



Exercise Program

A self-directed exercise program for overcoming chronic health conditions or boosting your health to a higher level

Encouragement and practical tips for people who wish to reverse chronic illness, pain, or symptoms using the powerful medicine of exercise

If you think you can't exercise because of your health problem, read this booklet.





Stoll Foundation for Holistic Health
PO Box 21132
Boulder, CO 80308
303-527-2886
info@stollfoundation.org
www.stollfoundation.org

Our mission: to improve individuals' lives through health education, providing lasting and inexpensive solutions for disease reversal through self care and healthy lifestyle support (taking into account that conventional medical evaluation may be needed).

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Stoll Foundation for Holistic Health Exercise Program

Starting an exercise program can seem daunting, especially if you have a chronic illness or health condition. But exercise may be the best medicine possible for reducing or eliminating both physical and mental/emotional symptoms, especially as part of an overall wellness program. Many people undermine the medical treatments they receive by not taking enough personal steps to enhance their health. No matter what health issue you have, you'll be farther along the road to recovery if you exercise appropriately on a regular basis.

Common physical conditions that may be helped by this exercise program: adrenal fatigue, aging, arthritis (all kinds), asthma, autoimmune conditions, back pain, cancer, chronic fatigue, chronic pain, cold hands and feet, colon problems, costochondritis, diabetes, dysautonomia, emphysema, endocrine imbalance, fatigue, fibromyalgia, frequent colds, headaches, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, insomnia, menopause, musculo-skeletal conditions, neck pain, osteoporosis, pre-menstrual syndrome, unusual or undiagnosable symptoms, vertigo, and many others.



Common mental/emotional conditions that may be helped by this exercise program: alcoholism, agoraphobia, anxiety, attention deficit disorder (ADD), depression, drug addiction, learning disabilities, manic-depression (bipolar), memory loss, nervousness, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and many others.

Every bodily system that has been studied has been shown to improve in function with simple exercise. Exercise does several important things: it increases metabolism, burns fat, and builds muscle. It increases range of motion, improves strength, and increases reserves of function. Most people who exercise regularly feel better and have more energy, too.

Exercising to reverse chronic illness may really be easier than you think. There are four simple basics or guidelines to exercising for health improvement:

- First, choose the right exercise(s) for you according to your condition and goals. We call this the “Be careful!” guideline.
- Second, exercise *regularly*, no matter how little. This is the “Consistency counts!” guideline.
- Third, be flexible and experiment enough to create your success. This is the “Do what works!” guideline.
- Fourth, have fun exercising, so you keep going! This is the “Have fun!” guideline.



IMPORTANT POINT: It is often said that you should consult your doctor before undertaking regular exercise. It is perhaps more important to consult your doctor if you are not exercising regularly. However, we’d like to emphasize the importance of appropriate medical care or supervision. Get a medical exam if you have a complex or delicate medical condition, if you are beginning an exercise program for the first time, or after a long pause from exercising. If you are starting aerobics, see your doctor for a stress test. Also always see an appropriate health care practitioner if something doesn’t feel right or if you have an injury. It’s better to err on the side of caution than to risk getting worse or creating new health issues. “Be careful!”

If you have questions at any step along the way, you may ask them at Dr. Stoll’s website at www.askwaltstollmd.com. His website bulletin board is a place to ask health or exercise questions to experienced volunteers including coaches, trainers, weekend warriors, health care practitioners, and others who have overcome their own personal health problems. See the Resources Sheet enclosed with this booklet for easy instructions for using the bulletin board.

We encourage you to read and learn more about both health and exercise as you go along. The more you know, the more direct your

path to health may become. This Exercise Program is primarily based on information in the book, *Recapture Your Health*, by Walt Stoll, M.D. and Jan DeCourtney, C.M.T., which teaches a self-help wellness program called the 3LS (Three-Legged Stool). We highly recommend you read this book. *Recapture Your Health* is available through most libraries and bookstores. It provides a helpful overview of how to reverse chronic symptoms and the part exercise plays in accomplishing that. At the end of this booklet we give a brief explanation of the 3LS. Information is also available in the book and at our website, www.stollfoundation.org.

For additional information about exercise, we recommend the book *Fitness for Dummies*, by Suzanne Schlosberg and Liz Neporent, for its a wide range of exercise wisdom. For other helpful books, see the Resources Sheet enclosed with this booklet, or visit www.stollfoundation.org.

Now, let's begin. This process of exercising for health improvement has been set up into easy steps for you to follow. At the end of this booklet, there's a place to write your personal exercise plan.



Step One: Set your goals

Just exercising regularly is a goal in itself for many people, especially people who aren't feeling well or don't have much energy. However, it's helpful to have more specific goals for several reasons: 1) to know exactly why you're exercising, 2) keep yourself motivated, and 3) track your changes and health improvements.

There are two basic types or ways to set goals.

One, a goal may be selected in terms of health, such as symptoms you would like to reduce or to reach a certain health standard.

Health goals include:

<i>Achieving cardiovascular fitness</i>	<i>Feeling good</i>
<i>Alleviating emotional states such as depression or anger and enhancing positive emotions such as self-confidence or contentment</i>	<i>Heartening optimism</i>
<i>Attaining a higher level of physical health or fitness</i>	<i>Improving balance</i>
<i>Bettering one's quality of life</i>	<i>Increasing awareness of body</i>
<i>Boosting energy flow in the body</i>	<i>Losing weight</i>
<i>Building stamina</i>	<i>Overcoming specific illnesses</i>
<i>Circulating lymph</i>	<i>Pregnancy fitness</i>
<i>Conditioning for a particular sport or activity</i>	<i>Preventing specific health conditions</i>
<i>Detoxifying</i>	<i>Recovering physical function</i>
<i>Developing physical strength</i>	<i>Reeducating the body in nonrestricted movement</i>
<i>Enhancing body-mind integration</i>	<i>Rehabilitation from injury or illness</i>
<i>Decreasing musculoskeletal pain</i>	<i>Restoring range of motion (flexibility)</i>
<i>Developing better posture</i>	<i>Reversing or delaying the effects of aging</i>
<i>Enhancing coordination</i>	<i>Reversing specific symptoms</i>
	<i>Strengthening the immune system</i>
	<i>Toning muscles</i>



Two, a goal may be chosen in terms of increasing your ability in strength, time, distance, or frequency. Some examples are:

- *walking 1 mile in 25 minutes instead of 30 minutes (time)*
- *getting strong enough to change from lifting 2-pound weights to 3-pound weights (strength)*
- *biking 1-1/4 miles instead of 1 mile (distance)*
- *exercising 2 times a week instead of 1 time (frequency)*

Some people set a time frame or date for meeting their goals. In the case of exercising to reduce symptoms or reverse an illness, it is usually better to exercise on a “how am I doing” basis. This means having one small goal with no date or time frame and allowing your body to heal, change, or improve at its own pace, with no pressure. If you do set a date for meeting your goal, always be willing to change it just in case your goal was too ambitious.

Take a moment and select one or more goals for yourself. You may write your goal(s) at the end of this booklet.

Step two: Choose your exercise(s)

Exercise is not “one size fits all,” especially for those with health considerations. For the exercise aspect of your personal path to health, select an exercise that will help you meet your goals, that takes into consideration your health condition and previous injuries, and that you enjoy! Enjoyment may be the most important factor, because that’s what keeps you going, but let’s look at all the considerations for selecting an exercise, one by one.

1. There are four basic categories of exercise:

aerobics, exercise milder than aerobics, strengthening exercise, and flexibility exercise. Some exercises fall into more than one category. Many people with chronic health conditions would do well to start by selecting just one exercise.



Aerobic exercise is any extended physical activity that increases heart rate and breathing while using the large muscle groups at a regular, even pace over a period of time. Some common examples of aerobic activities are jogging, bicycling, brisk walking, and swimming.

Exercise milder than aerobics does not increase the heart rate to a significant degree, but builds stamina that can help anyone battle

stress, help prevent disease, and reverse symptoms. Common examples include leisurely walking, gentle rebounding (mini-trampoline), stretching exercises, strengthening exercises, Pilates, t'ai chi, and yoga.

Strengthening exercises are for building muscular strength in parts or the entire body, and is generally non-aerobic. Examples include isometrics, Pilates, progressive resistance exercise, and weight training.

Flexibility exercise helps maintain full range of motion and flexibility in the body. Examples include Pilates, stretching or flexibility exercises, and yoga.

As mentioned, most beginning exercisers would do well to choose just one type of exercise. However, some people may choose more than one type of exercise and alternate or rotate doing them. When your health is pretty good and your ability to exercise is strong enough, you may ultimately want to plan an exercise program that includes something from each of the four categories.

If you have a chronic illness or symptoms, the next several points will be very helpful in helping you select the right exercise for you.

2. Consider your health condition. If you have poor health, a chronic illness, or if you have been sedentary for a long time, we suggest you consider starting with exercise milder than aerobics, or a flexibility exercise, and build up slowly. Here are some suggestions:

- gentle mini-trampoline (rebounding)
- leisurely walking
- easy t'ai chi or qi gong
- gentle stretching
- mild strengthening exercise (such as lifting a one-pound weight such as a can of soup, or doing a few easy floor exercises)
- beginning yoga
- Synergetics (a simple, low-impact sequence of movements. A few used videos of Synergetics exercise are usually available on Amazon.com.)

Also consider any type of exercise program for seniors, including exercise that can be done while sitting in a chair, if that meets your need. Local YMCA or rec centers often have senior exercise programs. If attending a class isn't appropriate, find exercise videos for seniors at your public library or at online bookstores. TV exercise shows may offer similar mild exercise as well. A website with over many senior exercise DVDs and videos is listed on the Resources Sheet. If you have a computer, look for free podcasts through iTunes and at exercise websites online.

A note about rebounding (mini-trampoline):

Rebounding for ten minutes, several times a day, can be especially practical and beneficial for those who have been very ill or are weak. Even very gentle rebounding produces health benefits due to the circulation of fluids including lymph and blood. Although muscular exercise may be derived from rebounding, the greatest health results come from the movement itself. Thus if you are very ill, you may even just sit on a mini-trampoline and have someone else do the bouncing so you move up and down. Similarly, if you have leg or knee problems, the good benefits may be derived by standing on the rebounder and moving the forearms up and down just enough to create a rhythmic movement of the whole body going up and down. Jumping is never necessary on a rebounder, just bouncing, and even that bouncing may be done very gently.



3. Consider your previous injuries or physical impairment or condition that might be affected by your activity.

Choose helpful activities. In most cases, gentle exercise boosts the body's own self-healing capabilities to address whatever ails you. However, exercise may also target specific areas of the body or be done for certain purposes to help ease pain or improve some health conditions. For example, selected back exercises are helpful for low back pain. Some activities

that may be selected for such healing qualities include yoga, Active Isolated Stretching, Pilates, the Egoscue method, or stretches or strengthening exercise.

Because people are so individually different, one exercise might work well and help one person but not be right for another. Thus we refer you to experienced instructors who can tell you which exercise could best help your specific condition. A personal trainer or an instructor experienced in any particular activity will be able to tell you what would work best for you. There are a few specific exercise applications, however, that we can safely mention. For arthritis or knee or hip issues, consider swimming since it is a non-weight bearing exercise which is easy on the joints. For emphyzema, rebounding is known to be helpful.

Avoid potentially harmful exercise. Most gentle forms of exercise are safe for most people, but don't forget the "Be careful!" guideline. Some conditions or diseases have specific contraindications for certain types of exercise which means some exercises could harm, injure, or make you worse depending upon your condition. For example, people with detached retina possibilities (or a family history of them) should never do yoga poses that put their head in a low position; people with low blood pressure should avoid activity that makes them lightheaded, and so on.

We cannot list all health concerns here, so if you are recovering from, or dealing with, a medical condition or concerned over finding the best form of exercise for your condition, consult a professional. It's wise to ask your health care practitioners about special limitations of which you should be aware, and if they can refer you to a fitness professional who has experience training clients with your condition. Personal trainers, sports medicine specialists, physical therapists, pilates instructor, or others who have specific training in exercise can give good advice.



Whenever you take a class, always inform your exercise instructors of your health issues and goals so they can tailor the activity to meet your needs. If ever an activity doesn't feel right, stop it and get checked.



4. Choose something fun and enjoyable for you to do! By making sure you are having fun and enjoyment with your exercise, you will be motivated to continue on a regular basis. If you choose jogging but hate to jog and then don't do it, you won't get anywhere with improving your health! Select fun activities such as square dancing, yoga, NIA, karate lessons, golf, hiking, jazzercise, ping pong, walking, t'ai chi, mini-trampoline, stretching, swimming, or frisbee. These are great activities for starting your exercise program. Or, add components of fun like great music, buying new exercise clothing, being with friends, or participating in a group activity. Enjoyable exercise done regularly, even if mild or moderate, far beats having an ambitious exercise plan that just doesn't work for you. *Do what works, and plan to have fun doing this!*

Start where you are, and over time, see if you can work up to doing exercise that will further advance your health. Dr. Stoll recommends aerobics as the most curative type of exercise. Aerobics has been well studied for bringing optimum health benefits. Not everyone can do aerobics, but it can be a goal for your health future.

Now that you've reviewed all the considerations for choosing an exercise, select one (or more) and write your choice(s) at the end of this booklet.

Step three: Choose the frequency and length of exercise

When you have been sedentary or are recovering from a chronic illness, and are just starting to exercise, it does not matter how long or how often you exercise. Start with as much as you can or want to do. Take it slow with reduced speeds and short exercise sessions. At the beginning, be really easy on yourself and exercise comfortably with-

out stress or pressure. You can even do as little as two minutes at a time or exercise only one day a week. You need to give your body a chance to get used to the new activity to avoid flareups of your health condition.



People who try to do too much, too fast, often experience flareups, burnout, or have to stop exercising to recover from overdoing. They lose the safe, steady momentum and health benefits of regular easy exercise. It might seem “dumb” to be doing just a little, but sometimes doing that is smarter than doing more. Exercising a little is better than nothing, and the little bit may soon lead to increasing the amount of exercise. What really matters is exercising regularly, no matter how much. “Consistency counts!”

The 3LS Wellness Program’s general guideline for health improvement is exercising 20 minutes, three times a week. Depending upon your health condition, you can do less, but you may also do more.

Take a moment to write down the frequency and length of time to start your exercise program at the end of this booklet.

Fourth Step: Start your program, and adjust it as needed.

Choose a right location to exercise. It’s good to exercise outdoors in the fresh air whenever possible, and be inspired by nature, too. However...

- People with certain illnesses or conditions, who are very sensitive to the external environment, may feel better exercising indoors where they can control the temperature, workout, humidity, etc.
- If the weather is bad, have a backup plan such as a fitness club, home equipment, exercise videos, TV shows, or podcast.
- Exercise safely. Avoid jogging or walking alone in the dark or in desolate areas. While taking care of your health, don’t forget your safety.

Listen to your body, and adjust your program according to how you feel. On days when you're not feeling as well, do a little less or take a day off to rest. Your plan might even allow for more active exercise on your good days, and milder, gentler exercise on the days when you feel less than optimum. Taking your time will help you be careful not to flare up existing conditions. Even if it's just a little bit of exercise, if it feels like too much exertion, slow down or reduce it, or select a different exercise. Keep your focus on consistency, plus slow and steady improvement for health, rather than performance.

Don't push yourself to meet your goals. Remember that just exercising regularly is a goal in itself and is a help for your health. Feel free to change your goals and plan at any time as your body gives you feedback about what you're doing. Plan to get in shape during several weeks and months, not in days. Follow common sense and don't push past exhaustion. Remember, the longer you keep doing this, the stronger you will get. Listen to yourself before you do something that



seems too challenging even if recommended by coaches, teachers, experts, or friends. Exercise is like good medicine for you, but you have to find the correct dose for your individual needs. Go at your own pace and do the amount that feels right

for you and according to your capability.

Slowly build a foundational base. As your body and your muscles become accustomed to your new exercise program, increase slowly to longer and more frequent exercise sessions. Yet do not be in a hurry to increase the intensity or length of exercise sessions, but take your time to avoid placing unnecessary stress on the body. When you're ready to add more, your body will tell you: what you're doing will become much easier or boring. After you've been exercising for a while, you'll likely be able to progress to having a greater goal.

Use your body's cues as clues to advance your health even farther. One of the great things about regular exercise is how much more you

get in tune with your body and its needs. As you continue exercising, if you're paying attention, your body will give you gentle signals about areas that need work and tell you what's not working well and needs your attention. For example, you may notice a tightness or restriction in some area, and get some massage to loosen it, thus both increasing your function and improving how you feel.

If you're following the 3LS Wellness Program, exercise before doing Skilled Relaxation. It is very helpful to schedule your Skilled Relaxation session *after* you exercise (never before), because it enhances the healing effects of both the exercise and the Skilled Relaxation. See the end of this booklet for a brief description of Skilled Relaxation.

If something hurts, rest for a few days. If it doesn't get better, don't hesitate to go for professional help. Take care of injuries at once to avoid creating new chronic problems.



If your activity does not seem to be helping your condition, after one or several months, consider trying a different exercise activity, or try beginning your wellness program with a different aspect (such as Skilled Relaxation or a Whole Foods Diet). See the book, *Recapture Your Health*, or visit www.stollfoundation.org, for options and instruction.

Fifth Step: Stay motivated.

Chances are that once you exercise regularly for a few weeks or months, you'll be feeling better, and start to see progress in your health condition. At that point, the exercise becomes a reward in itself and additional motivation is often not needed.

However, if you find that you're slacking off, don't berate yourself—*ever*. Instead, just look for a positive way to get back on track.

Here are some tips for keeping yourself motivated:

- Figure out any obstacles that are getting in your way, and make a plan to overcome them. This includes things such as finding a babysitter for the kids.
- Tie your exercise to a certain activity in your day, such as “I will stretch every night before I put on my pajamas.”
- Schedule your exercise times on your daytimer or PDA, or...
- Keep track of how you are doing on a calendar. Seeing your activity in writing can be encouraging and help you stick to your plan. We’ve enclosed a training calendar for your use. The calendar is also available at www.stollfoundation.org.
- Consider a session or two with a personal trainer or Pilates instructor. Either can help you customize a program to meet your personal needs.
- Review your goals and imagine how good you’ll feel without your health problems and how much money you might save in doctors visits.
- Read exercise books for tips and inspiration (see the Resources Sheet for some suggestions).
- Vary your exercise so you don’t get bored.
- Expect gradual, not sudden, improvement to your condition. It’s the regular repetition that’s so helpful to health. Remember the “Consistency counts!” guideline.
- Reward yourself for continued exercise with happy thoughts about your success, and/or some kind of healthy treat.



On the next pages, you will find a place to create your own Personal Exercise Plan.



Your Personal Exercise Plan

Before you write on this page, make several photocopies of it. Keep this original blank. Use one photocopy to write down your first plan and goal. After you meet your first goal, keep updating your program by using subsequent copies with new goals. This can help you get started and provide a record of how and where you started, where you are, and where you want to go.

Today's date _____

What is your ability level right now? (how much can you already do in terms of frequency, time, distance, speed, etc.)? _____

What are your health goals? _____

What are your ability goals? _____

What health condition, injuries or other considerations do you need to keep in mind when selecting an exercise? _____

Do you need to consult a health care practitioner to know about your special limitations or considerations? _____ Who will you see? _____

What types of exercise would be fun for you to do on a regular basis? _____

How often? _____

For how long? _____

What special adjustments or allowances do you need to make for how you feel on certain days? (For example, if not feeling strong, walking less or slower) _____

What special arrangements do you need to take to actualize this plan (i.e., arrange for babysitting, write your exercise times on your daytimer or PDA etc.) _____

What caring people in your life have you enlisted to support and encourage you? _____

On what day will you start? _____

What can you do to stay motivated (rewards, etc)? _____

Congratulations on creating your personal exercise plan for improving health. Do what works! Be consistent! Have fun!

Use this page to write additional notes or plans.

Read this after you've been exercising for a while....

It's great that you've begun exercising and are making progress! After you've become stronger, think about varying your exercise (this is also called cross-training). Choosing more than one type of exercise decreases boredom and burnout, and it stimulates different muscles and parts of your body. Varying your exercise also helps you meet diverse exercise goals.

When your health is good enough, you may want to start training for an event. Joining a group event can help end the isolation that often accompanies illness and is a lot of fun. The Stoll Foundation for Holistic Health has a self-directed Event Training Program for people participating in sporting events like walks, runs, or bicycle races for the first time. See the resources sheet for information or visit <http://www.stollfoundation.org>.

ABOUT THE 3LS WELLNESS PROGRAM: To improve your health, you can multiply by 3 the benefits of your exercise program by adding the other 2 aspects of the 3LS (3-Legged Stool) Wellness Program: Skilled Relaxation and a Whole Foods Diet.

Skilled Relaxation is any process (i.e., meditation, guided imagery, etc.) that reliably produces a relaxed state of mind characterized by alpha or theta brainwaves and the physical relaxation response.

A Whole Foods Diet is a healthy way of eating that focuses on eating whole foods and avoids refined foods and sugars.

Read about the entire 3LS Wellness Program in the enclosed handout, by visiting www.stollfoundation.org, and in the book, *Recapture Your Health*.

