

# Selecting and Effectively Using Stationary Bicycles



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# The Importance and Benefits of Physical Activity

It has been firmly established that individuals who engage in some form of physical activity, either by lifestyle or occupation, are likely to live longer and healthier lives. Research shows that even moderate caloric expenditure from physical activity has a significant impact on lifespan. A physically active person who possesses such factors as hypertension, diabetes and even a smoking habit can derive significant gains from incorporating regular physical activity into his/her daily activities.

Regular physical activity is also likely to help modify a number of risk factors. As an adjunct to weight loss, exercise is likely to help you stay on a diet and lose weight. Additionally, regular exercise is associated with reduction in blood pressure, improved glucose regulation, promotion of better lipid profiles and stronger/denser bones.

## The First Step!

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, answer the questions below. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine your suitability beginning an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition and that you should only participate in physical activity recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not involved in physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance because of dizziness, or do you ever lose consciousness? Does this occur when engaged in physical activity or everyday activity?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered **yes** to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered **no** to each question, you have reasonable assurance of your suitability for fitness testing and training.

# Selecting a Stationary Bicycle

Stationary bicycles are a safe and effective means of exercise. They provide a means of low-impact cardiovascular exercise, are generally quiet in operation, and are efficient with their use of space.

There are two major characteristics to consider when selecting a stationary bicycle. First, the seating position on the bicycle, and second, the method of resistance. Exercisers may choose the standard upright bicycle or semi-recumbent (sitting) stationary bicycles, which may be more comfortable for some individuals. For resistance, stationary bicycles use friction belts or wheels, magnets, hydraulics, or fans. Additionally, many bicycles are equipped with computers that will report workout data and in some cases even direct exercise sessions. All these characteristics influence the cost of stationary bicycles.

You must consider your needs and interests when purchasing a stationary bicycle. Position is important. Most upright bicycles come with a large, well-padded saddle, so comfort for most will not be an issue. However, for individuals with lower back pain, mobility, or balance concerns, a semi-recumbent stationary bicycle may offer a safer, more comfortable option. Computer, size, and resistance mechanism options will allow you to select the stationary bicycle to meet your fitness goals. Remember, more expensive models do not inherently make you more fit. An inexpensive model used regularly can adequately provide the necessary resistance to increase cardiovascular fitness.

## Safety

- Stability; wide base for ergometer
- Protected or covered flywheel and/or fans

## Maintenance and Durability

- Established, reputable company
- Assembly requirements
- Warranties and local maintenance
- Annual maintenance costs
- Availability of replacement parts

# Power, Performance and Operation

- Capable of providing adequate resistance
- Consider noise generated by fans
- Adequately adjusts for proper fit on the bicycle
- Comfortable seat, saddle, and handlebars
- Consider the size of the assembled unit
- Are the electrical requirements, if any, available in your exercise area?
- Guidelines for assembly and operation should be clear and complete

## Using a Stationary Bicycle

Stationary bicycles should be positioned so that all moving parts are allowed safe clearance. You should also have adequate room to safely mount and dismount the machine.

Position on a bicycle is critical to enjoyable and effective cycling. Handlebar and saddle height are the primary considerations. When you adjust your position on a bicycle, you are attempting to distribute your body weight evenly between your arms and your seat. First, adjust the saddle so that it is level with the floor. "Pointed up" will put pressure on the groin area. "Pointed down" will put too much weight on your arms and shoulders. Next, adjust the saddle height so there is a slight bend in the knee when the pedal is at the bottom of the stroke. An additional saddle height guideline is that your hips should not rock back and forth when you pedal. A saddle that is too high will result in too much pressure in the groin region and may cause soreness and/or numbness. Finally, adjust the handlebars to allow for a comfortable forward-leaning position. Handlebars that are too high will put excessive pressure on your seat, while handlebars that are too low may result in lower back soreness and arm and shoulder fatigue. It will take several cycling sessions and some additional adjustments to find your perfect position. Be patient. One of the biggest reasons people stop cycling is because of discomfort. Proper positioning on a bicycle will provide for comfortable and enjoyable exercise.

## Important Points to Remember

- **Spend time test-riding stationary bicycle models before you buy.** Adjustability, noise, and ease of operation should be considered in the store, not in your living room.
- **Proper position is imperative.** Be patient and complete in your positioning process.
- **Make it a habit!** A stationary bicycle is only good for your health if you use it. Set attainable goals for regular use of your home exercise equipment.

# A Complete Physical Activity Program

There are three principal components to a rounded program of physical activity: aerobic exercise, strength training exercise and flexibility training. It is not essential that all three components be performed during the same workout session. Try to create a pattern that fits into your schedule and one to which you can adhere. Commitment to a regular physical activity program is more important than intensity of the workouts. Therefore, choose exercises you believe you are likely to pursue and enjoy.

ACSM's Position Stand "The Recommended Quantity and Quality of Exercise for... Healthy Adults" ©1998 states that aerobic training should be performed three to five days per week with a minimum of 20 minutes per day. Remember, if your schedule is tight, it is better to exercise for a shorter period of time than not at all. Typical forms of aerobic exercise are walking and running (treadmills), stair climbing, bicycling (bicycle ergometers), rowing, cross-country skiing, and swimming. Many devices contain combinations of these motions. For general purposes, strength training should be done two to three times per week. Strength training is performed with free weights or weight machines. For the purposes of general training, two to three upper body and lower body exercises should be done. Additionally, abdominal exercises are an important part of strength training. Flexibility training is important and frequently neglected, resulting in increased tightness as we age and become less active. Stretching is most safely done with sustained gradual movements lasting a minimum of 15 seconds per stretch. At a minimum, strive to stretch every day.

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