Cross Training

Cross training is a way to vary your fitness program by combining different types of exercise activities.

So, rather than jogging 3 days a week for aerobic exercise, you alternate jogging with swimming, biking, and tennis. Rather than doing the same weight machines every time you go to the gym, you mix it up with some free weight exercises or take a strength conditioning class.

Cross training is an ideal way to develop a "balanced" fitness program. Varying your workout routines engages different muscle groups. This not only improves your overall fitness, it helps to prevent overuse injuries that are more common in single-sport activities.

Benefits

Cross training is a common training technique. It has several benefits, whether you are a competitive athlete or simply want to improve your overall fitness level.

- Cross training can provide a "total body tune-up," something you will not get if you concentrate on just one type of activity.
- Including a variety of activities in your fitness program will help prevent boredom. That can help you stick to the program.
- Exercising various muscle groups may help your muscles adapt more easily to new activities.
- Because you will not be using the same muscles in the same way all the time, you may experience fewer overuse injuries.
- If you do become injured, you usually will not have to give up your entire fitness program. You may be able to modify or substitute activities, based on your doctor's suggestions.

How To Cross Train

Before beginning a new exercise program, talk to your doctor and make sure that it is safe for you to participate. Some activities are not appropriate for people with certain physical limitations.

All effective fitness programs have three components:

- Aerobic exercises (stair climbing, walking, skating) improve cardiovascular capabilities.
- Strength training (weight lifting, push-ups) helps develop muscle strength and tone.
- Flexibility exercises (stretches, yoga) help keep muscles limber.

To reap the most benefit from exercise, you should do at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days. You can break the 30 minutes of activity into shorter periods, as long as it adds up over the course of the day.
When developing a cross training program, you should first consider what kinds of activities are readily available to you. Remember that physical activity is not limited to sports like jogging or weight lifting. Dancing, gardening, and housework count, too. Make sure that your list of activities includes aerobic, strength, and flexibility exercises. Choose activities that are both convenient and enjoyable.

As you plan your cross training schedule, be sure to vary the activities you include in your workouts. Try not to do the same aerobic or strength activity on consecutive days.

**A Sample Program**

A balanced, weekly cross training program might look like this:

- **Aerobic exercise:** Three times a week for at least 30 minutes. Alternate activities such as walking, swimming, dancing, and stair climbing.

- **Strength training:** Twice a week (not consecutive days) for at least 30 minutes, working each major muscle group. Try to do different exercises for each muscle group on alternate days, or use different resistance tools, such as free weights or stretch tubing.

- **Flexibility exercise:** Every day for at least 5 to 10 minutes. Stretching exercises may be done daily, but be sure to warm up your muscles with a short walk or other aerobic activity before you stretch.

An alternative may be to combine different activities into one day's aerobic workout. For example, you could combine 10 minutes of walking, 10 minutes on an elliptical trainer, and 10 minutes on a step climber. You may also decide to switch between upper body and lower body strength exercises on your strength training days.

On the days you do not have a specific workout planned, be sure to still get in your 30 minutes of activity — whether it be housecleaning, gardening, walking, or a combination of activities.

**Watch Your Progress**

Start slowly and gradually increase the duration and intensity of your exercises. Try to follow the "10 percent rule": Increase how often, how long, and how intensely your exercise by no more than 10% each week. You can use a Daily Activity Log to record your progress.

You may not see results overnight, but cross training will have a beneficial effect on your health and fitness level. Regular physical activity increases your chances for a longer, healthier, and more independent life.

Related Links:

- Aerobic Exercise (http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00194)
- Beginning a Weight Training Program (http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00331)
- Warm Up, Cool Down and Be Flexible (http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00310)
- Starting an Exercise Program (http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00416)