

long blog post for healthcare clinic

How To Return To Fitness After A Break

Returning to fitness is an exciting and worthwhile, but sometimes challenging goal.

Making the decision to prioritise your fitness has countless benefits. Regular exercise is beneficial for your mental and physical health, improves mood, increases energy and is fantastic for your overall well-being.

Returning to fitness is possible for everyone with the proper preparation and dedication. Follow the steps below to make your journey back to fitness enjoyable and stress-free.

Preparing the Mind for a Return to Fitness

1. Set SMART Goals

Goal setting is an important part of success; in fitness, business, and life!

SMART goals are:

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Relevant

Time-based

So, instead of your goal being: I will exercise.

Create a SMART goal such as: I will complete 30 minutes of exercise, 3 times a week in September.

This allows you to track your success and be more consistent. To achieve your goal- write it down, read it out loud, tell others and hold yourself accountable! When you do achieve your goal, celebrate your hard work.

2. Create a Workout Schedule

The most common excuse for people not exercising is that they 'don't have the time'. By scheduling your exercise into your day, you prioritise your health and fitness and make time for what is important.

Current research shows that we spend an average of 3 hours and 15 minutes on our smartphones everyday! Could you use this time better and schedule in time to exercise?

3. Set Timers

Setting a timer for when to exercise ensures that forgetting to exercise cannot be to blame. A simple alarm on your phone or computer can remind you to exercise and ensure that your routine is followed.

4. Motivate Yourself

Finding the motivation to exercise can be difficult. Finding your why can empower you to intrinsically motivate yourself to exercise, or perhaps a gym membership or workout buddy might be the extrinsic motivation you need to achieve your goals.

5. Get Excited!

When you exercise, you are doing something great for your health. This should be celebrated. Some ideas to get excited about exercise include:

Buy yourself some new workout clothes so you look the part

Make a playlist of your favourite songs to listen to while exercising

Preparing Your Body for a Return to Fitness

1. Assess your Fitness

Our fitness level fluctuates throughout our life depending on our level of activity and lifestyle. Particularly after a long break from exercise, we can lose strength, flexibility and aerobic fitness, meaning high intensity workouts may not be realistic straight away.

Assessing your fitness level is important. It sets a benchmark for you to work from and ensures you are not pushing your limits too far, too soon.

Some simple ways to assess your fitness include:

- **One minute test.** Set a timer for one minute and complete as many reps as you can. Squats, pushups, wall sits, burpees and planks are all great exercises to use in this test. After a minute of one exercise, note down how many reps you have completed. Two weeks later, try again and celebrate your improvement.
- **One kilometre test.** For this test, record how long it takes you to complete one kilometre. If you have been inactive for a long period of time, running a kilometre may sound unattainable. If you cannot run the whole distance, this is okay. Pace yourself and test your personal limits. After two weeks of exercise, try this test again and see how much faster you can complete one kilometre!

2. Consult a Healthcare Professional about any Pre-Existing Medical Condition

A lack of preparation when returning to exercise can often lead to injury and setbacks. It is vital that you consult your GP or Physiotherapist before returning to fitness, especially if you have a pre-existing medical condition. Your healthcare expert will determine whether it is safe for you to return to your exercise of choice and can help you to manage your condition while exercising.

3. Remember the Importance of Healthy Eating

If you are returning to fitness, you must consider your lifestyle holistically. You cannot be truly healthy if you exercise but neglect other parts of your health like diet or mental health.

Healthy eating and drinking lots of water will help you to achieve your fitness goals. Typically, healthy eating includes reducing processed and sugary foods, increasing vegetable intake and consuming a balanced diet. A dietician can help to support your healthy eating journey.

4. Start Slow

When returning to exercise, it is important to start slow and pace yourself. Pushing your limits without the fitness level to support your body can lead to injuries.

A physiotherapist or fitness coach can help you to transition back to exercise by creating a personalised exercise plan. This will ensure you set realistic, achievable goals and increase your strength and endurance.

5. Warm up and Cool Down

Warming up and cooling down the body is a vital step in injury prevention. Stretching is the most common form of warming up or cooling down. For some variety, try yoga or pilates exercises.

Returning to fitness is a great decision for your health. By following the steps above to prepare your mind and body, you can enjoy the process and learn to love exercise.

If you are returning to exercise, a visit to the physiotherapist could contribute to your preparation and overall success. At Northern Districts Physiotherapy and Sports Clinic, we can help you to assess your fitness and prepare a personalised plan to guide you through the process. Book online now.