

OPERATION

- Is the control panel accessible and easy to read?
- Does the control panel have the capacity for manual use separate from software used for automated programming?
- Is the noise level acceptable?
- Is the belt heavy duty as to not stretch with extended use?

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Weight of treadmill
- Space available and height of ceiling
- Aesthetics
- Storage potential
- How accurate is the calibration?

Using a Home Treadmill

Treadmills should be positioned away from walls to avoid injury due to falls. Be sure that the back of the treadmill has at least six to eight feet of clearance from a ledge, wall or window. The power supply and wiring should be located away from walking paths or taped to prevent tripping when stepping on or off of the running belt.

Make sure the running belt is properly adjusted before use. Belts that are too loose or too tight will cause wear and tear on the treadmill, which result in expensive repair or replacement costs. The deck beneath the belt should be laminated to protect it from friction wear and tear. This deck absorbs the hundreds of pounds of force from each step.

Make sure that you follow the directions included with purchase for maintaining the belt deck connection. Increased friction and heat will cause "amp draw," which pulls power away from the electrical components of your machine. Discuss appropriate lubrication and maintenance with the sales people at the store where you purchased your treadmill.

Your treadmill should come equipped with arm grips, siderails, or safety bars. These are excellent for defining the running/walking area for your exercise bout. They allow you to catch yourself if you trip or fall. When stepping off a treadmill while the belt is moving it is advisable to use these rails for safety.

The treadmill should come equipped with an emergency shut-off key, clip or tether. These are a safety must, especially with young children around. The tether feature is preferred, since an automatic stop button may not be in reach as you fall.

Many treadmills come with sophisticated electronic displays that allow you to design workouts to your needs. For some, this programming is basically a motivation and selling point. All you need is enough variety to keep your workouts motivating and interesting. The bare minimum display and programming features should include distance, speed, time, incline and possibly calories expended. It is important that you be able to use the treadmill in the manual mode.

Important Points to Remember:

Before you get on: Before you get on the treadmill, experiment with the controls. Speed it up, slow it down, increase and decrease the incline and test the emergency off button.

Posture when walking or running: Shoulders back, head up and slightly forward, chin up and abdominals tight. Look forward, not down at your feet.

Stride length: Relax and maintain the normal stride you would use when walking on the ground. Don't chop your steps.

Where you are: It is important to pay attention to where you are on the treadmill. Don't drift sideways or allow yourself to go to the back of the belt.

Make it a habit: A treadmill is only as good for your health as the frequency with which you use it. Set a specific time of day, set a specific number of minutes and make it routine.

Selecting And Effectively Using A Home Treadmill

For more information from the American College of Sports Medicine, visit us at www.acsm.org.



**AMERICAN COLLEGE
of SPORTS MEDICINE**

Tel.: (317) 697-9200 • FAX: (317) 694-7817 • www.acsm.org
Street Address: 401 W. Michigan St. • Indianapolis, IN 46202-3233 USA
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1440 • Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440 USA



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www.acsm.org

The Importance and Benefits of Physical Activity

It is now firmly established that individuals who engage in some form of physical activity, either by lifestyle or occupation, are likely to live longer and healthier lives. Research shows that even moderate caloric expenditure from physical activity has a significant impact on longevity. Importantly, a physically active person who possesses other risk factors like hypertension, diabetes and even a smoking habit can derive significant gains from incorporating regular physical activity into his/her daily activities.

Regular physical activity is also likely to help modify a number of risk factors. As an adjunct to weight loss, exercise is likely to help you stay on a diet and lose weight. Additionally, regular exercise is associated with reductions in blood pressure, improved glucose regulation, promotion of better lipid profiles and stronger/denser bones.

The First Step!

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, answer the questions below. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine your suitability for testing or training.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition and that you should only participate in physical activity recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest when you participate in physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not involved in physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance because of dizziness, or do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or heart condition?
- Do you know of any other reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult your physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity.

If you answered no to all the questions, you have reasonable assurance of your suitability for fitness testing and training.

Selecting a Home Treadmill

Treadmills are a popular choice of equipment for those who want to engage in physical activity. Below are useful guidelines for you to consider before making a purchase. Be sure to try it out before you buy. Doing so will allow you to find a treadmill that meets your specific needs.

A treadmill may be either motorized or human-powered. Manual treadmills are less expensive and safer because the running belt stops moving when you do. However, manual treadmills usually have smaller running belts, making it difficult to jog or run, let alone maintain a brisk walk. Often, the difficulty in getting the belt to move smoothly on a non-motorized treadmill increases the likelihood of holding on to the handrail in an effort to generate power, causing an inconsistent pace.

This inconsistent pace may cause muscle strain or difficulty in elevating your heart rate. Additionally, the holding on may elevate blood pressure from breath-holding. Exercise at home should be easy and something to look forward to. If it is difficult to get the machine to work, you are less likely to exercise. For these reasons, you may want to consider a motorized treadmill.

SAFETY

- Stability of platform when level and with elevation: feels solid, not wobbly.
- Doesn't have parts that hit you or cramp your movements in an unnatural fashion.
- Automatic emergency shut-off key, clip or tether.
- Side rails or safety bars for balance: They should be reachable and sturdy, but out of the way of swinging arms.

MAINTENANCE AND DURABILITY

- Is the company reliable and reputable?
- Can the treadmill be easily assembled and maintained?
- Cost of maintenance?
- Does the treadmill come with a warranty? What does the warranty cover and for how long?
- Are local technicians available for service?

POWER AND PERFORMANCE

- Treadmill motor: should have a minimum continuous duty rating of 1.5 h.p. motor (2.5 to 3.0 h.p. is preferred). To test the motor, plant your feet firmly on the belt while the machine is running at its lowest speed, checking for any hesitation, groaning or grinding.
- Power supply: Does the treadmill require 110 or 220v? 220v will probably require circuit alterations in the room where it will be used.
- Belt size: Should be at least 18 to 20 inches wide and 48 inches long. Narrow, short running belts make it more difficult and less enjoyable because the chances of tripping or falling off of the belt increase with a narrow belt. The platform should be low to the floor and have ample space to straddle the treadmill belt.
- Speed range should be 0.1 to a minimum of 8 mph. This speed range should satisfy most walkers as well as runners. Low starting speed is an important issue. We recommend a safe starting speed of 0.1 mph with slow incremental increase in belt speed. The stop should be smooth stop (not sudden). The motor should be able to maintain speed regardless of treadmill elevation and weight of user.
- Incline should range from 0 percent to at least 10 percent. Incline mechanisms can be either electric or manual. Manual cranks are found generally on lower end treadmills to keep the price down. The treadmill should not wobble at high elevations.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

There are three principle components to a rounded program of physical activity: aerobic exercise, strength training exercise and flexibility training. It is not essential that all three components be performed during the same workout session. Try to create a pattern that fits into your schedule and one to which you can adhere. Commitment to a regular physical activity program is more important than intensity of the workouts. Therefore, choose exercises you believe you are likely to pursue and enjoy.

ACSM's Position Stand "The Recommended Quantity and Quality of Exercise for ... Healthy Adults" ©1998 states that aerobic training should be performed three to five days per week with a minimum of 20 minutes per day. Remember that if your schedule is tight, it is better to exercise for a shorter period of time than not at all. Typical forms of aerobic exercise are walking and running (treadmills), stair climbing, bicycling (bicycle ergometers), rowing, cross-country skiing and swimming. Many devices contain combinations of these motions.

For general purposes, strength training should be done two to three times per week. Strength training is performed with free weights or weight machines. For the purposes of general training, two to three upper body and lower body exercises should be done. Additionally, abdominal exercises are an important part of strength training.

Flexibility training is important and frequently neglected, resulting in increased tightness as we age and become less active. Stretching is most safely done with sustained gradual movements lasting a minimum of 15 seconds per stretch. At a minimum, strive to stretch every day.