

DON'T DEPRIVE YOURSELF OF THE REWARDS OF EXERCISE

Talking to committed exercisers about the benefits of physical activity is like introducing a dedicated shopper to the joys of an anniversary sale at Nordstrom™. After all, those who exercise are no strangers to the freedom elicited by movement or to the sense of accomplishment felt at the end of a long walk or strength workout.

Those uninitiated in the pleasurable rewards of regular physical activity, however, remain skeptical. After all, how can something as basic as exercise not only improve one's life today, but perhaps even also save one's life tomorrow?

Why should you exercise?

Researchers have sought to answer this question for years. In 1996, the Surgeon General's Report on Physical Activity was released, detailing the research behind the benefits associated with exercise. This report goes beyond the anecdotal "it-just-feels-good" reason for exercising.

What follows are the conclusions of years of research on the health benefits of physical activity.

Who is exercise good for?

While not all types of exercise are appropriate for everyone, everyone can benefit from some type of exercise. After all, exercise is not limited to running or aerobics.

You can try water workouts or seated-chair classes. You can play softball or squash, go in-line skating or even take a turn or two around the mall, provided you don't spend all your time lingering in front of shop windows. And



Individuals who exercise regularly are less likely to develop:

- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Certain forms of cancer
- Osteoporosis

Individuals who exercise regularly are more likely to:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Effectively control the pain and joint swelling that accompany arthritis
- Maintain lean muscle, which is often lost with increasing age
- Have higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence
- Continue to perform activities of daily living as they grow older
- Experience overall feelings of well-being and good health

if you think activities such as ballroom dancing or tending the garden don't qualify as exercise, think again.

The primary factor in choosing an activity should be whether or not you enjoy it. Of course, an okay from your doctor also is advisable, particularly for men over 45 and women over 55, or those with special medical conditions or risk factors for heart disease.

How much exercise does it take?

How much one exercises is an individual decision, but numerous research studies indicate that hours of intense exercise are not necessary to reap the benefits detailed in the box above. In fact, health specialists now recommend that most adults accumulate 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity on most days of the week.

Moderate activity is any activity that raises your heart rate and gets the blood pump-

ing without leaving you out of breath or exhausted. So, rather than blocking off a large portion of one's day, 10 minutes of walking at lunch and another 20 minutes after dinner, for example, is all it takes.

For those who are so inclined, exercising at slightly higher intensities for longer periods of time can bring about even greater health benefits.

Less important than the intensity or duration of each exercise session is making the commitment to perform some type of physical activity every day, whether you focus on aerobic, strength or flexibility training. Soon, the exhilaration of movement and the empowerment that comes with greater fitness and health will have you hooked on exercise.

It won't happen overnight, and there may be some aspects you find less enjoyable (some people just can't get over the sweating part of it), but the sense of feeling better, of feeling healthier, will overpower any negative attitudes toward exercise that you may still be harboring.

Don't worry. These, too, will pass. So, isn't it about time you got started?

Additional Resource

National Institutes of Health Weight Control Information Network—Active at Any Size: www.win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/active.htm

If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at www.acefitness.org/GetFit and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts.™



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