

client handout

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One of the fastest-growing areas of fitness today is sports conditioning, practiced either in a group or individually with a trainer. Participation in sports is on the rise, says Suzanne Nottingham, sports and fitness instructor in Mammoth Lakes, California. Sports organizations are recognizing the need to “grow” their sports and are therefore considering the needs of beginners. It’s easier than ever to get lessons in roller and ice hockey, snowboarding, surfing, mountain biking, in-line skating, rock climbing and many other sports activities. Sports are especially appealing because they generally take place outside and challenge participants to learn a variety of new skills.

Not Just for Athletes

The sports arena today has broadened to include more women, children and mature adults. And whereas once it was thought only hard-core or serious athletes could enjoy the fun and challenge of sports, that view is now outdated. If you think sports conditioning sounds like fun, you might sign up for a general performance conditioning class. Alternatively, you could opt for a sport-specific or personal training program that could help you develop particular skills for a chosen activity. For example:

- A ski conditioning program could help you improve your turning skills and develop a tolerance for speed on the slopes.
- A marathon training program could teach you how to determine the amount of training you would need before a race, how to fight boredom and fatigue, and how to improve your running time.
- Tennis conditioning could strengthen your serve, improve your response time and help you avoid injuries such as tennis elbow.

Don’t make the mistake of thinking you have to win—or even compete—to feel successful at sports. Your satisfaction might come from trying something new, learning different skills, having fun, participating safely and achieving a personal best.

The Benefits of Training

Combined with motivation and practice, sport-specific training can ensure that you achieve that personal best. Sports conditioning can help you improve all these aspects of your

chosen activity: movement efficiency (the ability to use as little energy as possible to perform the skills your sport requires); power, agility, coordination and visual acuity; balance and flexibility; strength and cardiovascular fitness; injury prevention; physical response time (the ability to move quickly and precisely); skill development; tactical decision making (e.g., knowing when to pass the puck or shoot the basketball); and relaxation skills (including the development of functional tension, which allows you to react quickly and freely).

Is Sports Conditioning for You?



Finding the Right Program

The best class or personal training program for you is the one that meets your individual objectives and allows you to progress at your own rate. Some programs available today are customized for a specific age group (e.g., kids’ golf training, older-adult training with an emphasis on balance and coordination, etc.), while others are designed to prepare participants for competitions (marathons, triathlons, outdoor adventure contests, etc.). Programs offered in a clinic format are also popular; depending on where you live, you

might find clinics that focus on running, walking, in-line skating, boxing, skiing, tennis or a wide variety of other activities. If you want precise, individual guidance, a personal trainer can help you.

Nottingham suggests that before choosing a class, you check to see that it includes a warm-up and cool-down, and combines higher-intensity drills and tasks with balance, strength and flexibility training.

Once you’ve chosen a form of training, always make sure you can clearly hear and see your instructor’s demonstrations; you don’t want to be confused about the drills or movements you are learning. Your trainer should encourage you to participate at your own pace. You should feel challenged, but also, when the session is over, successful. The rest is up to you. As Nottingham says, “Enjoying your sport by doing it is the most specific conditioning you can get!”

