



Fighting Fit

Fitness Gym and Martial Arts Academy

The Importance of Warming Up

How many times have you been pushed for time, rushed to the gym to fit in that quick half hour of exercise, and jumped straight into a full-on run on the treadmill? Or how often do you come to the gym and immediately start hammering out those reps with your favourite dumbbell exercises, starting straight on the heaviest weight you lifted last time, in an attempt to beat it? If this describes you, then you're foregoing what is possibly the most important safety factor of any exercise or physical activity programme - the warm up.

What is a warm up?

A warm up is a preparatory activity designed to increase muscle temperature and prepare the body for the more vigorous activity to follow. It encourages blood flow into the muscles, and the secretion of synovial fluid into the joints, which lubricates them and helps to protect them from injury.

Why do I need to warm up?

Warming up is important because it allows the body to adapt to the increased stress being placed upon it gradually, giving the body time to prepare itself for an increased level of activity and exertion. Warming up loosens the muscles, making them more supple, responsive and "exercise-ready". It also causes the secretion of synovial fluid into the joints, which acts as a lubricant and facilitates free and smooth movement at certain key areas such as the knee, ankle, hip and shoulder joints. Heart rate is also gradually increased, allowing it to adapt to the stresses being placed upon far more safely and effectively than if it experienced a sudden and sharp increase. All these factors combine to greatly reduce the risk of injury, such as muscle strains (caused by cold, tight muscles) and damage to joints (caused by a lack of synovial fluid and subsequent lubrication).

A warm up also allows for more effective performance, as when suitably prepared for the stress about to be placed upon it, the body is better able to cope and allows you to push yourself harder and sustain the activity for longer.



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How do I warm up?

There are two types of warm ups - General and Specific.

A general warm up should precede all types of exercise, and involves starting off slow on a piece of exercise machinery that uses at least 50% of the body's muscle mass. All aerobic exercise machines fulfil this criteria, so whatever piece of machinery you choose, be it the treadmill, cross-trainer, stationary bike or rowing machine, start off slow at a pace that isn't over challenging, but is enough to raise your pulse and just get the body moving. Gradually increase the pace over a 5 minute period to a brisk, but not fast, rate.

A preparatory stretch should then be performed for each major muscle group, to further prepare the muscle for activity. (TIP: Ask one of the Fighting Fit staff to show you some appropriate stretches if you're at all unsure about how to do so. They will be more than happy to help!)

A re-warm up should then be undertaken, and should be specific to the type of activity you're about to perform. This is known as a specific warm up. For example, if you were going to run, then you would start with a brisk walk, break into a light jog and then gradually work your way up to your standard running pace. Similarly, if you were using weights, 1 or 2 sets of the exercise about to be performed should be conducted with a light weight, to get the blood into the muscle, ensuring it is primed and ready for your working-weight sets.

Such actions will not only help to prevent injury, but will also allow you to get the most out of your exercise sessions by allowing the body to perform optimally and to its potential, giving you an enjoyable and productive exercise session all in one.