

# FitFacts®



## Exercise for Individuals with Eye Impairments

WHILE STARTING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM POSES UNIQUE CHALLENGES IF YOU ARE VISUALLY IMPAIRED OR LEGALLY BLIND, A FEW PRECAUTIONS AND MODIFICATIONS CAN OPEN YOUR WORLD TO THE MANY BENEFITS AND JOYS OF REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. FOLLOWING ARE SOME TIPS TO HELP YOU GET STARTED.

### SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Before you walk through the doors of a health club or purchase your first piece of equipment, talk to your ophthalmologist. This step is especially critical if you have recently had an eye operation or are at risk for intraocular bleeding from conditions such as diabetes or age-related macular degeneration. (In such cases, strenuous activity should be avoided.) Ask for a referral to a fitness professional who can help you begin a safe, effective and enjoyable exercise program. If your doctor doesn't have a recommendation, check out [www.ACEfitness.org/profreg](http://www.ACEfitness.org/profreg) to find an ACE-certified Advanced Health & Fitness Specialist near you.

If you will be exercising at a gym, ask for a facility orientation. Determine if doors are completely closed or open versus dangerously half open. Are exercise areas well-lit with as much glare control as possible? Is the facility large enough to assure ample space between equipment and minimal clutter?

### COMMIT TO A PROGRAM

Once you [commit to a program](#), think of exercise as part of your daily routine. Set short-term, achievable exercise goals. This will help you to experience good results and the benefits of being active. Plus, modest, realistic goals also build confidence and enthusiasm, making exercise more fun.

Aim to be physically active doing something that you enjoy for at least 30 minutes on most, preferably all, days of the week. Once you've developed an exercise routine, gradually increase intensity, duration, or frequency to maximize your fitness improvements. Also be sure that your trainer develops a program for you that includes cardiovascular exercise (walking, swimming, biking, running), resistance training (free weights or machines, push-ups, core-strengthening exercises), and flexibility training (stretching, yoga). As you become more comfortable with your exercise program, you may choose to complete some of your workouts without a personal trainer. In those cases, make sure to work out with a sighted partner to assure your safety.

### MAKE MODIFICATIONS AS NEEDED

Just as it is important to challenge yourself physically to achieve your goals, it is also important to know when to limit physical activity. If you've recently had an eye operation, a serious illness, or a change in your vision, modify your exercise program to reduce the risk of complications. Decrease your intensity with exercises such as walking, swimming or water aerobics. When weight training, use lighter weights and increase your repetitions instead of increasing the amount of weight. Avoid exercises that stress isometric muscle contractions (e.g., pushing against an immovable object). Also make sure that you are exercising at an intensity that is comfortable for you and not overly strenuous.

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Terminate exercise if you experience loss or dimming of vision, new floaters (spots or shapes floating through vision) or light flashes or other symptoms.

### MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

A positive attitude will help with motivation and adherence to your program. Here are some tips for making your exercise routine enjoyable:

- Keep routines interesting and fun. Choose activities you enjoy and feel comfortable with.
- Vary the types of exercise you do so you can avoid falling into a rut. Exercise variables must be changed not only for the sake of interest, but also to foster progress.
- Make your exercise routine fit your personality and daily lifestyle with respect to time, location, expense and degree of social interaction. The more comfortable the routine, the more likely you will be able to maintain it.
- Even when you are feeling tired or stressed, try to maintain your program. You will feel better after your workout.
- Focus on your successes, no matter how small. Remember, persistence pays off.

Lesley Teitelbaum, a research assistant professor at the department of psychology, Syracuse University, and Mitch Lemelbaum, a faculty member in the department of exercise science, Syracuse University, provided exercise tips and recommendations for this educational handout.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[National Federation for the Blind](#)

[Medline Plus](#)

[National Eye Institute](#)