

Ask the Trainer... Training for Heavy Clients

by LaRue E. Cook, BS, MHA, JD



Q: I am overweight, and have been doing aerobic exercise (walking and aerobics classes) for over a year now, but haven't seen much change in my body. What type of exercise do you recommend for an overweight person trying to lose pounds/inches?

A: It depends! Each person is different and has her own unique set of health and physical characteristics and limitations. But, if a person is otherwise healthy (and here, I would insist on the person first checking with their physician to make sure that they are medically cleared to workouts), there's no reason why she can't train in a regular fashion. By "regular" I mean using the same or similar exercises and equipment that I would use with a non-overweight client (for example, free weights, aerobic and weight machines, stability balls, medicine balls and resistance tubes).

When I work with my clients, I use EVERYTHING that is safe and appropriate to the specific client, to help my client reach his or her goal(s)! There isn't any reason that an overweight person with no additional health risk factors can't perform many, if not all, of the same exercises that anyone else does. And, even if the person does have other risk factors, such as high blood pressure, with proper medical guidance, and a program modified to that particular condition, a safe and effective program can be created.

Here's how I approach my work with larger clients. First, we start with a consultation with the client's physician to make sure that these workouts are appropriate for her. Next, I'd sit down with her and conduct an assessment of her health and current fitness level, and then design a program with her specific needs in mind. Then, we're ready to start! With hard work, dedication, and teamwork between the client and me, we start on the road to health and fitness. Although each person progresses at their own pace, they should then begin to see positive changes to their bodies, health and lifestyle. That's exactly what has happened with one of my current clients (Angela) highlighted below.

When Angela and I began working together, we started very slowly. After an initial fitness assessment, discussion of her health and fitness goals, and approval from her physician, we began with some quick-paced walks, resistance tube work, light weight-lifting, and core work (abs and back). This is how Angela and I began our workouts together, but it was only the beginning! From that "humble" start, Angela has advanced incredibly! Through her hard work, and consistency, Angela has lost over 60 pounds and 4 dress sizes so far! I say "so far," because Angela has a greater goal, and we are steadily working towards it. Her workouts now consist of regular resistance training (free weights, tubes, medicine balls, machines, and body weight), core training (lots of abdominal and lower back strengthening exercises), balance and agility training, coordination exercises, and flexibility training.

The variety of her workouts now rivals any that I do with many of the athletes that I train! In other words Angela doesn't get a break, but instead is held to the same standards, relative to herself, that I hold each of my clients to. We absolutely make adjustments to certain exercises based on her specific strengths and weaknesses, capabilities, and physical condition, but she still does the work.



The results? Well, as you can see from her photos, she has definitely come a long way, and I absolutely applaud her for her efforts! In this first photo, Angela is seen with her niece in March of this year. The second photo was taken in October, 2005.

So, if you're not making much progress towards your goal to lose weight/inches, or you simply want to add some spice and variety to your current workouts, think about looking into whether reaching beyond your "normal" aerobic workout is appropriate for you.

Always check with your physician to make sure that this, or other types of exercise and training are appropriate for you before you start. Seek the direction of an experienced certified personal trainer to assist you with your exercise program.

LaRue E. Cook is a certified personal trainer with over 12 years of experience. He works with a wide variety of fitness clients including many who are overweight or obese. He conducts one-on-one workouts with individuals, and partner training sessions for pairs. LaRue also presents "interactive" general training seminars for people looking for an introduction to exercise and fitness. For information on his upcoming seminars, his personal training services, or his Special Report on shoulder and core exercises for tennis players, visit www.tennisfitness.net. Look for his new e-book, coming soon, on "Exercising for the Overweight Client."

