

EXCERPT:



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Keeping fit is an important part of overall health, especially if you live with limb loss or other disabilities. Experts advise that a regular exercise routine is crucial for maintaining your well-being.

“Fitness is for everybody, whether you’re a beginner, recovering from an injury, or have a complex medical history,” says Jessica Sobolewski, MS, physical activity coordinator at MHealthy Wellness & Health Improvement Services in Ann Arbor, Michigan. “When developing an exercise program for individuals who’ve undergone an amputation, the majority of the research recommends following exercise prescription guidelines to include all areas of fitness, including aerobic, resistance and flexibility training. The combination of these three components will assist in an improved ability to perform normal activities of daily living (ADLs).”

Sobolewski also says that, for overall fitness, muscular fitness/ strength training is vital to develop strength and endurance in the muscles of the legs and upper body so that those muscles do not tire too quickly. Strength is needed in the lower and upper extremities and core (stomach and back) muscles for ambulation and ADLs. The core muscles play a crucial role in standing and moving, so if the core is not strong, it will not be able to meet the physical demands made on it.

Finding the right exercise regimen with limb loss may take a little trial and error. But you don’t have to be an athlete or a fitness enthusiast to exercise. Here are examples of what some regular people with limb loss are doing to stay in shape.

Brooke Artesi, ... who participates in rock climbing and kayaking events at the Extremity Games, demurs at calling herself physically fit.

“You can just go and kind of fudge it,” she says. “I’ve taken third [place] in kayaking the past 2 years. With the rock climbing, I haven’t placed at all.”

The 30 year-old, who lost her right leg below the knee due to trauma 15 years ago, also runs and does “boxing, weight lifting, cardio and machines” at a gym. This exercise she claims she does out of necessity.

“I’d be pretty fat if I didn’t do all that,” laughs Artesi. “That’s pretty much what it comes down to.”

The kayaking, however, she enjoys. “Kayaking is fun,” she says. “That, I love. I’m all about it. In the summer, I keep it on my car, and whenever I can go, I go. It’s easy. I mean, it sounds like, ‘Oh, Brooke kayaks, Brooke runs,’ but I am not in whitewater rapids. I’m just in lakes, where I can put on my iPod and scoot around.”

Artesi has some simple advice for folks who want to start exercising: Just do something.

“We get patients in the clinic every day who haven’t done anything in years,” she says. “I tell them, just do something. Start slow. Just go take a walk around the block. Even if it’s just walking around the block, it may not seem like a lot, but even a little exercise can make a difference.”