COMPONENTS OF FITNESS

There are five health-related components of fitness, including cardiorespiratory (cardiovascular or “aerobic”) fitness, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and body composition. Different from skill-related components of fitness like agility, speed and balance, health-related components of fitness are specifically related to chronic disease prevention and improvement.

Cardiorespiratory (Aerobic) Endurance The ability of the heart, lungs and blood vessels to supply oxygen, energy and other nutrients to working muscles efficiently.

**Exercise Modes** “Aerobic” activities which involve dynamic, large-muscle exercise sustained over a period of time: bicycling, aerobics, step aerobics, running, walking, cross country skiing, swimming, rollerblading, rowing

**Exercise Benefits** Decreased resting and recovery heart rates, due to increased cardiac strength; decreased resting blood pressure; decreased total blood cholesterol; increased high density lipoprotein cholesterol (the “good” cholesterol)

Muscular Strength The maximum force or torque exerted by a muscle or muscle group

**Exercise Modes** Includes resistance exercise such as weight training. Focus is on using heavier resistance (heavier weights), fewer repetitions

**Exercise Benefits** Increased muscle fiber size; increased workload capabilities; improved ability to perform everyday activities; decreased risk for musculoskeletal injury; decreased risk for osteoporosis; increased metabolic rate; improved skeletal alignment

Muscular Endurance The ability of a muscle or muscle group to exert and maintain submaximal force or torque for extended periods or for many repetitions.

**Exercise Modes** Includes resistance exercise such as weight training. Focus is on using lighter resistance (lighter weights), many repetitions

**Exercise Benefits** Increased muscle fiber size; increased workload capabilities; improved ability to perform everyday activities; decreased risk for musculoskeletal injury; decreased risk for osteoporosis; increased metabolic rate; improved skeletal alignment

Flexibility The ability of a joint to move through a full range of motion. NOTE: A person may be flexible about the hip joints, but inflexible in other areas. Therefore, labeling a person who can touch his or her toes as “flexible” may very well be inaccurate.

**Exercise Modes** Stretching, yoga, ballet, gymnastics

**Exercise Benefits** Decreased musculoskeletal injury; improved skeletal alignment

Body Composition The absolute and relative amounts of muscle, bone and fat in the body.

**Exercise Modes and Benefits** Although body composition is not a type of exercise, it is an important component of fitness, and will be affected by activity. Aerobic exercise can decrease fat, increase muscle and bone content. Muscular strength and muscular endurance training increases muscle mass, may help decrease fat mass and increases bone mineral density.