

Proper warm up and cool down

By Anna Miller, Group Exercise Director

Proper warm up and cool down before and after aerobic activity are essential elements of your workout routine. In fact, these elements may be as important as the workout itself. Imagine your enthusiasm to get started on your road to fitness and all of the benefits that come along with it. Now imagine getting injured and setting yourself back. In order to continue down the path to a healthier, more fit body, take the time to take care of your body by incorporating a warm up and a cool down into your workout. Allowing your body to gradually warm up and cool down instead of jumping right into or out of your workout will help prevent muscle strain or injury.

A proper warm up prepares your body for the specific exercise you will be doing. It gradually warms up your cardiovascular system, increases blood flow to your muscles, raises your body temperature and prepares your mind for the work ahead. It's important to warm up the muscles you will be using in your aerobic activity. For example, if you are taking a Group Exercise class such as Sports Conditioning, an all over body warm up would be necessary for the first 5 - 10 minutes of class. If stretching is incorporated, it should take place after the muscles are warm and should be held for approximately 30 seconds.

Immediately after your work out, take time to ease back on the level of intensity and recover for 5-10 minutes and then stretch. The cool down will lower the temperature of your body and may help reduce muscle injury, stiffness and soreness. Similar to the warm up, this should be done gradually not abruptly. After recovery when the muscles are still warm and receptive to stretching, take time to stretch the primary muscles utilized in your activity. Hold each stretch approximately 30 seconds. Stretching is most beneficial when the muscles are relaxed, not tensed. To help relax your body, incorporate gentle, steady breathing. Make sure not to overstretch to the point of pain, instead keep the tension mild. Stretching should never hurt.

Take time to incorporate a proper warm up and cool down into your current activities. You'll be glad you did!

