

ELLIPTICAL MACHINES

Good News For Bad Knees

By Mike Perko, PhD

Looking for a way to stay active but don't have the knees you once did—or hips or back for that matter? Glide on over to elliptical training. Designed to follow the natural path of your ankles, knees and hips, elliptical trainers greatly reduce the impact of stress on your joints. By the way, elliptical means egg shaped, or oval, just in case you were wondering.

Exercising on an elliptical trainer is like combining stair stepping with cross-country skiing. Typical machines allow you to go either forward or backward and add or reduce resistance. Some machines have ski-like poles so you can get a total body workout.

What about you non-bad knee types—still want to stick to your treadmill workouts? A recent study looking at elliptical-vs-treadmill machines found that participants used 12% more oxygen and experienced greater heart rate on elliptical machines. Even though the study was done on persons with existing cardiovascular disease, the authors said the study confirms other investigations with healthy populations that elliptical training is as good for you as the treadmill, without the impact.

Before jumping on the elliptical machine for the first time, be sure to practice proper elliptical etiquette:

- » Try to keep your feet on the step platform at all times, including your heels.
- » Stand up straight, shoulders back and looking forward.
- » Move smoothly and balance your weight evenly.
- » If your machine has poles, grip them lightly!

Source: *Journal of Exercise Physiology online*, 2002.

Choosing An Elliptical Machine For Home Use

If you are building a home gym and want to add an Elliptical machine, Consumer Reports offers you this advice:

You're more likely to be happy with a machine that has:

- an easy-to-read monitor
- easy-to-understand controls
- push-buttons to adjust the resistance electronically
- Watch out for models with narrow pedals and with moving arms that can hit your arms when you hold the fixed handles
- When you try an elliptical in the store, make sure you feel comfortable with the elliptical pattern; it varies from one machine to another
- Additionally, look for a warranty of a year or more

An elliptical exerciser provides a good workout without the joint-pounding impact of running on a treadmill. Be warned—unless you want to pay top dollar, don't expect a model designed for home use to match the quality of health-club versions.

Source: Consumer Reports, Jan 2005

