Exercise for Good Health

Exercise is like medicine. Getting regular exercise is important in preventing and treating heart disease, osteoporosis, frailty, diabetes, obesity, and improving mental health.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

Coronary Heart Disease

Exercises such as brisk walking, cycling and swimming increase the strength and ability of your heart. They also can help lower cholesterol levels. According to the National Institutes of Health, people who exercise regularly have a lower risk of coronary heart disease and getting a heart attack.

Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a bone-thinning disorder common in older women. Women can slow bone loss by exercising 30 to 60 minutes, three times a week. In particular, weight bearing activities, like aerobics, light weight lifting and other strengthening exercises, put a helpful stress on bones and help prevent the loss of bone.

Frailty

Physical frailty may be improved at any age. Exercise can improve the muscle strength, balance and mobility of people who are well into their nineties. Studies have shown weak muscles lead to falls. Falls are one of the main causes of hip fractures and other injuries in older adults.

Type 2 Diabetes

With age, your body loses its ability to use blood sugar properly. This can result in type 2 diabetes. Regular exercise may help in the long-term control of this disease.

Obesity

You can control your weight through diet and exercise. Exercise burns excess calories and can help shed those extra pounds. A brisk one-mile walk can burn about 100 calories.

Mental Health

Exercise helps reduce stress, anxiety and depression, and may improve self-image.

GETTING STARTED WITH AN EXERCISE PROGRAM

It is important to:

- See a doctor before beginning a new exercise program, especially if you are over 40, new to exercise or have a disease or medical condition.
- Tailor an exercise program to fit your own ability and special needs.

Keep in mind:

- If you have not been exercising at all, start small and gradually add more time, steps or exercise to your routine.
- Pay attention to symptoms that are not normal such as chest pain, shortness of breath, aching joints, or muscle cramps. Talk with your doctor if any of these occur.

Flexibility

Stretching improves muscle and joint movement and helps protect against injury and muscle strain. Stretching exercises should always be slow and smooth. Include 5-15 minutes of stretching in your warm-up and cool-down routines. Perform stretching a minimum of 2-3 days, working up to 5-7 days.

Muscle Strengthening

Strengthen muscles by using small weights, rubber exercise or therapy bands or water resistance. Use slow, smooth, simple movements for both the upper and lower body. Try to strength train all major muscle groups at least two times a week. Start by doing a single set of each exercise, using a weight or resistance level heavy enough to tire your muscles after about 12-15 repetitions. Work up to 2-4 sets of 8-12 repetitions with a 2-3 minute rest time between sets.

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise causes your heart beat and breathing rate to increase, which strengthens your heart and lungs. If you are older, or have health or joint conditions, like arthritis, choose low-impact aerobic activities that don't put as much pressure on the joints and muscles. Examples include: walking, swimming, water aerobics, cycling, and dancing. Always remember to consult with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

For good health and maintenance, gradually work up to at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity (or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity) per week.

You can complete your activity in 30 minutes, five days a week, or break it into smaller 10-minute sessions (or more) to reach your ultimate weekly goal. If you want to keep off lost weight or meet specific fitness goals, you may need to exercise 300 minutes or more per week.

Balance Training

Balance training aids us in our daily activities and is especially beneficial for older adults or those with specific medical conditions. You can include it simply by standing on one foot during an arm exercise, or can add into your daily activities by standing on one foot while waiting in the grocery line or cooking.

FINDING A GOOD PROGRAM

Check with reputable gyms, universities or hospital-affiliated programs to find an instructor who has a college degree in physical education or exercise physiology, or is certified by the American College of Sports Medicine, American Council on Exercise or other accredited fitness association.

Community centers, YMCAs, community colleges, churches, or synagogues may also have programs. Look for age-specific exercise classes or those that provide variety.

If you prefer to exercise at home, you can locate a fitness professional for private training through the American College of Sports Medicine or American Council on Exercise.

STAYING MOTIVATED

- Choose activities you enjoy.
- Make exercise part of your daily routine.
- Exercise with friends.
- Keep a written record of your progress.
- Set realistic goals for what you want to accomplish.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing and properly fitting shoes with firm soles and good arch support.
- Increase daily activity by parking farther away from a building or using the stairs instead of an elevator.
- Walk in your local shopping mall when temperatures outside are too hot or cold.
- Stay focused on the short and long-term benefits of exercise.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

- Increases the strength and ability of your heart
- Strengthens your bones and slows bone loss
- Improves muscle strength and mobility
- Helps with weight control
- Improves self-image and mood
- Helps prevent and manage stress, anxiety and depression

If exercise could be packed into a pill, it would be the single most widely prescribed, and beneficial, medicine in the Nation.

~ Dr. Robert N. Butler, National Institute of Aging

This document is not a substitute for professional medical advice and treatment.