



Moving Your Way to Better Health:

Exercise as Medicine

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Let's be honest. Your body wants to move. Really it does. It may not feel like it wants to get up off the couch or roll out of bed but deep down your cells, tissues and organs thrive on activity. You were made to move, shake, dance, wiggle and run and when you don't, your body doesn't function optimally. Together with the food you consume, physical activity is an essential pillar of good health. In this article we want to highlight some of the research on physical activity, reasons to get moving and tools to keep you on track. You deserve your BEST health, so read on!

PAPERS, PAPERS EVERYWHERE

Over the last 50 years, medical researchers have published thousands of papers validating what we've always known. Regular physical activity is good for you. In fact, it is so good that the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), American Medical Association (AMA) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) now promote "Exercise as Medicine."

Exercise or physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease by 40 percent, stroke by 50 percent, diabetes by 50 percent, breast cancer by 30 to 50 percent, osteoporosis by 20 percent and many other metabolic and inflammatory diseases. In

fact, regular physical activity has more positive effects on more body systems and disease processes than just about any other choice you can make. That is powerful stuff. What are the side-effects of this powerful "medicine" you may ask? All the best ones! Reduced stress, lower rates of depression, improved libido, enhanced quality of life, feelings of self-efficacy and empowerment and reduced disability. Give me more of that "medicine" please!

DISUSE OR AGING?

Unfortunately many people think exercise or regular physical activity is something for the young or those with too much free time.

More than 60 percent of adults are not regularly active and according to the Institute of Medicine, more than half of all U.S. children fail to get enough exercise to develop a healthy heart and lungs. When it comes to older Americans, the numbers are even more disturbing. Fewer than one in three men and women over 60 get any regular physical activity and it shows. The rates of "sarcopenia" or muscle loss, osteoporosis, impaired balance and reduced mobility are sky-rocketing. As the baby boomers are "booming" so are the rates of disability and dysfunction.

Good news is, this doesn't have to happen. According to top-ranked researchers like Dr. Walter Bortz

M.D. and Eddie Phillips M.D., many of the changes we used to think were due to aging are actually a result of "disuse." Researchers learned this by placing healthy 30-year-olds on bed rest for a few weeks and they saw a rapid loss in muscle mass and strength, progressive osteoporosis and impaired flexibility and joint mobility – all because they weren't moving. The good news is that by returning to action, the body is able to replenish muscular stores, renew calcium balance in the bones and return to healthy function. So if you haven't been moving, it's not too late. Today is the day to start.

PINK SPANDEX AND SWEaty PEOPLE

We know what some of you are thinking, "I hate the gym and there is no way I am wearing spandex." Well fear not, you don't have to go to the gym and, fortunately, spandex is not a pre-requisite for good health. Many people got the wrong message years ago and never make it off the couch.

Moving on a regular basis at an intensity sufficient to get your heart pumping and provide resistance to the muscles is what matters. So that can be brisk walks, ballroom dancing, cycling, hiking, sporting activity and so much more. We define exercise into two broad categories:

- *Leisure Time Exercise:* sports you play, time in the gym, laps in the pool, etc. These are the things you do in your "free" time or time set apart exclusively for and as physical activity.
- *Lifestyle Exercise:* this is the exercise you incorporate into your regular day – for example taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking furthest from the main entrance and walking into the store. These simple choices can pay off big dividends.

WHAT, WHEN, HOW MUCH?

The American Heart Association, the Centers for Disease Control and National Institute of Health recommend 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise five times per week plus two sessions of resistance training for all Americans. That comes out to a total of 150 minutes a week of aerobic exercise. You can add it up however it fits your schedule – 10 minutes three times a day or longer exercise bursts less frequently. Make it fit your life and do not be intimidated by the numbers. As they say, start low and go slow. Ten minutes of brisk walking a few days in a row can quickly build up to a fun and invigorating habit.

If you don't know what to do or how to do it, consider finding a personal trainer or a friend who



maintains a healthy level of activity and ask for tips and guidance. If time is really tough, come up with creative ways to get bursts of activity in every day. We recently began a project with Dr. David Katz of Yale University you may want to check out called Activity Bursts

Everywhere™. We have created a library of more than 60 videos you will be able to view for free online starting in April 2011. These three-to eight-minute workouts at home, in the office, in waiting rooms and other locations highlight what you can do every day, everywhere. There is always time to get a burst of activity in. We can help you to be creative and have fun!

CAN YOU SING?

It is important to know that your activity is really giving you the workout you intended. Obviously just "moving" is health-promoting, but to get the most "bang for your buck" you want to exercise at a moderate to advanced level of intensity. There are lots of complicated ways to tell if you are in the "moderate range" including Target Heart Rate zones, Borg Scales, Perceived Exertion Scales and other new-fangled complex tools. We like simple things that work, so we recommend the "Talk Test" when it comes to knowing how hard you are working. This simple test is proven to be just as accurate as it's more cumbersome siblings.

An easy level of aerobic intensity is when you can talk and sing while doing the activity. A moderate level is when you can talk but not sing and an intense or vigorous level is when you can hardly talk or sing because you are too busy catching your breath. When you first start a new exercise program get cleared by your doctor, especially if you have any chronic medical conditions. Once cleared, start at easy and build up to the moderate level of intensity. At this level you will see the most health benefits and quite possibly have the most fun.

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GETTING SMART

If you are feeling empowered and excited about engaging in more physical activity/exercise, now is the time to make SMART goals. You see we often set ourselves up for failure by starting a new habit or routine without a clear sense of intention and before we acknowledge the challenges we will face or how we will determine our success.

SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. Let us explain. A person who says he or she is “going to start exercising” is far less likely to be successful than someone who says, “I am going to start walking around two blocks in my neighborhood three

times a week for the next week.” The second individual has a specific goal (to walk) that is measurable (around two blocks, three times a week) that is realistic in her schedule and is timely. No saying “Oh I might start exercising,” or “It would be nice to exercise.” Such thoughts don’t equate with action and will leave you sitting on the couch wondering where your week went. Get SMART...and get moving!

YOU CAN MAKE THE CHANGE

Let’s close with a few facts. You want to be healthy. You now know just how important exercise/physical activity is to your health. You have a life to live. You have a few concepts and tools to help you

along. You are the most powerful influence on your health! Don’t forget that.

Now is the time for action. If you’re not quite there yet, we hope you are at least thinking about thinking about making a positive lifestyle change!

We want to invite you to live your “best” life – a life of vitality, energy, confidence and health. Regular activity along with plant-based nutrition, emotional poise, adequate sleep and of course a touch of luck are the essentials. Don’t ignore them and remember, “health comes from healthy living.”

Get educated, feel empowered and stay motivated. You deserve your BEST health! 