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Lifestyle choices and health: Why exercise

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Abstract

This paper aims to focus upon the various aspects of health and fitness concentrating upon the choice of exercises. We all know that exercise is important in our daily lives, but we may not know why or what exercise can do for us. It's important to remember that we have evolved from nomadic ancestors who spent all their time moving around in search of food and shelter, travelling large distances on a daily basis. Our bodies are designed and have evolved to be regularly active. If you don't exercise, your muscles will become flabby and weak. Your heart and lungs won't function efficiently. And your joints will be stiff and easily injured.

Keywords: Lifestyle, health, exercises, fitness

Introduction

Our personal wellness and health are largely the result of choices we make. In recent decades lifestyles have changed dramatically, and most of us have become increasingly sedentary. The highly mechanised environment that we now live in has largely removed the need for hard physical work to earn a living, but has also removed most of the opportunities for us to incorporate physical activity into our daily lives.

The most common diseases we suffer from today, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer, have also become more prevalent as activity levels have decreased, and this can be linked to the lifestyle choices we make. To stay healthy we should eat a varied diet, restrict alcohol and stress, find time to relax and get adequate sleep, avoid smoking, and take regular exercise.

Why Exercise?

To maintain good health throughout life, physical activity should be part our daily routine. Despite the robust case presented for keeping active, many find it difficult to incorporate physical activity or structured exercise into daily living, even though just thirty minutes of moderate exercise five days a week would be enough to gain substantial health benefits.

Whilst we might marvel at the athleticism and achievements of athletes who excel in sport, many of us do not have the time or inclination to dedicate to developing such sporting prowess. There is much to gain, however, from embracing increased physical activity levels. You do not need to train like an elite athlete, nor do you need technical equipment, a gym environment, unlimited cash or extra hours in the day realise these benefits: all you need is a dose of the same kind of enthusiasm and determination they demonstrate. Regular exercise should make you feel fitter, look better and provide you with more vitality and energy to go about your day-to-day tasks with ease.

The Benefits of an Active Lifestyle

Numerous health benefits are afforded by regular exercise participation. The more activity you plan into your lifestyle the more health benefits you can expect to enjoy:

- **Weight loss and weight maintenance.** Regular endurance type exercise improves the ability of muscles to burn fat as a fuel, while regular resistance type exercise can help to combat the loss of muscle mass that often occurs with dieting. Gains in muscle mass contribute to an increase in resting metabolic rate and can further aid weight loss and maintenance by increasing energy requirements even when at rest.

- A stronger heart and a reduction in risk factors associated with heart disease and stroke, such as high blood pressure and cholesterol, as well as overweight and obesity.
- A lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes and an increase in the uptake of glucose for those who already suffer from impaired glucose tolerance.
- A lower risk of developing some cancers, such as cancer of the breast and colon.
- Stronger bones. Regular exercise promotes bone density, lowering the risk of osteoporosis in later life. It can also alleviate the symptoms of arthritic pain by keeping joints flexible and maintaining the strength of muscles surrounding joints.
- Enhanced mood, reduced anxiety, raised self-esteem and improved confidence. This is a growing area of scientific research, but surveys suggest that physically active individuals feel happier with life.
- Improved digestion as a result of physical activity and exercise supporting the proper functioning of the gut, reducing the risk of indigestion and constipation.

A lifelong commitment to regular exercise is essential to facilitate health benefits, but even small amounts of exercise can bring big benefits.

Recommendations and Guidelines

To gain health benefits, it is recommended that we do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on at least five, if not all, days of the week. This 30 minute a day recommendation ought to be viewed as a minimum requirement. The good news is it does not have to be achieved in a single effort. Several short bouts of activity can count towards the total making it easier to meet this daily target. New research suggests that even a few short bursts (1-2 minutes each) of high intensity efforts can bring many health benefits.

What is Moderate Activity and What Type of Activity Should You Undertake?

Moderate means that you need to get a little warmer and slightly out of breath. The type of exercise can be anything that raises your energy expenditure above resting level, enough to expend about 200 calories, and bring about the symptoms described. For example brisk walking, swimming, cycling and jogging are all fine, but dancing, heavy housework and gardening can count too.

Getting started

For many, the mere notion of exercise will conjure up unpleasant thoughts or images of boring training programs, or rough competitive sports where the risk of injury is a real turn off. The first step in undertaking a regular exercise program is making the commitment to stick to it.

Current recommendations from the world Health Organisation for Physical activity promotion for health gain recognize the importance of physical activity.

- Adults aged 18-64 should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or do at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.
- Aerobic activity should be performed in bouts of at least 10 minutes duration.
- For additional health benefits, adults should increase their

moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity to 300 minutes per week, or engage in 150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity per week, or an equivalent combination of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity.

- Muscle-strengthening activities should be done involving major muscle groups on 2 or more days a week.

To keep you on track it is important to set short, long and possibly medium term goals depending on your personal wants and needs. Setting goals, provided they are realistic, will provide a target to aim for and an incentive to continue, especially if the going gets tough or motivation starts to wane, whilst attaining them will improve self-esteem and motivation. If you have never exercised before, or are in poor physical shape you should not expect to see immediate results. Achieving an improved physical fitness requires time and a consistent approach.

Conclusion

Deciding what lifestyle components are important to you help you to manage your health. Different types of exercise provide different health benefits. Once fitness goals have been determined the exercise undertaken must allow for the type of benefits you desire, such as weight control, stress management, muscle definition or the maintenance of flexibility. Important factors to take into account are convenience, cost, motivation and enjoyment. It is essential that your planned program is enjoyable if you are going to sustain it. Whatever you choose, start sensibly and listen to your body. If you experience any signs of discomfort or stress terminate the activity immediately and seek medical advice as soon as possible.

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