



# Halifax Chiropractic Clinic

[About](#) | [Doctors](#) | [Clinic](#) | [Exercises](#) | [Seasonal Tips](#) | [Articles](#) | [Links](#) | [Media](#) | [Home](#)

## BACK TO FITNESS

by Dr. Brian S. Seaman, DC, FCCSS(C), FICC

As another year goes by, there is the inevitable increased focus on fitness as our thoughts turn to “getting back into shape”!

There are many components to any fitness program – strength, flexibility, balance and cardiovascular (“cardio”). The benefits of fitness and being “in shape” are well known, including increased energy and stress reduction.

Caring for your overall health is somewhat like caring for your teeth. In between your dental check –ups, you brush, floss and rinse, to decrease the possibilities of cavities and gum disease. The same analogy can apply to your health. Using a variety of exercises, including activities to strengthen your heart and lungs, reduces the possibility of health problems.

Unfortunately, most people’s interest in their exercise program is directly proportional to any health issues they are experiencing at the time. Back pain is a good example. Research has shown that only 20% of patients continue with their exercise program after 6 months.

It is important that you give your level of fitness careful consideration. I can assure you that the effort you put in to developing and maintaining an exercise program will pay you dividends. It is important that you ensure that the various components of your exercise program are in place. As I mentioned earlier, this could include stretching and strengthening your muscles, as well as some time of “cardio” activity.

### Exercise includes –

**Stretching** exercises enhance the flexibility of our muscles. This improves your overall movement and can reduce the possibility of suffering from a muscle “strain”. This differs from a “sprain” which is a stretching injury to a ligament or joint capsule.

There are a number of ways to **strengthen** our muscles including basic floor exercises (an example would be push-ups) which can be done at home, the incorporation of a stability ball to increase core muscle strength or combined with a variety of resistance training which can include hand weights, tubing or specific machines if you work out at a gym.

### Balance

An important component of fitness and well being is our balance. This becomes much more important as we grow older. Some balance problems cannot be avoided due to a variety of medical conditions. If needed, use a walking aid such as a cane or walker. Sometimes it is difficult to admit that we may need these “aids”. However it is far more desirable to use a cane or walker to get “out and about”, than risk falling and breaking your hip. The Canadian Chiropractic Association has developed a program “**BEST FOOT FORWARD**” which provides practical tips on how to reduce the chances of you falling in and around your home. Ask your local chiropractor for more details.

When you are choosing a “cardio” activity, please take into consideration your level of activity and physical capabilities. As always, no exercise or fitness program should be embarked on without consulting with your health care professional.

### Other Benefits

Exercise can also benefit our cardiovascular health by strengthening our heart, increasing our lung function and improving our circulation.

As we get older, exercise also becomes very important for the health of our bones, specifically the density of our bones. It is well known that weight bearing exercises such as walking, running and some types of resistance training helps to increase the density of our bones.



If you are using any type of hand weight, be conscious of your grip. There are many different types of hand weights which can be used including those with soft material on the grip. Doing some type of weight bearing exercise also helps to battle what is often referred to by patients these days as "osteo".

Years ago "osteo" meant "osteoarthritis". However osteoporosis has become much more well known as is a very important factor in our health. Be sure to talk to your healthcare professional about this. A bone density study may be indicated to establish your level of bone density and determine if additional approaches are needed:

- Increased focus or modification of your exercise program or activities
- Pharmacotherapy or medication prescribed by your family physician (i.e. Fosamax, Didral, Actonel.)
- Calcium supplement with vitamin D

Exercise can be a valuable means of preventing, treating and managing back pain as well. Don't ignore your back because you can't see it! Mechanical type back pain accounts for upwards of 90% or more of back pain cases. That means that back pain can be caused when the joints in your back are not moving properly.

Most people think of "slipped discs" (they don't actually slip) and "pinched nerves" as primary causes of lower back pain. Actually, this is not the case. Mechanical type back pain is often very successfully treated with a variety of conservative approaches used by chiropractors, such as manipulation or adjustments and specific rehabilitative exercises. Surgery is seldom needed. If you experience back pain, stop the activity you are doing and put ice on the injured area for 15-20 minutes.

#### **First Aid Tip**

Ice is often the best choice for any injuries. It helps to reduce the irritation and inflammation of the muscles and ligaments. Think of these injuries, including any injury to your back, like an ankle sprain. Would you put a heating pad on an ankle sprain? Obviously not! As a general rule, icing 3-4 times per day for periods of 15-20 minutes, is beneficial. Be sure not to leave the ice on too long as the body will shunt blood back to the injured area if it is left on for too long. However if your injury is not responding or becoming worse, be sure to consult with your health care professional.

#### **Best way to start?**

Walking is likely the best way and, for most people, the most convenient way to start exercising. However this time of year you must be cautious of your footing—be careful of slippery or icy conditions. If need be, walking in a mall is probably your best option.

Swimming or pool exercises are other good activities depending upon the availability of such facilities. Shallow water aerobics, in a warm pool or deep water aerobics in which you use a water vest or belt may be potential choices for you. If you are swimming, be aware of your shoulders and try not to swim with your head up out of the water as this can cause neck problems.

#### **If in doubt –**

Be sure to consult with your health care professional for any suggestions or advice on selecting an activity which will be appropriate for your situation. Your health care professional can also assist in the development of an exercise fitness program, refer you to a personal trainer or a fitness facility in your area which can help with this.

So keep that New Year's resolution this year – have fun getting active, and staying fit.

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Halifax Chiropractic Clinic  
6112 Willow Street  
Halifax, NS B3K 1M2  
Ph: 1 902 423-9223

Fax: 1 902 423-9666