a swimming costume (obviously!) plus goggles to improve your underwater vision and protect your eyes. Some people also prefer to use ear plugs while swimming (especially those who are susceptible to ear infections) although this is not strictly necessary.

Swimming is a superb all-round aerobic exercise, as it works every muscle in your body. The more swimming 'strokes' (e.g. breast stroke, back stroke, etc) you know, the more benefit you will get from swimming. This is because the different actions called for by each stroke naturally call upon different muscle groups for their successful application.

To get the full benefits of swimming you need to be able to swim, but it is never too late to start learning.

Most local swimming pools offer lessons for everyone from the youngest babies right up to adults, so it should not be too difficult to find a place where you can learn, and do not be embarrassed about joining the class.

You will certainly not be alone, although, if you are the type who might be shy about this kind of thing, then it should be possible to receive private tuition.

Make an effort to set aside a time every week when you can go swimming, and go with friends or (even better) your kids, as this will increase the fun of what you are doing considerably. The more fun it is, the less it will seem like real exercise.

As always, start off slowly, because, even though swimming is the gentlest of sports in terms of the negative 'shock' impact that it will have on your body (there is none) it is still strenuous. Your heart will be getting a serious workout when you are swimming, although you will probably be unaware of the fact, so do not try to do too much too quickly.

Once you have the basics in place – you can at least swim - then in order to get the maximum benefits from your new found ability, you should consider putting some kind of plan in place.

Otherwise, it is far too easy to get into a rut, doing the same number of lengths of the pool every day, and that might become tedious pretty quickly. When it does, you might start to lose interest, go to the pool less and less and it is not long before you stop going completely. And then you are back to square one, not taking any exercise.

Here is an outline plan for getting the maximum exercise benefits from swimming. This plan will seriously increase your fitness levels over two four week periods. Each of these four weeks is made up of three weeks of active swim training followed by one week of recovery and relaxation.

If that immediately sounds scary or worrying, do not be alarmed. This is not a program for those who are planning to become Olympic class swimmers! However, it is designed to be a program that will bring noticeable increases in fitness levels as quickly as possible, so, if that is the primary objective of taking exercise, then this is ideal for you.

The basics of this plan are essentially the same however many times you will be swimming, as are the objectives. What you are going to do is build up your fitness levels while learning better swimming techniques, so that you swim more efficiently.

This is important, because getting stronger while continuing to apply poor technique is not really going to help you. While the primary objective is to get fitter through exercise, improving your swimming abilities and skills is also a focal point of this plan.

In practical terms, technique and fitness go hand in hand, in that you cannot maximize one without having some focus on the other. On the other hand, it is pretty well impossible to focus on both at the same time, and that can lead to frustration and a feeling that you are not improving or getting anywhere.

So, this program mixes both swimming skills development and exercise, but not at the same time.

It is a training plan that is primarily focused on satisfying your general need to improve overall fitness levels, but it is still a training plan that is supremely adaptable. In other words, if your long term objective or goal goes beyond merely getting a little fitter, then you can modify this plan to suit your specific requirements.

For example, if you are looking for nothing more than a good aerobic workout, then this plan will work for you pretty much as it is, as running through the plan just once will noticeably increase your fitness levels.

If you then want to take your fitness to the next level, simply repeat the program, and keep doing so until you reach the point where you are happy

with your condition. It is then just a case of maintaining that condition with regular swim sessions.

Here is how it works:

This is a systematic plan, so you need to have a pencil and paper to write things down. There are also some calculations needed, so a calculator might be handy as well. Alternatively, write everything on your computer in a Word document, and use the in-built calculator too.

In the first week of four, each workout session should be 45 minutes in length. Of these, spend the first 9 minutes warming up with some gentle stretching pool side, followed by some moderately paced swimming. Spend the next nine minutes focusing on your [swimming technique](#), followed by twenty two minutes of your 'main' fitness training period. In this period, swim fast for thirty seconds, followed by 30 seconds at medium pace, another fast thirty and then thirty seconds of rest. This is repeated until the period is up. Finally, there is a five minute cool down period of gentle swimming.

Over the next three weeks, increase the 'main' fitness training period by between 5 & 10% per week. This is not at the expense of any of the other sessions, so your total pool time should increase over the weeks.

Decide how many swimming sessions you can realistically fit in per week, and stick to that plan. Be as consistent as you can, so if you do five sessions in the first week, try to do the same (or as near as you can) every week. Also, try to increase you 'main' training period time every session if possible. If, for example you are planning a total increase over the week of 10% and you have five sessions penciled in, start with a 5% increase, then 6% next session, 7% the next and so on.

Even at the end of the total eight week cycle, you should not be swimming any more than 75 minutes per session in total, and I would not recommend that you increase the main training by any more than 10% in any given week. A target increase of between five and ten minutes per week of 'main' training is a good goal.

Make sure that you complete every 'section' of each workout session, and be sure to rest for up to a minute between each 'section' of the session.

In each section of your training sessions, do everything as many times as you can, so that none of your training time is wasted.

Remember that this plan is based on three weeks of active training, followed by a week of rest, then another three weeks of training and a week of rest. Make sure that when you start every new three week training period, you do so from the point that you finished the last three week program. If, for

instance, you finished your last three week stint with a main training program time of 40 minutes, that is the point that you begin from. You do NOT go right back to the start again, and, of course, this is still subject to the maximum of 75 minutes per session in total.

This program will undoubtedly improve your fitness levels, simply because you are working out so regularly.

In terms of technique, however, improvements may not be quite as easy to recognize by yourself, so it is a good idea to request the help of others who can give you an unbiased assessment of how much you have improved, and what you still need to do in technical terms.

If you have a friend who is a strong swimmer, or perhaps someone who is a recognized expert such as a lifeguard, they would be a good person to ask for help.

Failing that, your local pool may have a swimming coach attached and if that is that case, you could perhaps book a few sessions of professional training as a way of identifying and then 'ironing out' any technical flaws or weak spots.

Remember that the idea of improving your technique is not to make you an international class swimmer! However, without good technique you will not get the maximum benefits in terms of fitness either, so do not neglect the technical side of swimming.

Skip to be fit

Skipping is another excellent form of aerobic exercise that you can do literally anytime, anywhere.

It helps to improve both your heart and lungs, as well as improving your flexibility, co-ordination and of course your fitness.

Skipping may at first seem like it will be an easy option but you might find that it can be a lot tougher than you think if you decide to keep skipping for any length of time. Remember that boxers use skipping as an integral part of their training programs between matches, and they are not generally known for doing things the easy way, so that you should tell you how effective skipping is as a form of exercise work-out.

Skipping also represents a pretty high intensity workout, as indicated by the fact that twenty minutes of skipping will burn off 250 kilocalories of energy. It is great for helping to shape and tone the lower part of the body, especially the calves, hips, thighs and bottom.

In fact, skipping is directly comparable to jogging at 12kph in terms of the energy that is burned, but because it is an activity that carries a lower impact level than running, it is far gentler on the joints and is less likely to cause injury than pounding the sidewalks or using a running machine.

Nevertheless, skipping does obviously entail jumping up and down, and there is therefore some impact to be considered. Some basic sensible precautions are accordingly necessary.

For example, you should make sure that you have a rope that is of the right length for your height.

In order to test this, stand on rope at the middle point and lift the handles at either end. If the rope is the right length, then the point where rope and handles join should be on a level with your armpits.

If it is too short, then you need a longer rope. If, however, it is too long, all you need to do is artificially shorten it by tying knots in the rope as near to the handles as you can manage. This is a particularly good idea if more than one person will use the same rope.

When you are skipping, you can also reduce the potentially adverse effects of the 'landing' impact by wearing cushioned soled shoes, and trying to skip on surfaces that have some 'give' in them.

For example, skipping on a wooden floor (that has some 'flex' in it) will be better than skipping on a tiled floor or concrete.

For most of us, the last time we skipped was probably a good many years ago, so, in case you have forgotten, here are the basics of how to skip for maximum exercise benefits:

- Stand upright but relax while doing so, and try to breathe normally;
- Keep your elbows level with your waist, but your arms should be extended sideways at an angle of approximately 90 degrees to the body;
- You need to perfect a circular wrist motion in order to turn the skipping rope;
- Hold the rope handles loosely, and use your thumbs and index fingers as a means of controlling the rope;
- Jump from the balls of your feet and try to cushion your landing (which should be back on the balls of your feet) by flexing your knees;
- This is not the Olympic high jump competition! You only need to jump high enough to allow the rope to pass beneath your feet. If you can do this successfully, then making around 60 turns per minute (i.e. one per second) should be an achievable starting target.

It will take a bit of practice, but once you have mastered these basics, then you might want to start doing a few tricks and skipping 'stunts', both as a way of making your session a little bit more interesting and also to show off your new found talents!

Believe it or not, according to the [International Rope Skipping Federation's website](#), there are over one hundred single rope tricks that you can learn, including such favorites as the 'double bounce', the 'skier' and the 'bell':



Skipping is a very simple but extremely effective form of exercise that anyone can do anywhere. Do not underestimate its benefits just because you have not hopped over a rope once since the day you left school!

Stretching, bending and toning

So far, all of the exercise formats that we have considered have been focused on the aerobic side of taking exercise, doing activities that will burn off energy while working your heart and lungs that little bit harder.

However, not all exercise is necessarily aerobic, as there are many exercises that focus more on toning and shaping the body, while increasing such things as flexibility and suppleness.

Such exercises are no less beneficial than the aerobic workouts that we have looked at so far, and you might be surprised just how many ways it is possible to practice these exercises without making too much of an obvious effort.

Let us start looking at some of these exercises now.

Yoga

There is another book in this series that deals with every aspect of yoga in far greater detail.

However, as an overview, yoga has been practiced throughout the world for some 5000 years, and is an active work-out that is essentially made up of a combination of positions, postures and poses. Taken together, these will improve your bodily strength and flexibility while serving to decrease stress levels at the same time by calming the 'inner you'.

Although for the purposes of this book we are focusing on yoga as a form of exercise, yoga is, in fact, much more than that. It is a complete way of life, one that brings together man's spirit, mind and body in a unified system of beliefs and actions.

There are several types or branches of yoga, with the exercises that we are going to look at (known as 'Asanas') being part of the yogic branch called Hatha Yoga (meaning forced yoga) which is especially popular in the West. Yogic exercises are made up of many asanas, and they all have varying degrees of difficulty in physical terms. However, the physical degree of difficulty is only part of the story, because many yogic poses are focused less on the physical nature of the pose in question, and far more on the spiritual aspect.

For example, the pose or position that would appear to be the least demanding from a physical point of view is the 'shava-asana' or corpse pose. This needs the student to lie still on their back, hands by their side.

In physical terms it could not be easier, but the point is that what is really being attempted is to make the whole body and mind totally still and relaxed. Without that total stillness, the 'shava-asana' is not actually complete, according to yogic thinking.

While keeping your body completely still may not be that difficult, doing the same with your mind is far harder, to the extent that many people would find it all but impossible. To attempt the 'shava-asana' is therefore extremely easy, but to achieve it properly is definitely not so.

At the other end of the scale of physical difficulty is the 'vrischika-asana' or scorpion pose, as illustrated on the next page.

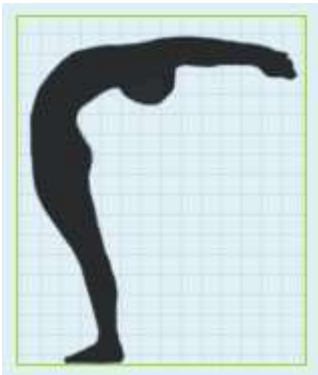
Achieving this successfully is obviously difficult for anyone who is not extremely fit, strong and flexible, and this pose therefore demonstrates why yoga is such a great form of exercise.



Of course, this is an extremely demanding pose, one that you would probably not recommend to your Grandmother without a great deal of practice (if at all)! On the other hand, there are a great number of asanas and not all of them are as difficult as becoming a scorpion!

Even these easier poses are beneficial, and each one represents a tremendous way of increasing your bodily flexibility and suppleness through exercise.

For instance, the benefits of adopting the 'ardha-chandra-asana' (the 'half moon pose') are principally felt in the lower back, chest and abdomen.



While the 'trikona-asana' (the 'triangle pose') is great for stimulating blood flow throughout the body, especially to the head. It also assists your general physical condition by stretching and relaxing your shoulders, back, arms and legs, so the benefits are tremendous in comparison to the amount of effort and energy being expended.



You can see a full list (and diagrams) of all the 'asanas in action' [here](#) The bottom line is that yoga is great exercise, but it can quickly become a way of life that will help you on both a physical and a mental level, so try it.

Unusual exercises you've never thought of

As suggested earlier, focusing on toning your body is every bit as important as burning off energy through aerobic exercise.

There are, however, various parts of the body that most of us never really consider as needing exercise.

The whole of your body needs exercise if the various parts of you are going to remain in tip-top condition.

In this section, I am going to look at some of the most often neglected bodily parts, and how you can exercise them utilizing simple, straightforward everyday activities.

Exercising your face

Your face is almost certainly a part of your body that you have never considered exercising.

But it does need it, especially if you want to open up your features, remove the lines from your skin and give yourself a clearer and younger looking expression.

Exercising your face is all about using the facial muscles that you use the least in your everyday life, because this strengthens these muscles and therefore your face becomes more flexible and expressive.

Before starting these exercises, you should take a good, long look at yourself in the mirror to decide which exercises you should focus on personally. If, for example, you are by nature a frowner, then do not bother with the frowning exercise. Instead, focus on smiling or winking, for example.

Here are four extremely easy and painless facial exercises that you can start putting into practice right now:

- Smiling: To paraphrase a line from Casablanca, 'you know how to smile, don't cha?' If not, here is how you do so to gain maximum exercise benefit from smiling.

With your head in an upright but relaxed pose, clench your cheeks upwards while drawing your lips wide over your teeth at the same time.

Hold the position for a few seconds, then relax and repeat the process. Do this 15-20 times per session, and try to do it at least once every day.

Try smiling at other people more often as well. You might be surprised how much better it makes you feel spiritually, and the responses that you get will more than likely justify making the small effort involved.

- Frowning: In this exercise, you start with your head upright but relaxed, only this time you tense up the muscles in your forehead and draw your eyebrows down by doing so. Hold the resultant frown for a few seconds and then release, and do the exercise 15-20 times per session.

This is an exercise that you should only do in moderation, as overusing these muscles by doing this exercise too regularly or often can lead to the development of unwanted facial lines and wrinkles.

- Winking: With your head in the (by now) traditional upright and relaxed position, turn your head slightly to one side so that one eye is pushed slightly forward. Close the more prominent eye, and hold it closed for a second or two. Open the eye again, and repeat the operation 15-20 times with the same eye.

Then, turn your head the other way so that the opposite eye is to the fore, and repeat the whole process with that eye.

Once again, you probably do not want to overdo this particular exercise, as doing so can lead to the formation (or acceleration) of the fine creases and wrinkles at the corners of the eyes that are commonly known as 'laughter lines'.

Also, I would recommend that this is an exercise that you do in a private place, because doing this in public or with people that you do not know around you might give them completely the wrong idea!

- Tongue pulling: This is an exercise that you should only do in private or with people that you know. While winking at strangers could get you a lot of unwanted attention, this one is far more likely to get you a smack in the face or a punch on the nose, so do be careful where and when you choose to practice this exercise!

Start from the relaxed but upright head position and purse your lips slightly. Then, push your tongue out of your mouth (yes, exactly like you used to do when you were a kid) and then retract it.

Assuming that you do not regularly go around pulling your tongue out at people, this is an action that the muscles at the back of your tongue will rarely undertake. While your tongue is used to moving up and down and from side to side inside your mouth while you are eating or talking, this 'pushing back to front' is using the muscles in a way to which they are not accustomed.

Repeat this exercise 15-20 times per session.

Feet and leg exercises

If you have travelled on a long distance flight in recent times, you will probably be aware that many of the major airlines are now showing safety videos that emphasize the importance of moving your feet and legs during the flight. This is to counteract the increased risk of suffering a deep vein thrombosis that spending several hours in a pressurized cabin can bring on.

In a similar manner, more and more people spend the vast majority of their working day sitting down, and they are therefore not using their legs as much as they should be doing.

They will sometimes visit the restroom and perhaps walk outside the office to grab some lunch, so they are not totally idle, but they are almost certainly not using the muscles in their legs and lower back as much as they should. Just like the videos that you see on the planes, I am going to show you several ways that you can make your muscles work even while sitting down.

- **Crossing legs:** This exercise is exactly what it sounds like it would be, but just like the safety videos on the plane suggest, even moving your legs and feet around while sitting down can stimulate blood flow and muscle activity in your legs.

So, it is simply a question of sitting down in your chair, relaxing and then crossing one leg up and over the top of the other. Hold that final position for less than a second - in this case, it is the action and movement that is important, not the final position - and then unwind back to the original relaxed position.

Do the same thing 15-20 times and then repeat the actions for the other leg.

- **Swinging:** This exercise is almost an extension of the crossing motion that we used in the last one.

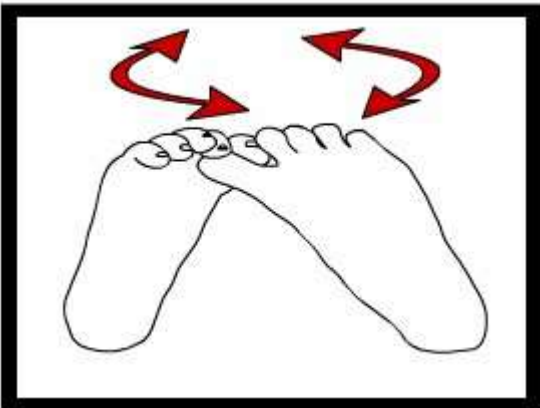
After the legs have been crossed, you should swing the foot that is on top forwards and then backwards again in a pendulum like motion. This makes the muscles at the back of your legs contract and expand in the effort to elevate your foot, and this stimulates the muscles and increases the blood flow in your legs.

As always repeat 15-20 times for each leg, and do try not to do this in a environment where you might risk kicking others while taking your exercise!

- The swivel: This one is easy, but effective for keeping your calves and ankles, in particular, in good shape.

It can also be done sitting in your chair or on the floor at home, with your legs stretched straight out in front of you.

All you need to do is swivel your feet at the ankles so that the toes of both feet point at each other, and then swivel back again so that your heels do the same. Repeat this as many times as you like (at least 20 would be good) and use this exercise whenever you have been seated for long periods as a means of 'refreshing' your legs.



- Tip, tap: Even the simple act of tapping your toes on the ground will keep your feet, ankles and lower legs active and ensure that your muscles are stimulated so that the blood flow in your lower legs is encouraged.

Whether you are wearing shoes in the office or sat at home barefooted, simply lift the toes of your left foot off the ground and tap them back down again two or three times. Rest for a moment – you shouldn't need long, as this is hardly strenuous – and then repeat. Do this 15-20 times with the same foot, and then repeat the exercise with the opposite foot.

This is an exercise that is best done to music!

Back and buttock exercises

- Shift and lift: This is an exercise that you can do to strengthen the muscles of your lower back and buttocks (in particular) while sitting down. This is therefore something that you can do even while you are at work, although given the nature of the 'lifting' element of the exercise, I would not really recommend that you do this while talking to others in your office, for example. It might make them think there is something wrong with you!

Nevertheless, this is a great exercise for reducing any stiffness or soreness that might result from sitting in the same position for an extended period of time, and it strengthens those muscles too!

While you are in your chair, relax and then clench the muscle in one buttock and hold for a couple of seconds, lifting slightly as you do so. Relax and then repeat. Do this 15-20 times for each buttock.

- Hip sway: This is great exercise to do if you are standing for any length of time, as it relieves the tension in your legs and stimulates the blood flow throughout the whole of your lower body. It also helps to avoid getting the pain in the lower back that afflicts some people if they are forced to stand for any length of time.

While standing upright, let your right knee relax and soften, while at the same time pushing your left hip out to the side. Pull the hip back in again, and repeat the same action 15-20 times.

After that, allow your left knee to bend and relax, and force your right hip out in the same manner.

- Lifting: Grab a bag – a supermarket plastic bag, or anything else that has suitable handles for lifting will do the trick.

Put something of weight in the bag – again, it is fairly irrelevant exactly what it is, as long as it weighs at least a few kilos (water bottles are ideal for this, because you know that a liter bottle weighs almost exactly a kilo).

Keeping your arm straight down by your side, bend at the knees until you can reach the bag on the floor and then lift it by straightening your knees up. Lift until your legs are once again straight, hold the 'lifted' position for a few seconds, and then return the bag to the floor by bending at the knees once again.

Repeat 15 times on the one side of your body, and then repeat on the opposite side.

When done correctly – that is, by bending at the knees and not from your back – this exercise is excellent for strengthening the lower back, buttocks and hips, but it will also help to keep your arms and thighs in great shape.

- Give us a shrug: This is an exercise that not only helps keep your lower back strong, but is also an effective way of releasing the tension that can build up in your shoulders and neck. It will help to keep your arms and shoulder muscles toned and in trim at the same time.

It can also be done in either a standing or a sitting position.

Wherever you are, simply lift your shoulders up towards your ears in a classic shrugging motion, then lift your forearms up to a position where they are parallel to the floor and turn your palms outwards.

Finally, tilt your head to one side, and twist your head slightly from the neck, then hold that final position for a few seconds. Return to the beginning and do the whole thing again, but this time, tilt your head to the opposite side before twisting.

Conclusion

Very few people are entirely unaware of the fact that exercise is good for them.

The problem is that, for many people, even when they know this, the idea of having to join a gym and really putting themselves through the physical grinder in an effort to get themselves fit is totally unappealing.

So, they chose to ignore that fact that their bodily condition is deteriorating and get on with their life in exactly the same way as they did before, unless some event comes along to make them change.

The point that I hope you now appreciate after reading this book is that it is not necessary to wait until you have to start doing exercise before you take any action. There are literally dozens of opportunities to work some part of your body every day of your life, and all you need to do in order to start exercising is recognize these opportunities.

Nor should exercise automatically equate with desperately hard work, drudgery and pain.

As you have seen, simple activities such as walking and climbing stairs can be integrated into your daily life quickly and almost seamlessly, but the benefits of both of these activities can be enormous.

The bottom line is, there really is no excuse not to start exercising right now, and everything that you need to know in order to do so is contained in this book.

There is no better time to start taking regular exercise than this very second, so get your shoes on, go out for a nice long walk, and take the time to think about all of other ways that you are going to make exercise an integral part of your life from now on.