



## Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

# Getting Fit During Physical Distancing

**Q:** *I've been told to stay home as part of the Coronavirus social distancing strategy. Consequently, I have a lot of free time on my hands and I have decided to use some of that time to improve my fitness. It has been 8 years since I last ran and I am looking for advice on how to safely start running again. Bored Barb*

**A:** Dear Bored Barb: congratulations on your decision to do something positive with your free time. You haven't run in a long time and following these tips will reduce your risk of injury and make getting back into shape much more enjoyable:

1. "Trying too hard" is the number one reason people get injured when they try to get back into shape. It is much smarter to start slowly to give your body the time it needs to adapt to the demands of exercise;
2. With the above in mind, don't begin by running during your workouts. Running is a high impact activity and your body tissues need to adapt and be 'toughened up' before they can safely handle this load;
3. Instead, start with walking for the first 4-6 weeks. Try walking 30 minutes/day and as tolerated, gradually increase the length of your walks to 60 minutes/day.
4. Once you can comfortably walk 60 minutes/day, you are ready to start doing walk/run workouts. For these, warm up by walking the first 10-20 minutes. For the next 30 minutes alternate jogging 1 minute and walking 1 minute. Warm down by walking the last 10-20 minutes.
5. As you get fitter, progressively increase the time you jog to the point where you can eventually jog 10 minutes and walk 1 minute.
6. At that point, you are ready to try running 30 minutes every second day and to walk, cycle, swim, etc. (called 'cross training') on the other days. This approach allows your body time to recover from the impact loads of your running workouts.
7. It is important to note that you don't need to run to get fit. Walking is also an excellent way to improve and maintain your fitness. Walking is a low impact activity and has a much lower injury rate than running.

The bottom line: Be sure you don't overdo it when you start your "Physical distancing" fitness program. It takes a while to get out of shape and it will take a while to return to activity and reach new fitness goals. Try the above strategies: they will not only reduce your risk of injury but they will also make your fitness program much more enjoyable. Train smart and remember "Movementis Medicine!"

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Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

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