

Staying in Shape During a Pandemic

The first official day of summer is quickly approaching on June 20. When the pandemic began, gyms closed and stay-at-home orders went into effect – causing many to cozy up on the couch. With both summer and the “new normal” right around the corner, you may be thinking about getting your exercise routine back in place.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), physical activity helps you feel better, function better and sleep better. It also reduces anxiety. The CDC recommends that children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 years need at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity daily. Adults need 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity activity such as brisk walking for health benefits.

The best way to do get back into your workout routine during the COVID-19 pandemic is by starting outside while maintaining social distancing.

“So, first and foremost, I think when you’re outside we have to realize that the temperature is definitely different than the winter time and so it’s very important to stay hydrated, you know, especially if you’re doing more strenuous activities, trying to drink plenty of water. For the vast majority of us, we don’t need sports replacement fluids like Gatorade and Powerade and things like that. Plain water is probably adequate for 99% of our activities,” said Ginny Hendricks, M.D., fellowship-trained sports medicine family medicine physician, OSF Little Company of Mary Medical Center

According to the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), the COVID-19 transmission risk is greatly reduced outdoors as opposed to indoors. Wherever possible, Illinoisans are encouraged to go outdoors for fresh air and exercise – walk, hike, jog, bike, visit public parks and outdoor recreation areas, golf, boat, fish, or simply enjoy the outdoors.

“On days that it’s particularly hot and humid, it’s definitely worthwhile to try to exercise earlier before it gets hot and humid or to exercise later as the sun goes down. And then once gyms do reopen, it’s worthwhile looking into your gym’s health and safety policies and what they’re doing to prevent the spread of COVID,” said Dr. Hendricks.

As many gyms are preparing to reopen this summer, many Illinoisans may be eager to get back. Dr. Hendricks recommends taking protective measures to reduce your risk of exposure to COVID-19.

“When you are at the gym, washing your hands frequently, using hand sanitizer, making sure that you’re cleaning equipment very well both before and after use can be helpful in terms of minimizing your risk. And then also trying to reduce your use of the gym at crowded times – so either going a little bit earlier, a little bit later, middle of the day,” Dr. Hendricks continued.

When engaging in a particularly strenuous workout, Dr. Hendricks recommends sticking to the outdoors whenever possible.

“It’s very important when you ARE at the gym to try to wear a light covering on the face – cloth or cotton – for anything except strenuous activity,” explained Dr. Hendricks. “Strenuous activity is best done outside still because of the risk of the exposure with COVID and the air respiratory droplets.”

Please check the [Illinois](#) or [Michigan](#) Departments of Public Health for safety guidelines to engage in additional activities that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.