Beginning A Physical Activity Program

Goal
To have a physical activity become a healthy habit for life.

Objectives
Participants will:
- Start slowly and progress gradually.
- Include endurance, strength and flexibility activities.
- Learn how to pace themselves.
- Learn tips to make any activity a healthy habit.
- Do a physical activity.

Key Teaching Points
- Choose an activity you like.
- Warming up and cooling down helps prevent injuries.
- Never “bounce” when you stretch.
- Hold stretches 15-20 seconds.
- Do only what your body can handle and progress slowly.

Introduction
Physical activity is moderate activity sustained for a length of time. For example, it may include 30 minutes of walking, roller blading, skiing, lawn mowing (using a push mower), dancing, aerobics and various sports. If time does not allow for 30-45 minutes of continuous activity, it can be divided into 10-15 minute segments three times a day.

Choosing an Activity
It is important to choose an activity that you enjoy doing. If you decide to run and later find out you do not like it, you should try something else until you discover an activity you enjoy.

Ask your friends what they like to do. You may get ideas for physical activities from them that you may not have thought of by yourself. Also, it is more fun to take part in an activity with others.

Participate in more than one activity. Sometimes you may want to walk alone or with a partner. Other times you may want to play soccer or basketball with a group of friends. If you like more than one activity, you are less likely to become bored with “exercise.”

Getting Started
Once you have decided on the activity you want to do, start slowly and progress gradually. Too often we “over do.” For example: Your normal routine when you come home from school has been to get a snack and watch TV. The only activity which you take part in is badminton during P.E. class. Now you have decided to start walking. How hard could that be? Well, you ask your friend who has been walking two miles every day for four weeks to be your partner. The first day you walk, you try to keep up with your friend. The next day, every muscle in your legs ache and you decide that walking is too painful to do it again!

You over did it. Maybe you should have asked your friend to help you decide how fast you should walk, like walking one mile in 20 minutes instead of 15 and increasing the pace after two weeks. Your
friend could be your support until you are able to keep up and become walking “partners.” Too often when we do not start out slowly and progress gradually, we become discouraged because we are too sore. No one likes to be in pain.

Give “Walking” handout to participants. Go over the section “Pace Yourself” so they will have an idea of how to monitor the intensity of their physical activity.

**Steps To Ensure Fun and Safe Activities**
Let’s look at how you can lessen the chance of injury and pain from a physical activity.

- **Warm-Up.** Warming-up the body before an activity reduces the risk of pulling a muscle and eases the body into the activity. One of the best ways to warm up is to mimic the activity. For example, when walking, start by keeping your pace at about 75% of the speed you normally go for about 5 - 10 minutes allowing the muscles to warm-up and stretch. They will be more flexible for the faster pace you will go, and be less likely to get injured.

  Another way to warm-up is by doing light stretches. The stretches must be done slowly and gently to prevent injury to muscles, tendons and ligaments. Do not bounce. Hold each stretch for a count of 10-30 seconds. You should not experience any pain when stretching. If you do feel pain, stop the stretch immediately to prevent injury.

- **Physical Activity.** Do the main physical activity after you have warmed-up. It may be walking, running, dancing, muscle strengthening or a flexibility workout. Stretching to improve flexibility can be done three times a week as well as before or after aerobic and strengthening activities.

- **Cool-Down.** Five minutes of your physical activity should include a cool-down. If you are walking, slow down the pace. This allows the body to return to a resting state and helps reduce muscle soreness.

- **Schedule Strength Activities After Aerobic Activities.** If you are planning to do more than one physical activity in the same day, do strengthening activities after finishing your aerobic cool-down. Your muscles will be warmed-up and you will have less soreness from the workout.

You can, of course, do endurance and strength activities on different days. Remember to warm-up and cool-down for each of them.

**Do one of the Warm-Up/Cool-Down activities with the participants.**

**Final Thoughts**
Physical activity can be fun or it can be work. Since we would all rather have fun, it is important you choose what you really like to do. Add music to your activity, choose a time of day that is convenient for you, find a friend to be your “physical activity partner”. Remember, do not over do. Start slowly and progress gradually. Most of all, HAVE FUN!

**Activities**

**Activity I - Warm-Up/Cool-Down ~ The S Trail**
This activity is intended for grade levels 3-5. No equipment is necessary. The emphasized skills include walking and jogging.
• Students form a single line.
• Designate 1 student to lead.

DESCRIPTION
• Students follow the leader in a single file line, with their eyes focused directly on the person in front of them.
• The student leader makes S patterns beginning with a walk and gradually increases speed to a jog.
• After a designated time (e.g., 30 seconds), change leaders by having the front person rotate to the back of the line.

TEACHING SUGGESTION
• Remind students to stay in single file, directly behind the person in front of them.

VARIATIONS
• Form two or more lines and have several patterns going simultaneously.
• Have students move in other formations such as numbers or geometric shapes.
• Change locomotor movement to a skip or gallop.
• BASKETBALL, SOCCER: Students dribble a ball while traveling.

Activity II - Warm-Up/Cool-Down ~ Stretch Routine
This activity is intended for grade levels 3-5. No equipment is necessary. The emphasized skills include stretching.

ORGANIZATION
• Students are scattered in personal space. (NOTE: Students should engage in a few minutes of gentle, rhythmic movement, such as walking, prior to stretching.)

DESCRIPTION
• Each stretch should be held for approximately 20 seconds, then repeated to the opposite site (arm, leg, etc.)
• Neck
  • Bend head to the right, moving right ear toward right shoulder.
  • Keep shoulders relaxed and down.
  • Turn head so that chin is above right shoulder.
  • Keep shoulders relaxed and down.
• Chest (pectoralis)
  • Clasp hands behind hips.
  • Raise clasped hands upward and away from body.
• Back
  • Wrap arms around upper body as though hugging yourself.
• Trunk, Sides
  • Stand with feet shoulder width apart.
Place right hand on right hip, extend left hand up and over head.
- Bend to right side.
- Do not lean forward or backward, keep extended arm directly above the head.

- **Back of Thighs (hamstrings)**
  - Cross left foot over right foot with knees slightly bent.
  - Bend forward slowly, sliding hands down the front of the legs.
  - Keep hands on legs to support lower back.

- **Front of Thighs**
  - Reach back to grab left ankle with right hand.
  - Keep left knee pointing to the ground.
  - Pull left ankle toward body.

- **Calves (gastrocnemius)**
  - Lunge forward with right foot and bend right knee.
  - Keep left leg straight with foot flat on the ground.
  - Point both feet directly forward.
  - Hold upper body straight and high.

**TEACHING SUGGESTIONS**

- Stretches should be held to the point of gentle tension - no strain or pain.
- Remind students to breathe during the stretches. (One way to ensure they breathe is to have them count aloud.)
- The purpose of stretching before activity is to gently lengthen and prepare the muscles for more vigorous activity.
- Do no use ballistic (bouncing) stretches.

**Evaluation**

Ask participants to fill-out the *Youth Health Breaks* Evaluation for ‘Beginning a Physical Activity Program.’

**Additional Resource**

*Youth Health Breaks* Handout - Walking