

# HOW TO PREPARE FOR YOUR COURSE

Proper prior preparation prevents poor performance! NOLS instructors live by this mantra, and you should, too. Follow our advice on physical conditioning, gear selection and recommended reading, and you'll be well prepared for a fun and successful NOLS experience.

## PHYSICAL CONDITIONING

*Conditioning before your course is important for avoiding injury and staying healthy. It will add to your enjoyment and ability to participate on your course. Please call our admission office if you have further questions.*

### Start Your Conditioning Program Now

If you are already in good shape, keep it up. If not, consult with your physician or your school's athletic trainer and get started as soon as possible. You don't need to be a superb athlete to enjoy the wilderness. Regardless of what course you're taking, increasing your muscle strength, flexibility, and aerobic fitness will enable you to focus on the curriculum and activities of the course. For NOLS courses, an exercise routine should develop aerobic endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility.

### The FITT Principle of Training

The FITT principle of training provides a basis for how to benefit from a physical conditioning program. FITT stands for Frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type.

*Frequency:* Exercise should be done five to six times per week. Remember, your NOLS course is active seven days per week and exercising just a few times per week is not an adequate representation of what you'll be doing.

*Intensity:* Exercise at about 60 percent of maximum effort. Use the "talk test." If you are breathing so hard that you can't converse with a partner, you're working too hard—slow down a little. If your fitness is already high, you can exercise at a higher intensity. For a more in depth explanation on this and the rest of the FITT principle, go to [www.sport-fitness-advisor.com/fitt-principle.html](http://www.sport-fitness-advisor.com/fitt-principle.html).

*Time:* For a low-fitness individual, 20–30 minutes (not counting time for warm up and cool down) is sufficient to start, but as fitness improves this time can increase to 45–60 minutes.

*Type:* Aerobic exercises should be "total-body"—involving the large muscle groups—and should be rhythmical and continuous in nature. Examples include running, walking, swimming, dancing,

cycling, aerobics classes, and circuit training. Resistance exercises can include lifting weights, resistance bands, or exercises using body weight resistance.

### Develop Aerobic Endurance

Having a base of aerobic endurance is beneficial for all NOLS courses. For mountain courses, where hiking is the method of travel, endurance should be achieved with exercises using the lower body. One guideline is to be able to run 1.5 miles in 12 minutes or 5 miles in 45–50 minutes. For water based courses, where rowing or paddling is the method of travel, aerobic endurance should also focus on the upper body achieved by paddling or rowing a boat, a rowing ergometer, or light weights and numerous repetitions.

### Improving Muscle Strength

Strength conditioning that focuses on the core muscles (the muscles that run the length of the trunk and torso) is beneficial for lifting and carrying backpacks, boats, and other gear and for generally withstanding the rigors of backcountry living. These muscles stabilize the spine, pelvis, and shoulder and provide a solid foundation for movement in the extremities. They help control movements, transfer energy, shift body weight and distribute the stresses of weight-bearing and protect the back. Core strengthening can be achieved through body weight resistance exercises such as sit ups, push ups, pull ups; exercises using equipment such as medicine balls, balance balls, or balance boards; or using weights such as dumb bells.

### Flexibility

Flexibility is also important and should involve stretching of all muscle groups. Stretch easy; don't bounce or over stretch. Maintain each stretch for 10–20 seconds and don't hold your breath or strain. You should feel tension not pain.

### Get Inspired

Make a commitment to becoming physically prepared for your course. Schedule a time for exercise and don't let it take second place to other activities or demands. We want to encourage, not intimidate you. NOLS courses are strenuous, but they are within the limits of a person in good physical condition. Being in shape will not guarantee you an easy time on your course, but will allow you to perform at your optimum level, recover from the physical stress faster, and allow you to focus on learning skills, gaining experience and enjoying the natural beauty of the wilderness and companionship of your fellow expedition members.



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