

Take The First Steps To Fitness

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Winter in the Washington, DC is always interesting. One week, we're getting pelted with ice and snow. The next, it's warm and sunny and we're putting our winter clothes away for good...only to take them out again the following week. And in typical DC fashion, the past couple of months have been a roller coaster ride, weather-wise. Pretty soon, this roller coaster ride will end and Spring will really be here. This means there's no time like the present to talk about taking those first steps to fitness.

Here's a hypothetical situation: it's March 21st, the first day of Spring. It's a glorious day and you are ready to shake off the winter blues and get active. You haven't been active in...let's just say you've taken some time off. You put on the shoes that have been sitting in your closet all winter and head outside for a run. You get started, the first minute feeling really good. So, you speed up. Then your heart starts racing. You cannot catch your breath. You feel like your lungs will burst out of your chest. You turn around and go home, cursing yourself for even trying. You'll try again tomorrow. Though tomorrow comes and your knees ache and you tell yourself you'll try again some other time.

Sound familiar? If so, you're not alone. Everyone has to start somewhere and Spring is a perfect time to do so. The days are getting longer and warmer and seeing everyone being active outside is just darn inspiring. But the important thing to remember is that you have to go about it the right way in order to prevent the above scenario from happening. The first step to fitness is starting your fitness program from your own current level of fitness or it can lead to you getting hurt or getting burned out, or both. Some ways to determine your current level of fitness are seeing how long it takes you to walk one mile, measuring your heart rate before and after walking that one mile, measuring your body mass index and taking your waist circumference at your navel. These are all indicators of your current fitness and health. Though you should consult your doctor before you start any fitness program to be sure you're healthy enough for the type of physical activity you're about to try.

The next step on the road to fitness is determining your goals. What do you want your fitness program to do for you? Are you interested in losing weight? Do you want to rev up your current routine by trying something new? Do you want to challenge yourself and accomplish something you thought impossible? Or do you want to get active while meeting new people? Whatever your goals may be, it's important to have manageable goals that you can actually reach. If you set your goals too high, it can be very discouraging if you don't reach them. This can lead to you quitting all together.

The third step to fitness is thinking about your likes and dislikes. Say a friend of yours is really into a particular sport and wants you to try it. But you know you would rather be tarred and feathered than participate in this particular sport. It's nothing against your friend, but you know you will loathe every minute of practice and may even be mad at your friend for dragging you along. What's worse, you probably won't put much effort into it and possibly quit. It may take a few tries to find something you really like, but you're more likely to be active (and successful) if you do something that you like.

The fourth step to fitness nirvana is to start gradually. In that scenario above, you started off at full throttle and subsequently gave up and went home, never to try again. Next time, start off slowly and build up to full throttle after you've put some time in to build up stamina and endurance. Instead of running like a speed demon, start off at a pace that allows you to carry on a conversation. This will allow you to control your breathing and actually go a little farther than you would have been able to do at full speed. Understand that starting off slowly will reduce the likelihood of getting hurt as well as encourage and motivate you to continue going.

The last step on the road to fitness, and my personal favorite, it to JUST DO IT. Stop thinking about it and get to it. Don't be afraid to start an exercise routine. It doesn't have to be intimidating. And physical

activity doesn't have to be a punishment. It can be fun and something that empowers you. With the right tools, you can be successful and reach your goals!

We at Fleet Feet Sports, Gaithersburg can help you with those tools. We can help you get new shoes that fit you properly and offer the correct amount of support and/or cushion (a must for a new fitness program). Proper shoes can help prevent injury and help you feel good while working out, a key to success. We can help you with fitness apparel, to be sure you're wearing clothing that will wick that sweat away, leaving your skin drier and more comfortable. When you're comfortable, you're more likely to continue. We have accessories, medical items, nutrition products and everything you could possibly need to get started with a new fitness routine. All you have to do is come in and we'll be here to help you get on the right track.

If you're thinking about starting a running program, whether you've never run before or have been injured and want to come back to the sport, our No Boundaries Beginning 5K Programs are a great way to get started. You will get so much information about running form, staying injury free, how to hydrate and eat well, and more. You are more likely to run regularly and learn the proper running dos and don'ts. You are more likely to have fun. And that's what running is all about. If it's fun, you're more likely to do it. And besides, you don't have to think about anything. You just follow the program! Many of our No Boundaries alumni have become life-long runners, completing 10Ks, half marathons, marathons and triathlons. Friendships are made, and traditions are formed through our running programs. You just can't get that on your own. As the coach, I have seen people go from unsure and apprehensive beginning runners to strong, confident life-long runners. Consider joining one of our No Boundaries Beginning 5K running programs sponsored by New Balance and Whole Foods. In just 10 weeks, you'll go from the couch to crossing the finish line of a 5K race. For more information, check out our website (<http://www.fleetfeetgaithersburg.com/2011-beginning-5k-running-programs>). All the program schedules are listed, you can register online (<https://www.signmeup.com/site/online-event-registration/74509>) and read what some of our graduates have said about the program. Come to our Kick Off Event on March 14th at 7:30pm and learn more about the program. You can ask questions with the coaches, meet past participants, and get all the information you need about the program. As a special treat, we have a guest speaker joining us for our Kick Off event: **Sophia Franklin, contestant from the Biggest Loser Season 10**. Sophia will talk about the benefits of having a plan, working out with a group and how to stay motivated when the road ahead seems too overwhelming.

Whatever fitness routine you ultimately end up doing, know that being active is one of the most important things you can do for your health. It is the single, easiest way to live a longer, healthier life. You can't ask for more than that!

Happy running!

Jenn Gill is the Director of Training Programs for Fleet Feet Sports, Gaithersburg. She also offers personal coaching online and in-person. To learn more about her services go to www.coachjenn.com; to ask her any running related questions, contact her at jenn@coachjenn.com.