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Fitness and Exercise



Exercise and Fitness

Inside This Issue:

- Short Workouts Can Be Good for Your Heart
- Can Exercise Keep You Mentally Sharp?
- Fight Fatigue With Exercise

Short Workouts Can Be Good for Your Heart

Don't avoid exercising because you're short on time. Even quick workouts can benefit your heart.

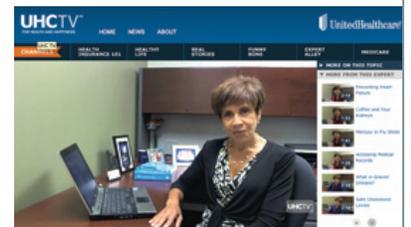
How much exercise do you need to help prevent heart disease? Do you need an hour breaking a sweat at the gym? Or will a walk around the block suffice?

Most people know that exercise is important to health. The American Heart Association recommends that all adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity each week. That breaks down to 30 minutes at least 5 days of the week. Or, you can break up this activity into 15-minute sessions if that works better for you, fitness experts say.

It's true that exercise such as brisk walking or aerobics may yield great health benefits. But even moderate-intensity activities like walking for pleasure, doing yard work, or dancing may help you lower your risk for heart disease.

How 15 minutes can help

You don't need to be an athlete to enjoy the health benefits of exercise. Short bursts of activity can help your heart, too. And most people should be able to carve out 15 minutes a couple times a day to be active.



Video Spotlight:

[Tips for Exercising and Getting Back into Shape](#)
[Exercise Guidelines for Adults](#)

Short Workouts Can Be Good for Your Heart (*continued*)

Exercise raises the level of HDL cholesterol - the so-called good kind - in the blood. High HDL levels have been shown to help protect against heart disease.

Exercise is also thought to make the endothelial cells that line our arteries healthier. These cells are vital in preventing the clogging and hardening of the arteries.

Always check with your doctor before you start any kind of exercise program, though.

Making quick workouts count

Aerobic exercise is what hearts like best. It helps the heart become stronger and work more efficiently.

You can get an aerobic workout from numerous activities, such as:

- Biking
- Brisk walking, jogging or running
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Jumping rope
- Using exercise machines like the treadmill, stationary bike, rowing machine, or stair climber

What's most important is simply that you get moving! It can be overwhelming to know where to start if you haven't exercised much before. So talk with your doctor to find a level of activity that is safe for you. In addition to doing what you typically think of as "exercise," you can also get aerobic workout benefits in your daily life. House cleaning or yard work can raise your heart rate. Seasonal recreational sports like ice skating, soccer, and beach volleyball can also help get your heart pumping while you're doing something fun at the same time.



SOURCES:

- American Heart Association. Physical activity improves quality of life. Accessed: 04/13/2011
- American Heart Association. Ask the experts. Accessed: 04/13/2011

Can Exercise Keep You Mentally Sharp?

Exercise helps both body and mind.

Exercise maintains your body by keeping it fit and strong. Physical activity also helps ward off serious conditions like heart disease, diabetes and cancer. But exercise doesn't just work wonders for your body. These effects apply to your brain, too. Physical activity sustains brain function and wards off declines in mental ability, too.

Experts say that exercise can help prevent mental decline as we age. Regular exercise may enhance memory and mood, and may improve our ability to juggle multiple mental tasks.

The aging brain

Severe memory loss or other serious mental impairments are most often caused by disease. But age-related mental declines may be the result of decreased brain activity and stimulation. Both mental and physical exercise can help keep your brain sharp.

Your brain with exercise

So how does physical activity boost brain power? It helps you:

- **Think more clearly.** Getting your heart rate up pumps blood to the brain. This helps your brain perform better. Low-impact exercises like walking may be best for "clearing your head" because muscles don't work hard enough to use up extra oxygen and glucose.
- **Improve your memory.** Experts say that exercise brings on the growth of nerve cells in the hippocampus, the region of your brain involved in memory.

Studies show that seniors who walk regularly have better memories than inactive older adults. And the more you exercise, the better your memory gets.

- **Better your ability to do complex tasks.** One study found that aerobic exercise helped people with mild cognitive problems to organize information, pay attention and multi-task better. This may be because exercise helps the body move glucose to the brain, which improves its function.
- **Possibly ward off Alzheimer's disease.** There is growing research that suggests regular exercise is linked with a lower risk of Alzheimer's. Brain activity has been shown to increase with physical fitness. One study found that adults who exercised three times a week had a much lower chance of getting Alzheimer's than those who didn't.
- **Ease depression and anxiety.** Exercise increases the level of serotonin (a chemical that affects mood) in the brain. Low levels of serotonin are linked with clinical depression. Some studies show that exercise can work just as well as medication in treating mild depression in some people.
- **Reduce stress.** Physical activity helps lower the release of cortisol in your body. Cortisol is a hormone linked with stress.
- **Help keep your blood pressure in check.** High blood pressure can harm blood vessels in your brain and reduce your brain's oxygen supply. This damages nerve cells that are used for decision-making and memory.



Can Exercise Keep You Mentally Sharp? (continued)

Time to get moving

Check with your doctor first before starting an exercise program. Then use these tips to get moving:

- **Pick an activity you enjoy.** Try walking, swimming or playing tennis. You'll be more likely to stick with exercising if you enjoy doing it.
- **Start slowly.** Work your way up to at least 30 minutes of exercise most days of the week.
- **Get a workout buddy.** Exercise can help build friendships. It may be easier to stick to a fitness schedule if you have someone counting on you to show up.

Even if you've lived an inactive lifestyle up until now, regular activity will help keep your body - and brain - in shape.



SOURCES:

- American Council on Exercise. Healthy hydration. Accessed: 06/08/2011
- American Council on Exercise. Eat well to stay motivated and energized. Accessed: 06/08/2011

Fight Fatigue With Exercise

Feel like napping? A little bit of exercise may be all you need to get an energy boost.

About one in five people say they're often tired. If you're one of them, you may think another cup of coffee is the answer. But there's a healthier solution that can help spark your energy. It's called exercise.

Physical activity may be the last thing on your mind when you are tired. But studies show that exerting some energy may be the secret to combating recurrent tiredness.



Exercise, energy, and exhaustion

How could a workout, which burns energy, help you feel livelier? When you get moving, blood flow improves. Greater blood flow carries more oxygen and nutrients to the muscles. This gives you more energy.

A little bit of exercise can go a long way to boost energy levels in fatigued, sedentary people. In one study, experts

found that healthy young people who did a low-intensity exercise like walking three times a week for six weeks:

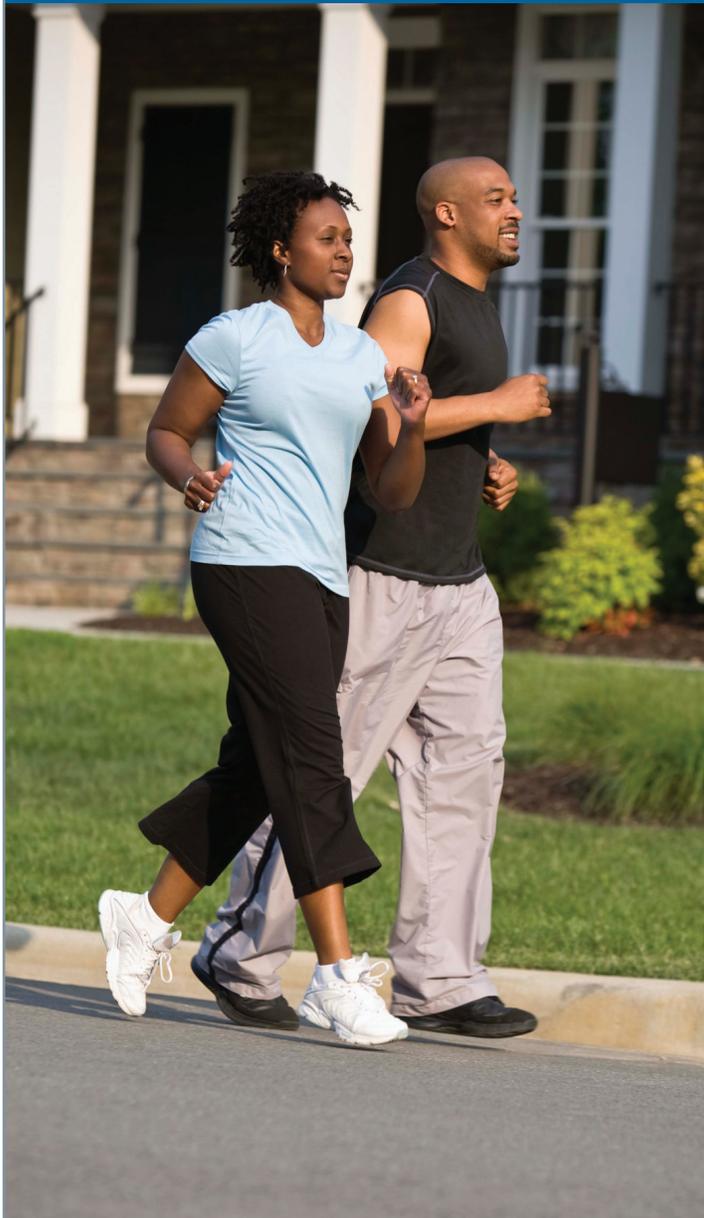
- Increased their energy levels by 20 percent
- Lowered their fatigue levels by 65 percent

Sedentary people who did a moderate-intensity activity, such as cycling, for six weeks raised their energy levels by 20 percent and cut their fatigue levels in half.

Researchers noted that more strenuous exercise, such as competing in a 5K run, is not always the key to high energy levels. In fact, high-intensity exercise may leave you feeling drained, especially if you're not used to it.

Increase activity to amp up energy

Do you want to see if exercise can help your energy levels and reduce fatigue? First, check with your doctor to make sure physical activity is safe for you. Then gradually increase your activity level.



Fight Fatigue With Exercise *(continued)*

Experts suggest at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise each week. That number may seem like a lot, but it's really only half an hour a day, five days a week. And you don't have to do the half hour all at once.

This means you can take a brisk 10-minute walk before work, at lunch, and after work, and you've got your 30 minutes for the day. Or you could garden, ride a bike, or clean house. As long as you keep moving for at least 10 minutes, it counts as exercise.

More reasons to move: better physical and mental health

Even if your energy levels are up to par, physical activity still offers great rewards. The health benefits of exercise reach far beyond an energy boost. Being fit cuts the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and depression. It can also keep weight in check, ease stress levels, and lead to better sleep.

If you're always tired

Exhaustion is one of the most common reasons people seek medical care. If you constantly feel tired, see your doctor. Sometimes, a health condition can cause fatigue. But in one in four people, there's no clear medical reason for their unrelenting fatigue.

One of the main causes of excessive sleepiness and fatigue is sleep deprivation. The demands of your job, family, and housework may compel you to skimp on sleep. But if you're not getting enough sleep, no amount of exercise will help your energy level in the long run. Sleep is just as crucial to your health as diet and exercise, so be sure to get enough of it.

If you're getting enough sleep and your health is good, exercise could be your ticket to more energy. Next time the 3 p.m. yawns hit, take a brisk walk instead of reaching for the coffee. You may be surprised by the results.

SOURCES:

- National Heart Lung and Blood Institute. Physical activity and heart disease I.Q. Accessed: 10/26/2010
- National Sleep Foundation. Fatigue and excessive sleepiness. Accessed: 10/26/2010
- American Council on Exercise. Exercise as a cure for fatigue and to boost energy levels. Accessed: 10/26/2010

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