

# What to know before starting a high-intensity workout routine

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While boot camps, high-intensity interval training and other new strength and conditioning programs have become increasingly popular, it is important to exercise intelligently to avoid injury. Dr. Theodore Shybut,

a sports medicine expert at Baylor College of Medicine, provides guidelines for successful participation in these high-intensity routines.

"When considering these types of workout routines, you should be aware of your baseline fitness level. If you're a novice, get input from an experienced coach or trainer before you set goals and expectations," said Shybut, assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at Baylor.

Many of the exercises in these programs are advanced and can include plyometrics and other ballistic, explosive, high-intensity movements where muscles are maximally engaged and move through a large arc of motion very quickly, he noted. Olympic lifts and sprints, power lifts and variations on gymnastics movements also are common.

"These are activities that usually require a strong base of fitness and training," Shybut said. "These can be phenomenal exercises because of their intensity, utilization of multiple muscle groups and complex movements, but these are the kinds of workouts where the potential for injury is also there."

Shybut said those who are interested in trying these types of workouts should take these steps for success:

1. Assess your own suitability. Have you done these types of workouts in the past?
2. If you have any [chronic medical conditions](#), check with your physician about activity recommendations.
3. Work on your baseline fitness. If you have not been exercising at all, start with basic cardiovascular fitness – walk, bike, swim, row, join a class or take up yoga or Pilates. Start with light-resistance exercises – use body-weight resistance and get comfortable with proper form before you "max out." For example, do step up/step down exercises before tackling box

- jumps. You have to walk before you can run.
4. Find a beginner's class with a coach or trainer who can get you involved safely rather than joining an advanced, competitive class. Be sure a coach or trainer teaches you the proper body mechanics and form for lifts – this will significantly decrease the risk of injury.
  5. Be realistic about your expectations and set goals.
  6. Know when to stop – severe pain should be a red flag. While some soreness is normal, the amount of soreness you experience with workouts should decrease as your body adapts. If your soreness is increasing or you are experiencing joint pain, swelling or instability, that's a bad sign, and you should see a sports medicine specialist for evaluation.

In addition, it is important to perform an active or dynamic [workout](#) to prepare the muscles to move at high speeds and high intensities.

"The rule of thumb is you want to break a sweat before engaging in high-intensity training," said Melanie McNeal, a physical therapist at Baylor.

Dynamic warmups for the upper body can include activities such as wall pushups, arm circles forward and backward and jumping jacks. Lower extremity workouts also can be helpful.

The most common injuries from these types of workouts include shoulder, lower back and knee injuries, Shybut said. Injuries are multifactorial – some may be related to incorrect form and overtraining. Research has shown that when an experienced coach or trainer is involved, the potential for these types of injuries decreases.

Many repetitive stress injuries can be managed through activity modification and appropriate rehabilitation. Working with an experienced physical therapist is often the best way to facilitate safe and

seamless return from [injury](#) to sport.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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