

# Is being a 'weekend warrior' bad for your health?

October 6 2010, by Sara Peach

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Work and family obligations keep many people from exercising on a regular basis. But working out only once a week or less puts you at risk of injury. Jeffrey Spang, MD, an expert at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, explains how you can develop a long-term, healthy approach to exercise.

During the week, you fight your battles behind a desk, slinging e-mail arrows from the safety of your cubicle. But on the weekend, your fights get physical: You defeat a 5K or soldier through a weight-lifting session.

If this description matches your behavior, you're probably a weekend warrior, said Jeffrey Spang, MD, an assistant professor of orthopedics at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. But exercising

vigorously only once a week or less increases your risk of an injury, he said.

Weekend-warrior injuries can hit men and women, both young and old. But they're most common among formerly active people over age 30 whose work and [family obligations](#) prevent weekday exercise.

“Much of their activity is kind of crammed into the weekend,” Spang said.

The most common injury is muscle strain, Spang said. But he regularly treats weekend warriors with chronic tendonitis and, more seriously, ruptures of the achilles tendon, which require prompt medical attention.

Each day, more than 10,000 Americans visit emergency rooms for sports and exercise-related injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Spang said many people hurt themselves when they have been inactive and then suddenly take on a major exercise program, such as training for a half-marathon.

“The most common mistake is to get out there and to do too much, too fast,” Spang said. Often, people get injured in the first few sessions and then are unable to train again for a while.

A better plan is to break your sessions into smaller, more frequent increments and to avoid exercising too much, too soon, Spang said.

“Gradually increase the amount that you're working out – and the intensity level – on a week-to-week basis,” he said.

In the end, is it better to exercise only once a week than not at all?

“Something is always better than nothing,” Spang said. But spreading your exercise out over two or three days allows you to build endurance and gives your body recovery time.

Here are other guidelines for avoiding weekend-warrior injuries:

-- Do a warm-up, such as by walking or biking at a moderate pace. Don't stretch until your muscles are warmed up. You can also try lunges and shoulder circles during your warm-up. Cool down by gradually slowing your pace. Then stretch your muscles.

-- Sore muscles are normal after an intense workout, but if you feel sharp or stabbing pain, stop exercising immediately. Apply ice and visit your doctor if the pain doesn't go away after a few days.

-- Find an exercise buddy, such as a friend or romantic partner. When you work out with a friend, the time will be more enjoyable. You'll also be more likely to exercise regularly, because you won't want to let your buddy down.

-- Use proper technique when you're working out. To learn about the safest ways to [exercise](#), talk with a trainer or learn more about your favorite activity on the Internet. You'll find the most trustworthy information on warm-ups, cool-downs and technique from nationally-known sports magazines and university websites, Spang said. “With a plan, you can really get started,” he said.

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Medicine

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