

Exercise 1010

Exercise benefits, guidelines and principles for weight loss and health

We all know what exercise is - Any type of physical exertion we perform in an effort to improve our health, shape our bodies and boost performance. Obviously that covers a broad range of activities and, luckily, there are plenty to go around whether you want to lose weight, get healthy or train for a sport.

The Benefits of Exercise

We could go on and on about all the things exercise can do for you, both physically and mentally. The great thing about it is that you don't need much to get the benefits. Even just a few minutes a day can improve your health, well-being and help you:

- Lose weight
- Reduce stress
- Relieve symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Reduce your risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer
- Boost your mood
- Give you more energy
- Help you sleep better
- Increase bone density
- Strengthen the heart and lungs
- Improve your quality of life

Motivating Yourself to Exercise

While it's important to know basic exercise guidelines and principles which we will cover in the next few pages, we think the most important step in starting an exercise routine is exploring the idea of motivation. Without that, all the advice in the world won't do you any good.

It's important to remember that motivation doesn't just happen. It's something you make happen each and every day. If you have multiple reasons to exercise, you'll always have something to get you moving, even when motivation is short. The hardest part of exercise is getting started...if you can get that far, you've won half the battle. Here are some ideas:

- Remind yourself of your weight loss goals
- Think of a future event to get ready for (a wedding, a vacation, etc.)
- Consider how much energy you'll have to get more things done
- Imagine how relaxed you'll feel after a workout
- Think of your exercise time as the only time you may get to yourself all day
- Remind yourself how good you'll feel by following through
- Promise yourself a reward for completing your workout
- Think of all the diseases and illnesses your workout could protect you from
- Remind yourself that this workout is necessary to reach your goal

How much and what type of exercise you do will depend on your fitness level, goals and time constraints, but a complete exercise program should include cardio, strength training and flexibility exercises.

Cardio Guidelines

Cardio exercise is any rhythmic activity performed continuously and can include activities like walking, running, aerobics, cycling, swimming and dancing. Cardio strengthens the heart and lungs, increases endurance and burns calories which can help you lose weight. While you should always stick with a cardio program that fits with your fitness level, the general guidelines for cardio exercise include:

- For health benefits, do moderately intense cardio 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, OR
- Vigorous cardio 20 minutes a day, 3 days a week
- For weight loss, you may need to do 60-90 minutes of activity several days a week

Working at a moderate intensity means you're working, but still able to talk, which is about a Level 5 on this perceived exertion scale.

Keep in mind that you can also split your workouts throughout the day and get the same results.

Strength Training Guidelines

Strength training is another form of exercise that works the body in a different way than cardio. With strength training, you lift weights (dumbbells, barbells, resistance bands, machines, etc.) to strengthen the muscles, bones and connective tissue. Strength training is just as important for weight loss as cardio. By lifting weights, you build lean muscle tissue which raises metabolism and reduces body fat as long as you're also watching your calorie intake.

The general guidelines for strength training are:

- Choose 8-10 exercises, targeting the major muscle groups (lower body, chest, back, shoulders, biceps, triceps and abs)
- For beginners, start with one set of 8-16 reps of each exercise to fatigue. More advanced exercisers can do 2-3 sets.
- Train each muscle group 2-3 non-consecutive days a week
- Work each exercise through its full range of motion and use good form (Hire a personal trainer if necessary... form is IMPORTANT!!!!)

Flexibility Guidelines

While stretching is often the most overlooked exercise, it's one of the most important for keeping us agile as we get older. And, unlike the rigors of cardio and strength training, it's relaxing and it feels good. Stretching can be done anytime throughout the day, but it's also important to stretch after your workouts, especially if you have any chronically tight areas. The guidelines for stretching are:

- Stretch your muscles when they're warm (after your warm up or, even better, after your workout)
- Do static stretches with a focus on tight areas such as the hamstrings and lower back
- Stretch a minimum of 2-3 days a week...even better would be every day
- Stretch within your range of motion. Stretching shouldn't hurt.
- Hold each stretch for about 15-30 seconds and do 2-4 reps of each stretch

Don't forget that yoga workouts are a great way to both stretch your body at the same time you build endurance and promote relaxation and stress-reduction. Pilates also promotes flexibility along with core strength and stability. Both of these activities are a great addition to a traditional cardio and strength training routine.

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Basic Principles of Exercise

There are some basic principles that govern the world of exercise, and knowing them can help you set up and manipulate different components of your workout.

The F.I.T.T. Principle

FITT is an easy way to remember the exercise variables you can manipulate to avoid boredom and to keep your body challenged:

- **Frequency** - how often you exercise
- **Intensity** - how hard you exercise
- **Time** - how long you exercise
- **Type** - the type of exercise you're doing (e.g., running, walking, etc.)

When you workout at sufficient intensity, time and frequency, your body will improve (also called the **Training Effect**) and you'll start to see changes in your weight, body fat percentage, cardio endurance and strength. When your body adjusts to your current FITT levels, it's time to manipulate one or more of them. For example, if you've been walking 3 times a week for 20 minutes and you've stopped seeing improvement, you could change your program by implementing one or more of the following ideas:

Frequency - Add one more day of walking

Intensity - Add short bursts of jogging, speed walking or hill training

Time - Add 10-15 minutes to your usual workout time

Type - Do a different activity such as cycling, swimming or aerobics

Changing any of these variables every 4 to 6 weeks can help you keep that training effect going.

Progressive Resistance (the Overload Principle)

In order to improve your strength, endurance and fitness, you have to progressively increase the frequency, intensity and time of your workouts. A simple way to stimulate your body is to try different activities. If you normally walk on the treadmill, try riding the bike which will use different muscles and allow you to burn more calories. If you've been doing biceps curls with dumbbells, change to a barbell.

Specificity

This principle is just how it sounds...how you exercise should be specific to your goals. If you're trying to improve your racing times, you should focus on speed workouts. If your main goal is simply health, fitness and weight loss, you should focus on total body strength, cardio and a healthy diet. Make sure your training matches your goals.

Rest and Recovery

While we often focus on getting in as much exercise as possible, rest and recovery is also essential for reaching your weight loss and fitness goals. You can often do cardio every day....though you may want to rest after very intense workouts. As far as strength training goes, you should have a day of rest between workouts. Make sure you don't work the same muscles two days in a row to give your body the time it needs to rest and recover.

<http://exercise.about.com/cs/exbeginners/a/exbasics.htm>