



## What's all the fuss about Fitness By Dr. Delia Roberts

The condition of being physically fit and healthy can mean quite different things to different people, especially when you add on the idea of being fit to work. What is a given, is that of all the various treatments and approaches, the one that has been consistently proven to improve health, performance, well-being and quality of life is physical fitness. Yes, this one simple thing will not only improve your endurance, strength and agility, it also helps with everything from the inside of your blood vessels to the function of your white blood cells to your sex life. This isn't surprising when you consider that our bodies' evolved to do physical work. Before the invention of machines the physical labour that was needed to survive was more than enough to keep our bodies strong. But nowadays many of us spend long periods of time at a desk, or in a vehicle or machine – and without hard physical work, we lose the capacity to generate force, utilize fuels, transport nutrients and wastes, and repair damaged tissues. In short, we cease to function well.

So we know that we need some level of physical activity to provide good health and well being, but what about performance? Here's where things start to get complicated, because once again, performance means different things to different folks. At one end, you have jobs like tree planting, where a third of the planter's body weight is carried 15 km or more over difficult terrain, and you have to get those trees in the ground fast if you want to make money. Compare that to the other extreme, where a log hauler sits in their machine all day, but repeats the same arm and leg movements thousands of times – and has to have the focus and reactions of a professional hockey player in order to keep more than 60,000 kg moving safely down the

road. In between, you might have an engineer whose daily job is desk-work, but then has to hike up through steep slash to lay out a block. In each of these situations, the risk of injury is high if the physical capacity to do the work is less than what is needed to get the job done. And the greater the physical reserve, the more energy there will be to do the job well, stay alert, and enjoy the rest of the day outside of work.

But just 'getting fit' isn't a simple task. If it were, we would all be able to maintain the level of fitness that we want. The reality is that it's difficult to know how to build and maintain physical fitness between work, family and other responsibilities. None of us have a lot of extra money or time, and with the multi-billion dollar fitness industry trying to sell you the latest trend it's hard to know what is marketing and what is for real. So here's a quick guide to help you find a good fitness program that will not only meet your health and performance goals, it will fit your lifestyle so that you can make it a permanent change.

Your first step towards fitness is to ensure that there aren't any safety concerns. If you haven't been exercising, have any kind of pre-existing medical condition, a family history of disease, or have suffered a previous musculoskeletal (MSK) injury, consult your primary health care provider to determine if there are any health risks that an exercise program might cause problems with.

Next, choose your current activity category:

**Sedentary** – This is you if you get less than 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity (where your breathing is deep enough that you have to pause for a breath while carrying on a

conversation) per day or a total of 150 minutes per week. Your goal will be to build up to this basic level of fitness and reap the many health and wellness benefits that will result.

**Intermittent exerciser** - This is you if your work and lifestyle are mostly sedentary but you occasionally have to do hard physical work. Also known as the weekend warrior, most days/weeks you do not meet the basic level of physical activity required for health, but sometimes because of work, projects at home or sports activities you do go hard. You have a high risk of injury because your systems are not accustomed to hard work, and yet the demands you place on your body require you to generate a fair bit of strength, power and/or endurance.

**Seasonal** - Your activity level is quite low for most of the year, but you engage in physically demanding work and/or other activities during certain seasons of the year. Often people in this category rely on the first few weeks of the activity or work to generate the fitness that they need to get the job done, which means that at the start of their season their fatigue levels and risk of injury are very high. It's hard for your body to respond and build capacity when all your energy is going to getting through the day, so unless you have at least three to six weeks of slowly ramping up your activity level, this is not likely to give you a successful season.

**Sustained** – You work hard every day, far exceeding the minimum activity level required for health. Your needs are for recovery tools, to help your body cope with the cumulative stress of hard physical work, long days, and managing all the other stresses in your life.

*Continued on page 24...*

Continued from page 22...

Each of these four categories requires quite a different approach to building and sustaining good physical fitness habits, but here's where to look for some evidence-based information for each of them. These programs are all part of the Fit to Work series, designed specifically for folks working in the forestry industry.

**Sedentary.** The most important aspects of any program that you choose is that you enjoy it and it fits into your lifestyle. Since you haven't previously been exercising, your goal is to get moving, and build gradually - which you are far more likely to do if it is already part of your day and you enjoy doing it. The Fit to Drive program will explain what kinds of activities will be helpful, how to incorporate them into your day, how much you should be doing, and how to stay motivated when you don't want to do your workout. The program is free and can be found on the BCFSC website starting on page 81 of the [Power Driving Manual](#).

**Intermittent Exerciser.** Since your bouts of physical activity only take place every now and then, it's not likely that they are enough for you to build and maintain the physical fitness you need to get your job done safely and well. This means that like those at the Sedentary level, you will want to find activities that fit into your lifestyle on a regular basis so that you will stick with your program and maintain your fitness throughout the year. The [Fit to Log](#) program is available on the BCFSC website free of charge, and includes sections on building and maintaining fitness. Beginning on page 97, you will find specific exercises for your back, knees, shoulders and neck, which can be helpful if you have had a previous injury or the demands of your activity stress a particular joint. Pages 129-138 explain how to build endurance capacity quickly, with two different levels of a six-week program. For those starting from the Sedentary level, basic programs can be found starting on page 151, and motivational help on page 163.

**Seasonal.** Summer forestry jobs can often be very physically demanding, so if you want to make money and not



get hurt, it's a good idea to come into the job with a good level of fitness. Depending on how much time you have to do this, and the specific needs of the job you will also find some good resources on the BCFSC website. The Fit to Plant program offers a free, planting specific eight-week program, or if you are short on time, try the [10-day Desperate Planter's Last Chance](#) to build some fitness in a hurry. If your summer forestry job isn't tree-planting you likely won't need the same level of preparation for your arms, so the two levels of programs provided in the Fit to Log manual described in the Intermittent section above are a good place to start.

**Sustained.** You work hard, all day every day, which takes a toll on your muscles and joints. Energy management and recovery strategies can go a long way to ensuring that you have a long and productive career. Check out the resources in the [Fit to Log](#) program, provided free of charge on the BCFSC website. The Power Eating section that begins on page 7 explains how to make sure that your body has enough of the right fuel to perform well day after day. This can help keep you strong and reduce fatigue on a daily basis. Specific joint exercise found on pages 103-125 can help lower any pain from previous injuries and help you maintain your posture and muscle strength. Lastly, the section on stretching (pages

139-148) will show you how to use even a small amount of stretching to relax tired muscles at the end of the day.

Fitness is a lifelong goal, one that can provide you (and your family) with good physical and mental health, reduce pain and fatigue and increase well-being. It takes time and effort, but for every bit of energy you put into it, the rewards are tremendous. People who exercise regularly have lowered rates of pretty much every disease, from heart problems, to diabetes, to cancer and even depression. It's a positive change for yourself and your family that you can make today, without special equipment or money. Just put on a pair of good shoes, grab a friend and head out the door for a brisk walk. Each step you take is one toward a longer and better life. 🍏

## New Healthy Worker Resources

The Healthy Worker Series of crew talks, posters and backgrounders was created to help forestry workers and supervisors talk about common health challenges and ways to become healthier.

The latest resources on obesity and mental health have recently been added to the [BCFSC Healthy Worker Series](#). 🍏