

Walk before you run

Summer's here and everyone's thinking about looking their best at the beach, or joining the masses signing up for the local fun run or corporate triathlon.

But where to start? It seems that when we first undertake an exercise program it just seems too hard. And if we adhere to the adage, "No pain, no gain" then in a majority of cases for all the pain there's not enough gain.

The most common mistake I witness is people trying to get fit too quickly and exercise is conducted at an intensity that their bodies struggle to tolerate. This results in injury, illness, or lack of motivation to continue because it all seems so difficult.

Here's an approach I suggest to new exercisers when I'm asked how to get fit. It doesn't matter whether you've been working out all your life or just starting. The majority of your workouts should be conducted at an easy to moderate effort (puffing but still able to talk) with the occasional workout being moderate to hard (laboured breathing, hard to talk).

For people who are just after general fitness I advocate roughly 80% of your exercise time for easy to moderate effort workouts and approx 20% for hard workouts each week. It allows the body to cope better with its adaptation to exercise, will get better results long term and substantially reduces the risk of injury or illness.

So how does this work in practical terms? Let's say you're getting into running for the first time. Let's do a test to gauge your starting point. Power walk for 10 mins to warm up and then attempt a slow jog for 15 mins with 5 mins slow walking at the end to cool down. If you were able to jog for the full 15 mins without laboured breathing, then this becomes your starting workout and the one that fulfils up to 80% of your initial weekly routine.

If you were unable to jog continuously for the full 15 mins or your breathing became very laboured then this becomes your hard workout and should only be conducted approx 20% of the time. I would also encourage people in this category to initially perform this workout once, or possibly twice, a week with power walking as their easy to moderate exercise alternative. Once you're able to complete the 15 min jog comfortably, then all workouts can involve running.

Here's a 4-week training plan for getting into running:

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	Monday	Tuesday	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1	15min jog test	Day off	30min walk	Day off	45min power walk	Day off	20min walk
Week 2	15min jog test	Day off	30min power walk	Day off	45min power walk over hilly terrain	Day off	30min walk
Week 3	15min jog test	Day off	45min power walk over hilly terrain	Day off	15min jog test	Day off	45min power walk
Week 4	15min jog test	Day off	60 min power walk over hilly terrain	Day off	15min jog test	Day off	60min power walk over hilly terrain or 15min jog test