Physical Activity

Why is Physical Activity so Important?

Physical activity is one of the most important aspects of maintaining a healthy body and preventing risk of chronic disease. People who are active typically live longer and are at a reduced risk of developing serious health problems such as heart disease. For people with current chronic conditions, physical activity can reduce risk and manage associated complications.

Benefits of Physical Activity

Even a single session of moderate to vigorous physical activity can provide instant benefits to your overall health. Some of the short term benefits include:

- Improving quality of sleep
- Managing stress
- Improving blood pressure
- Improving blood sugar spikes
- Improving digestion

Long term benefits of physical activity include:

- **Balance, coordination, and reducing fall risk**
- **Healthy weight management**
- **Lowering the risk of heart attack, stroke, and type 2 diabetes**
- **Improving bone and joint strength as we age**
- **Lowering risk of at least 8 different types of cancer (colon, breast, endometrium, kidney, bladder, lung, esophagus, and stomach)**
- **Reduces risk of depression and degenerative disease such as Alzeimers and Dementia**

Physical Activity Benefits Related to Heart Disease

It's proven that inactive people are at a higher risk for cardiovascular disease than active people. Studies have suggested that inactivity is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease similarly to having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking. Consistent, moderate to vigorous aerobic activity can lower the risk for coronary heart disease. This is a condition where plaque builds up in the arteries, reducing blood flow to the heart. Over time, plaque build-up can rupture and cause a clot to form, setting the stage for a heart attack to occur. Physical activity can reduce risk factors of this by:

- Raising HDL (good cholesterol)
- Lowering triglycerides and blood pressure
- Reducing risk of obesity (in combination with a healthy diet)
- Maintaining a health weight once you have achieved your goal
- Balancing blood sugar levels, reducing risk of diabetes
- Reducing C-reactive protein (CRP) levels, a sign of inflammation and increased risk of heart disease
- Assisting with tobacco cessation

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How Much Exercise Should I Get?

The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week for health benefits. Individuals who want to further improve their fitness, manage weight, and reduce risk for chronic disease may exceed the minimum recommended amount. Ask your doctor how much and what intensity is safe for you if you have heart disease or other health concerns.

- ★ **Strength training is an important form of exercise for our muscle, bone, and cardiovascular health as well as maintaining a healthy metabolism. Aim for completing strength training exercises 2-3 times per week. This includes activities such as:**
  - **Strength training /circuit classes**
  - **Resistance bands**
  - **Free weights at home or the gym**
  - **Weight machines**

Tips on Getting Started

It's helpful to start by choosing an activity you like to do, whether that be walking with a friend, playing tennis, or joining a kickball league. Make sure to set realistic expectations taking into consideration the climate you live in and access to facilities. Start slowly and gradually add times/weight/reps as you go. Continue to add time gradually until you work yourself up to 30 minutes. **Examples of moderate physical activity include:**

- Walking, jogging, swimming, bicycling, rowing, golfing, gardening, weightlifting, and dancing.

Examples of vigorous physical activity include:

- Running, circuit training, tennis, mowing the lawn, carrying furniture, aerobics

Safety Concerns

Use the talk test to determine if you are overdoing it-if you are too out of breath to hum or sing a song you might be pushing yourself too hard. If you feel any symptoms such as nausea, chest pain, shortness of breath, or dizziness, stop what you are doing and contact your health provider immediately.

Tips to Add Exercise Everyday

- Take a 10 minute walk after your largest meal of the day to reduce blood sugar spikes
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Park at the back of the parking lot to extend your walk
- Instead of calling or emailing a coworker, take a walk to their office
- Grab a friend to try a new exercise class such as pilates or yoga
- Take your dog on a daily walk
- Pick an activity you can do while watching tv such as walking on the treadmill or chair exercises at home
- Try a free exercise app or website (ACE fitness, Nike training club, Caliber)

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