

Exercise: The good and the bad

The good thing about exercise is that it can benefit almost everyone in 30 minutes a day. People who are over weight, have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, osteoporosis, intestinal problems, arthritis, memory problems and those who wish to prevent these problems all benefit from exercise. The type of exercise program needs to be adjusted to take medical conditions into account so you will need to think and use common sense. For example be careful exercising outside in the heat of the day.

The good news is it does not matter what you do and you can do different things each day, as long as you increase your heart rate and use your muscles for thirty minutes a day four days a week. So make an appointment with yourself and put it on the calendar like you would for the hair dresser or to have the car's oil changed. To benefit from exercise you need to increase your heart rate to about 60% of what is called your maximum heart rate and make your muscles tired. Your maximum heart rate is a simple calculation, 220 minus your age. Multiply this number by 0.60 and you will have your heart rate goal. Another way to judge moderate exercise is while doing it you are breathing hard but can still talk while exercising. While doing something strenuous you are not able to talk.

The worse your physical conditioning the less it takes to become short of breath and increase your heart rate. You may need to start with multiple short sessions spread throughout the day. For example if you start with a chair exercise such as lifting your arms over your head and putting them back down and after five minutes your heart rate has increased over 60% of your maximum heart rate or if you have to strain to lift your arms one more time you should stop. Once your heart rate has slowed and your strength has returned you can spend another five minutes until you have done it 6 times to reach the goal of 30 minutes. After a few weeks you will find that it will take longer and more effort to reach your target heart rate. You may have to lift or add weight to your arm and leg movement to reach the point where your muscles are tired. You can then change your program to 3 - ten minute sessions or 2 - fifteen minute sessions gradually reaching one 30 minute session. It is good to include all three types of exercise: endurance, resistance and stretching. If you have a medical condition or have not done an exercise program in the past discuss your plans with your doctor before you start.

Endurance or cardiovascular conditioning includes things like walking, biking, swimming, rollerblading, treadmill, stairmaster, aerobics class, dancing and others where you generally move in a consistent rhythm.

Resistance or strength training includes exercise against a resistance like lifting weights, pulling against elastic bands, lifting your own weight doing push-ups or chin-ups with the goal to increase muscle strength. This may be especially helpful for diabetics as muscle uses sugar without insulin and increasing muscle bulk can help stabilize blood sugar. Muscle strengthening is also helpful for those with joint problems as stronger muscles around a joint can help take strain off the joint.

Stretching or flexibility exercises include things such as Yoga, Tai chi, hamstring and upper body stretches, range of motion and balance training. This helps balance and is good for relaxing. It can also help protect joints and people feel better and can do more when they do not feel stiff.

Many activities do more than one thing, for example canoeing or kayaking requires stretching out and pulling against resistance in a rhythmic fashion.

The bad thing about exercise is you have to do it. For some people having too many choices of what to do keeps them from doing anything. People think about what type of exercise program they should start and never start. The weather, holidays, visitors, etc, etc can disrupt a program and once disrupted it is never resumed. As a bad joke, people say it is easy to quit smoking I've done it a hundred times. Somehow no one says it is easy to start an exercise program, I've done it a hundred times. It is common for people to have a hundred reasons to not get off the couch and go for a walk or think about and start doing something other than walk.

Even worse is that not only do you need to do it but if you stop it only takes a few weeks to lose the conditioning gained by months of exercise. So think about what you like, schedule your exercise appointment, use common sense and start improving your health.