

ARE YOU FIT?

Fitness can be achieved in many ways. There are many opinions on what are the best ways. Is there a best way? Are there many ways? In this article I'm going to explain what fitness really is, and then you can decide if you are fit. Are you?

What is fitness? Often people lump *health* and *fitness* together. It's like they belong together all of the time. The problem with that is they are not the same thing, and they don't always lead to one another. I'm going to give you my version of the textbook definitions of the different terms that often describe "fitness".

1. *Physical fitness* is being able to complete tasks with vigor.
2. *Health* is the absence of disease.
3. *Physical activity* is anything that burns calories.
4. *Wellness* is the balance of body, mind and spirit, and represents a higher level of living.
5. *Exercise* is a sub-category of physical fitness and is structured to propel at least one of the five components of physical fitness.

As I stated in number five above, there are five components to physical fitness. They are cardio respiratory fitness, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, and body composition. Cardiorespiratory fitness is the capacity of your body to bring in and utilize oxygen. The more O₂ your body can use the better fit you are. Muscular strength is your muscles' abilities to go through ranges of motion with heavier loads. The stronger the better. Muscular endurance is your muscles' abilities to handle sub-maximal loads and go longer before fatigue is reached. Flexibility is your joints' abilities to go through a more full, pain free range of motion. And body composition is the difference between fat mass and fat free mass.

As you can probably tell, when people are talking about physical fitness they are really speaking of the five components to physical fitness. All of the five definitions above are related to each other, but as you can see they are different. And health and fitness don't always go together. What if you are strong, have a strong heart, able to crank out many push-ups, and are flexible and lean, but in order to get "lean" you have an eating disorder? Is that healthy? No. Or if we have all of the above properties of fitness but still have high blood pressure (which is very possible), are we at optimal health? No. So the point is we do need both.

So are you fit? Are you also achieving optimal health? If you ask most runners, they'd say yes. I don't always agree. I do agree if it's true! I agree if it's a runner whom also pound-for-pound has a great degree of muscular fitness because he/she works out, and shows a great degree of flexibility because he/she stretches, and is lean within healthy limits because of healthful eating, and doesn't abuse his/her body to stay lean. If this is the case, then heck yeah you're fit! But many times it's not. Runners often think they're the be-all end-all of fitness but many times they can hardly even do 10 push-ups. That is not fit. We need muscular fitness to be fit. Muscles move the bones and muscles keep the metabolism up and running. Besides, don't you want to look good? Isn't it nice to bust out a 5k with your muscles pumping?!

Runners often overly restrict their caloric intake to keep their body weight at a bare minimum. This may not be classified as an eating disorder but it certainly is disordered eating. And often times runners are

tight as piano strings simply because they run all the time and don't stretch. That's not overly fun when the piano string pops and you blow a tendon in your hamstring. Am I picking on runners? No way! I run. I love to run. Running is one of my exercises of choice. I'm simply trying to help my fellow runners to know that if we really want to join the ranks of truly fit people, we can't just run. We have to be balanced. Will our 5k times drop if we add a few pounds of muscle? I'm not going to lie to you, they could. There is no doubt that the most competitive runner is an emaciated sack of atrophy. But they get paid for it. And nobody said it was healthy. They just said it wins. So after a certain age, shouldn't we be slightly less concerned with plaques and trophies? Especially considering that the greatest trophy is a toned, muscular, fit and fast body that is injury free?!