



PC Conditioning

Personal Training for all Levels

April 2007

“Find success in spring workouts”

Traveling past Victory Field on a daily basis in the cold winter months, whether by car or on foot, can be rather depressing. A recent trip to the gym led me past the visibly empty, snowy and icy track.

Not surprisingly, no one was up for a game of tennis or shooting some hoops – funny how people don’t flock to the tennis courts when the wind chill is just above zero. Admittedly, there were a few brave moms chatting among themselves, while simultaneously attempting to ward off frostbite as they sipped their Starbucks while their little ones ran around in the playground. Two thoughts subsequently ran through my head: one, thank God the heat in my car works well; and two, I can’t wait until the warmer weather of spring arrives.

One of my favorite pastimes, particularly in the spring and summer, has always been to head to Victory Field. Whether it is a walk/jog on the track, pickup hoops or tennis with friends or a game of Wiffle ball in the middle of the track, Victory Field’s offerings never fail to keep exercise enthusiasts content. Every year, I enjoy seeing the track flooded with walkers and runners during the mild spring and summer nights. While the fall season has its share of users, Victory Field on a warm spring or summer night is a wonderful place to be.

So what exactly can one do to ensure a safe, effective and efficient workout this spring? I’m glad you asked, as a lecture I recently gave at a local fitness center revolved around steps toward an optimal fitness regimen. I’ve taken the liberty of sharing seven of them with you.

Step 1: Engage each of “The Big Three” – Cardiovascular conditioning, resistance training and flexibility (stretching) constitute the three major components of a properly designed exercise regimen. According to the American College of Sports Medicine (2006), cardiovascular exercise should be performed on most, if not all, days of the week at a moderate intensity for 20 to 60 minutes. Resistance training (“strength training”) should be performed two to three times/week. Engage all major muscle groups (i.e. legs, back, shoulders, chest, shoulders, etc.) and attempt one to three sets of eight to 12 repetitions initially. Flexibility/stretching should be performed on a daily basis, ideally after a workout as the muscles are warmer and looser than prior to a workout.

Step 2: Prioritize – Put extra focus on the weaker areas of the body and don’t spend so much time putting work into what you’re already proficient at. For example, I encounter

many exercisers (males in particular) whose lower backs require strengthening, yet the first thing they do when they get to the gym is lie down under the bar and perform set after set of bench presses. They should be focusing on exercises and stretches to help strengthen their lower back, rather than reaffirm their desire to improve the appearance of their chest muscles ("pecs" as they are often referred to).

Step 3: Intermittent Activity — Unbeknownst to the majority of people, recent research has indicated that multiple bouts of shorter duration exercise provide equal benefits to one longer session. For example, if you are unable to squeeze in a 30-minute continuous exercise session in your schedule, try a brisk 10-minute walk on your lunch break and complement it with a 20-minute walk when you get home from work.

Step 4: Devise a Plan of Attack — Based on my experiences with clients, those who keep records or some sort of weekly written exercise schedule tend to meet and exceed their goals quicker than those who don't. Instead of saying, "I'm going to get 30 minutes of physical activity five days this week," take a few minutes to write out exactly what you seek to accomplish and review the list daily. Place it on your refrigerator and make a copy to post at your desk at work. The key is to make yourself accountable — in writing — for a given task.

Step 5: Range of Motion — Exercises should be performed through a pain-free, full range of motion, unless contraindicated. I never understood the phenomenon of performing half-reps on exercises (i.e. doing an arm curl but only going halfway up). As we get older, our range of motion with certain movements may become limited, so we need to counteract this by engaging full ranges of motion. An injury should be the only exception to this rule. For example, if an individual has been instructed by his/her physical therapist to avoid a full range of motion to an existing injury, then a partial range of motion may be warranted.

Step 6: Variety — There's nothing worse than a boring exercise routine. Who wants to do the same thing every session? A regimen with no variety encourages the ever-dreaded training plateaus. The human body adapts well to change after a while. Therefore, new stimuli must be introduced every so often to continue to challenge yourself. Specifically, try switching up your walking routine this week by doing any of the following: increase the total time you walk; change your route; stop every two minutes and perform 10 jumping jacks; or simply increase the speed at which you walk. The aforementioned examples merely represent the tip of the iceberg as far as how to tweak your routine to keep it interesting. You're only limited by your own creativity.

Step 7: Buddy system — There may be a day when you are not feeling as motivated to exercise. We've all been there. After an exhausting, stressful day at work, it can be challenging to keep up an exercise routine ... enter, the "fitness buddy."

Last winter, I wrote a column for the TAB & Press. In the conclusion of that article, I wrote a blurb about how beneficial having a workout buddy could be. Whether it is a co-worker, friend or family member, try and pick a friend — or two — who you know could help motivate you and vice-versa. Use your training buddy to keep you accountable. Challenge each other, set up fitness challenges for each other, and provide consistent

positive and motivational feedback to each other.

With the warm weather upon us, today is a great time to implement these seven steps. Most of you will read this on a Friday, the day the TAB is delivered, yet wait until Monday to start. Be different – be the person who makes the big change on a Friday or Saturday – not the typical “resolution” exerciser who always starts over on a Monday and falls off course by Wednesday. Take that as a challenge and keep me updated with your progress. As always, I welcome your questions and comments. Good luck and have fun!

To your health,
-Paul Connolly

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About the Author

Certified through the National Strength and Conditioning Association as a personal trainer (NSCA-CPT), Paul possesses a degree in Exercise Science with a background in anatomy & physiology, human performance, and nutrition. He has been involved in the fitness industry since 2003 and has contributed to local and national media publications as a featured health and wellness columnist. The founder of suburban Boston-based personal training consulting service PC Conditioning (<http://www.pcconditioning.com>), Paul is an advocate of strength training for all ages and enjoys working with fitness enthusiasts of all levels. His diverse clientele includes high school and collegiate athletes, stay-at-home Moms, corporate 9-5ers, brides-to-be, and seniors. Paul's passion for fitness has led him to engage his clients in all major components of fitness including cardiovascular conditioning, nutrition, strength training, and flexibility. Adult AED and CPR-certified, Paul is available by appointment only. He can be reached via e-mail at paul@pcconditioning.com or telephone at 617-834-1502.

“Understanding the fundamental concepts of exercise and optimizing daily function are key concepts in the training programs I outline for my clients. Injury prevention, improving self-confidence, and heightening one's knowledge of physical fitness through consistent hard work and dedication are all integral components of the approach I take with my clients. I see many people making similar mistakes in their conditioning programs and I make it a point to correct these areas. I demand 100% effort from my clients and make it a point to consistently educate them about the necessary lifestyle modifications required to achieve their respective goals.”

Important Disclaimer: The information contained within this document is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice and is not intended for medical diagnosis or treatment. The intention of this article is for the sole purpose of disseminating fitness information. We recommend that you always request the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider before starting any new fitness program or with any questions you may have regarding your health or any medical condition.