



Active health Q&A with James S. Kercher, MD

As I get older, what are the secrets to consistently staying in shape while also avoiding injury?

Exercise is essential for a healthy lifestyle. New fitness regimens such as Cross-Fit and Boot Camp are popular and based on the concept of high-impact interval training. These programs emphasize explosive exercises including plyometrics, nontraditional weight lifting and interval cardiovascular training. While these programs are effective at decreasing body fat and building lean muscle, the repetitive, strenuous nature increases the risk of injury.

There are steps you can take to avoid injury. First, start slow and build your way up. Your body needs time to adapt. Training too hard or too frequently can lead to overuse injuries, such as stress fractures and inflamed tendons. Ideally, training days should alternate between high-intensity and low-intensity days to allow for recovery. Always include a warm-up, stretching and a cool-down period. Low-impact activities like swimming and biking are great cardiovascular workouts and less stressful on your joints. High-impact activities like sprinting, running, and plyometrics are great for speed and explosiveness but can compromise joints if you are tired. Give your body time to rest and recover. Fatigued muscles are less effective at protecting our bodies from tendon, ligament or cartilage injuries. When strength training, remember to maintain good form. Start with light weights and keep repetitions high. Do not strain to finish more repetitions or to lift heavier weights. When your muscles become fatigued, form may be compromised and injuries can occur. There is a fine balance between pushing yourself and making your body susceptible to injury. It is important to listen to your body.

Depending on your age and fitness level, you may want to contact a doctor prior to beginning a vigorous workout routine. If an injury does occur, it is best to see a healthcare professional early, so the problem does not worsen or become chronic. At Peachtree Orthopaedic Clinic, our primary goal is to help you stay in the game.