

HOW FAST WILL YOU GET OUT OF SHAPE?

Often, over holidays, our daily exercise regime changes. The need to finish up work before the end of the year along with preparations for the holidays has us frustrated with fear that our physical health will diminish because of the changes. Miss a week or two of exercise, and it's easy to feel that your body is turning to mush. Almost 60 percent of the emails I receive tell me you believe you'll be out of shape after only a seven-to 14-day layoff. But fitness doesn't disappear as fast as you might think. Here is what really happens when you slack off -- and what you can do to hang on to your hard-earned fitness gains.

TWO CARDIO WORKOUTS PER WEEK will preserve your aerobic fitness if you keep their quality high. With only one strength training session per week, you will also maintain some muscle power.

AT ZERO WORKOUTS FOR TWO WEEKS, you will see a moderate decrease in your aerobic fitness (more if you are a new exerciser, less if you are more experienced). You will notice less loss in your (anaerobic) strength fitness. But you will regain what you've lost in two to four weeks after you get active again; much faster than if you were starting from scratch.

AT ZERO WORKOUTS FOR FIVE WEEKS, your fitness level drops by half. When you resume your routine, start with less intensity than what you were used to. If you were logging three miles on the treadmill, for example, cut back to 1 ½ to two miles for the first couple of sessions and see how you feel. If you had been pressing 50 pounds on the weight machines, cut back to 30 or 40. See how you feel after 2 sets of 10 to 12 repetitions instead of 3 sets. Certain muscle groups will fatigue faster than others. Remember to use your sense of perceived exertion. In other words, how you feel when you are working out. Your body will warn you when you pay attention. And pat yourself on the back for a victorious return!