

Types of exercise and the impact on overall health...

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Exercise plays a key role in your overall health. There are numerous ways to exercise and each facet has its own benefits. Simply put, there are three main categories of exercise including cardiovascular, strength training, and flexibility-focused exercise.

Cardiovascular exercise includes running, walking, swimming, cycling, dancing, etc. This type of activity improves cardiovascular/heart health, while building endurance and burning fat and calories, helping to manage weight.

Here are some things to consider when starting a cardiovascular program:

- **Use a heart rate monitor:** This is a great accountability tool that will help you monitor your progress and exertion levels. To take it a step further, consider getting a metabolic assessment profile done to more accurately understand how your body burns fat, and how your heart is processing oxygen while exercising.
- **Mix it up:** Avoid doing the same type of cardiovascular activity all of the time at the same level. Walk or jog one day at a comfortable pace, the next day do some interval training with hills or speed. Try swimming or rowing to engage different muscles, and challenge your cardiovascular system in a different way.
- **Think quality verses quantity:** Quality workouts are more effective than long workouts. After about 40 minutes our bodies start to release cortisol (a stress hormone) during exercise. If you exercise for long periods of time without proper nutrition or recovery, you could actually promote weight gain due to excessive inflammation from increased cortisol production.

Strength or resistance training has endless benefits for your metabolism, disease management and prevention, and anti-aging. It is unfortunate that strength training often has negative stigmas associated with it. People often avoid it because they do not want to get “bulky,” or think they need to lose a certain amount of weight through cardiovascular exercise before they can start lifting weights. This could not be further from the truth. We will dive into several metabolic and health benefits of strength training to disprove these negative connotations.

- **Manage and prevent type 2 diabetes:** Strength training won't make up for a diet full of poor quality, high-carb processed food, but it can certainly help your body process insulin more effectively. A new study revealed those who had more muscle mass displayed a reduced chance of having prediabetes. [1] Likewise, when blood-sugar control is lost through both inactivity, and poor nutrition, it's more difficult for the body to burn fat — making it easier to gain weight and harder to lose it.

- Type 2 diabetes is most often diagnosed in those who are in middle and later adulthood. It's also common for people this age to be less active and have less muscle mass than in their younger years. Making weight training a regular part of one's lifestyle can help reduce age-related muscle loss.
- **Reduced rate of, or reverse, aging of muscle tissue:** For those who are sedentary, it's common to lose tone in the areas where we have the most muscle, and gain size in the areas where we best store fat. Fortunately, we do have some control over that. Weight training sets up a physiological process where your body will make new, younger acting (and looking) muscle tissue.[2] Its never too late to start.
- **Increased metabolism:** Unfortunately, most people tend to go up and down with weight loss and gain, especially if they achieve initial weight loss through diet and little exercise. Resistance training has been shown to play an important role in avoiding weight regain. After a weight training session, our body burns calories at a higher metabolic rate for 24-48 hours, thus increasing metabolism and the amount of calories the body burns while resting. Dieting alone, by cutting calories, only decreases the metabolism over a long period of time, making it harder for those wanting to maintain weight loss or even lose more.
- **Maintain testosterone levels with aging:** Conventional medicine has accepted the long-held belief that testosterone levels fall as we age, especially in men. Research presented at The Endocrine Society's annual meeting suggests the fall in testosterone levels may be a result of a loss of muscle tissue as a result of no regular strength training [3]. Reduction in testosterone levels may also be a result of stress and other conditions, but training with weights is an easy way to help reduce the loss of testosterone and overall stress with aging.

Flexibility focused training, is commonly known as yoga, Pilates, meditation, and physical therapy (or even "prehab" or "rehab" by athletes.) This is probably the most overlooked exercise component in those who are looking to lose weight, simply because it does not burn a lot of calories. The stress relief, adrenal health benefits, and anti-inflammatory benefits this type of exercise has on the body are endless, and will promote long term health and weight loss.

Stress stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and puts our bodies into overdrive for a long period of time, releasing excess stress hormones. These days, we tend to over-commit and over-schedule our lives, which can lead to overstimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. This results in inflammation, high blood pressure, and muscle pain, which increases weight gain and symptoms of depression.

To offset the negative health and weight effects of always being in “overdrive,” we may have to consciously stimulate our parasympathetic nervous system, by centering the mind and body. The key to re-balancing your system is not to over-exert yourself, but to gently trigger a relaxation response through an exercise format like yoga or Pilates.

Meditation has been shown to improve sleep, mood, pain relief, and anxiety. A four-month study of the effects of meditation found positive correlations with most common hormones that influence weight gain, specifically: Cortisol, testosterone, growth hormone, and thyroid stimulating hormone. [4]

Exercise is not only excellent for weight loss, looking fit, and overall health but numerous studies have shown it reduces the chances of getting Alzheimer’s Disease. Also, recent clinical studies have shown that regular exercise increases life span an average of five years over those who do not exercise regularly.

References:

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