

December 2009

Gifts for the Fitness-minded Friend



Purchasing the appropriate gift can be easy, especially if the recipient is involved in **fitness activities**. If your friends or relatives already belong to a health club they enjoy, you could extend the membership for as long as your budget allows. Depending on how well you know both parties, an **introductory session with a personal trainer** may be in order.

For those who play specific sports, consider standard equipment or apparel. For the adventurous ones on your gift list, consider a sample lesson for an offbeat activity: trapeze, rock-climbing, even skydiving. If your friend wants to start eating healthier to increase overall fitness level, he or she might appreciate a gift card to an organic food store or supermarket.

Or you can give the gift of **reading**. A book or a subscription to a magazine related to your friend's favorite fitness activity—or a biography of an inspirational sports figure—might be appropriate. If you enjoy a certain **fitness DVD**, give a copy of that. For their further relaxation, give **gift certificates to a reputable licensed massage therapist**.

Because practically everyone enjoys working out to music, the gift of a **new iPod**, **wireless MP3 headset** or similar device is an almost guaranteed hit. But if that is not within your budget, substitute a gift card that allows the recipient to **download an array of new songs** to listen while biking, punching, dancing, walking or jogging.

The American Council on Exercise has some further suggestions:

- **resistance exercise bands**
- **a stability board**
- **a set of free weights or adjustable dumbbells**
- **a high-quality jump rope**
- **a heart-rate monitor**

Many of the above suggestions are not limited to friends or relatives who already work out or play sports on a regular basis. If the person you are giving the gift to is just getting started on a new fitness program, we can help design a routine that incorporates your new gift and provides safe, healthy workouts for the months ahead.

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Weight Machines or Free Weights: Which Is Better?



The debate over whether weight machines or free weights better help a person achieve fitness is not new. Recently, the trend has been away from weight machines and toward free weights, so it is worth revisiting the benefits and drawbacks of both.

Weight machines have several advantages.

For one thing, they are easy for the beginner to use and result in fewer injuries. Because they allow individual muscle groups to be isolated and worked, machines move the body through a specific range of motion with good control. And properly adjusted machines provide support for the lift.

On the downside, weight machines reduce the need for balance and coordination while lifting. Their fixed motion pattern can lead to overuse injuries. Not all machines fit all body types well, and they are not portable.

Free weights help develop balance and coordination. They can be used through a full range of motion and for many different exercises, while working on muscles in a way similar to the way the body works muscles in real life.

However, free weights are more difficult for beginners to use and result in more injuries. They also require more control than weight machines, and when working with heavy weights, a spotter may be needed.

So which is really better? The American College of Sports Medicine recommends the following options for different groups:

- **beginning and intermediate training should incorporate both free weights and machines**
- **advanced training should emphasize free weights with supplemental weight machine work**
- **seniors should use weight machines for safety**

But perhaps finding a program you enjoy is the most important factor, because if you do not like your training routine, you will not stick with it. If you are ready for a change, talk to us about designing a new program that will add variety to your current workout.

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Effective Physical Therapy for Shoulder Dislocations



If you have dislocated your shoulder, choosing the best mode of treatment to get you moving and free from pain as quickly as possible can be a real challenge. One kind of shoulder dislocation, **multidirectional shoulder instability**, tends to occur in younger adults and may need surgery, along with physical therapy, to provide relief. Care should be taken not to resume any vigorous activity until the shoulder stabilizes.

Athletes, such as gymnasts, swimmers or weight trainers, can be particularly predisposed to multidirectional shoulder instability, because they lack the normal restraint system in their ligaments and capsule. Because this instability is not triggered by injury, it is vital to follow a physical therapy program

custom tailored to your unique case.

While your physician will determine if surgery is the best course of action, physical therapy alone might be sufficient to treat multidirectional shoulder instability in some people. Even if you do undergo surgery, physical therapy will still be the key to successful long-term recovery. **The goal of your physical therapy program will be to regain mobility and function, both for daily tasks and for more vigorous exercise or sports activities.** Successful treatment depends on several factors:

- the severity of your condition/injury
- the chosen treatment
- the intensity of physical therapy

You will be provided a gentle progression of exercises to assist in regaining your motion. Often your motion will be limited for several weeks. After approximately six weeks, you might start more intensive therapy, which could include strengthening exercises using weights or tubing. You should avoid movements such as throwing a ball that cause your shoulder to be stretched or extended.

Ideally, you should start your program early on, whether it is the sole treatment or immediately follows surgery. We will ensure that your program will get your shoulder in optimum condition in the most realistic time frame.

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Preparing for Ski Season Before Hitting the Slopes



After looking forward to ski season all year, the last thing you want is to be sidelined with an injury or sore muscles due to improper fitness. Because skiing is a physically intense activity, you need to be in peak physical condition when you hit the slopes.

At least a month before you intend to strap on those skis, **begin a skiing-specific training program.** This can help you avoid injuries common in skiers—tendonitis, knee injuries and muscle tears—and improve your speed, agility and endurance.

We can design a personalized program for you. Good preseason ski training may include

- **Strength training:** Obviously the legs and trunk are key muscle groups for skiers, but do not forget to work the upper body, as well. Strong arms help keep you stabilized when navigating difficult trails. Abdominal work improves balance and protects your lower back.
- **Balance-enhancing activities:** Many activities enhance balance and stability—yoga, rollerblading and trampoline training, to name a few.
- **Ski-specific workouts:** Routines designed especially for skiers use lunges, hopping, wall holds and isometric exercises to simulate skiing posture.
- **Aerobics:** Along with strength and balance training (three to four times a week) and your ski-specific exercises (two to three times a week), it is beneficial to add some aerobic activity. The stronger your heart and lungs, the better your stamina and endurance for long days of black diamond runs!

When your skis finally touch the powder after months of anticipation, remember to **take it easy at first.** Overdo it and you might get fatigued, causing injuries from stress or carelessness. For similar reasons, always be most careful on that last run of the day. No matter how ready you are for ski season, a long day on the slopes can take a toll.

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Treating Plantar Fasciitis with a Night Splint



The **plantar fascia** is a ligament full of fibers that runs along the bottom of the foot from the heel to the toes. More than two million Americans seek treatment each year for the pain and inflammation that result when tiny tears occur in the tissue. When the tears are located at the end of the ligament attached to the calcaneus, or heel bone, what you feel is **plantar fasciitis** or heel pain—a burning, aching or sticking sensation.

As you sleep, your foot naturally and normally flexes downward, and the plantar fascia contracts. If you suffer from plantar fasciitis, the initial stretching of the ligament when you arise from bed and put your foot on the floor will be particularly painful.

Wearing a **night splint** (or more precisely, a dorsiflexion night splint) **keeps your toes flexed a bit upward so the plantar fascia does not have the opportunity to contract.** Thus, in the morning, you reduce the difference between the ligament's position while you were sleeping and the ligament's position when you place your foot on the floor. This should alleviate a good deal of pain.

Conservative methods of treating plantar fasciitis include other modalities besides a night splint. The simplest include

- **rest**
- **ice packs on your heel for 10 minutes a few times daily**
- **calf-muscle stretches**

You should also **avoid walking barefoot**, which strains the plantar fascia. Your doctor may recommend taking a pain reliever like ibuprofen or another nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug.

We can help you manage your plantar fasciitis with additional foot devices, such as custom orthotics and pads, as well as a program of physical therapy exercises. In tandem, this regimen can help you avoid foot pain first thing in the morning.