FitFacts®

Cross-training for Fun and Fitness

TIRED OF THE SAME OLD WORKOUT? LOOKING FOR A LEVEL OF FITNESS THAT YOUR CURRENT EXERCISE ROUTINE CAN'T OFFER? ARE YOU EXPERIENCING NAGGING INJURIES THAT JUST DON'T SEEM TO HEAL? IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS, YOU ARE A LIKELY CANDIDATE FOR CROSS-TRAINING.

Cross-training is simply a way of adding variety to your exercise program. You can vary your aerobic routine and incorporate some muscular strength and flexibility training as well.

And if you think cross-training is new, think again. Athletes have been cross-training since the days of the Olympic decathlons and pentathlons of ancient Greece. The past decade has seen the popularity of the triathlon reach international proportions, introducing the concept of cross-training to even the most recreational athletes.

WHAT'S THE POINT?

The benefits of cross-training are numerous. It reduces the risk of injury because the same muscles, bones and joints are not continuously subjected to the stresses of the same activity.

Cross-training also adds variety to your workouts, making your routine more interesting and easier to stick with. For the athlete, it provides a break from the rigors and stresses of single-sport training. Cross-training will improve your overall fitness and, over an extended period of time, may ultimately lead to improved performance.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF CROSS-TRAINING

Whether you are new to exercise or a competitive athlete, the essentials of cross-training are the same. You can choose to vary your routine from workout to workout, or simply add a new component to your existing exercise program.

One of the easiest ways to start cross-training is to alternate between activities—walking one day and swimming or bicycling the next. Or, you can alternate these activities within a single workout, spending five minutes on a treadmill, five minutes on a stationary cycle, and so on for a total of 30 minutes.

More experienced exercisers might begin an hour-long workout with a 15-minute jog to a nearby pool. After a 20-minute swim and perhaps a few minutes of calisthenics, they can finish off their workout with a 15-minute jog back home and several minutes of flexibility exercises.

GET CREATIVE WITH CROSS-TRAINING

If you're looking to increase your endurance level, try alternating low-level aerobic activities, such as 20 minutes of stationary cycling, with 10 minutes of higher-intensity exercise, such as stair-stepping or jumping rope. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend on the more intense activity.

These formulas can be used with just about any type of activity—as long as you enjoy it. Combining a group of aerobic activities into one workout at steady or varying intensities is an excellent way to fight the boredom that comes from performing the same daily workout routine.

All exercise sessions, whether they involve cross-training or not, should begin and end with low-level aerobic exercise and stretching to effectively warm up and cool down. And remember, it's always a good idea to check with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Mayo Clinic

American Academy of Orthopedic Surgery

ACE
AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE