

Exercise.

Lifestyle, facts and benefits.



There is absolutely no doubt that regular, moderate, physical exercise is extremely beneficial to us. Apart from cigarette smoking, exercise is the most important factor influencing your current and future health.

Although only about 16% of the population actually smoke, it has been estimated that 70% of the adult population do not get even the bare minimum recommended levels of exercise.

Lifestyle

Our modern lifestyles are so geared towards remaining totally sedentary that we often think we are doing well if we climb a flight of stairs rather than take the lift or walk to the office coffee machine twice a day. Most of us own a car and many of these are now automatic and have electric windows to save us from using any effort (!) How many of us get up to turn the TV over nowadays without using the remote control? Using no energy gives us no energy. A minimum of 30 minutes daily moderate exercise can make a significant difference to our general physical and mental health and enable us to enjoy an improved quality of life for longer.

What effect does a lack of exercise have on our health?

Doctors know that exercising regularly and consistently can definitely help to reduce weight, blood pressure, premature heart disease, stroke, hardening of the arteries, osteoporosis and even the chances of developing diabetes. For example, being sedentary doubles your chances of developing premature heart disease and the British Heart Foundation estimate that 37% of all deaths from heart disease are because of inactivity.

That's a huge number of people. 40% of people aged 50 or over in the UK take less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week.

Regular exercise can help combat:

- Lethargy
- Depression
- Weight gain
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Stress

The psychological pressures from the impact of technology (email, mobile phones, etc) and our increasingly material "Wealth not Health" culture, can also be reduced through exercise. Blood cholesterol and fat levels alter for the better when we become more physically active.

How much and what type of exercise is good for us?

Opinion varies on this, but a sensible level would be a minimum of 30-40 minutes brisk walking 3 times a week (or the equivalent) to stay healthy and 4-5 times a week (or the equivalent) in order to help weight loss.

Consistency is the absolute key and this will involve a degree of self-discipline. However, the health rewards are high for a minimum investment of time and you will feel and look better for it. Brisk exercise releases chemicals called endorphins into the brain which are natural antidepressants that give us a 'lift'. Exercise speeds up our metabolism for several hours and increases our energy levels.

Exercise.

Lifestyle, facts and benefits.

The short and long term benefits can be summarised as follows:

Short Term

- Relaxes and revitalizes - Physical activity reduces mental and muscular tension, and at the same time, increases concentration and energy level
- Physical activity is like a mini-vacation - you're allowed to have fun
- Helps you feel good about yourself - Physical activity increases your self-esteem and self-confidence
- While many people start a physical activity programme because of long-term benefits, it's the short-term benefits that keep them motivated to continue the habit

Long Term

- **Decreases risk of heart disease** - Inactive people are twice as likely to develop coronary artery disease (CAD) than active people
- **Decreases blood pressure** - High blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and kidney disease. Inactive people are twice as likely to develop high blood pressure as active people
- **Decreases body fat** - Regular physical activity helps maintain healthy body weight and composition. High blood pressure increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and kidney disease
- **Decreases cholesterol level** - A high blood cholesterol level increases the risk of heart disease. Regular exercise raises the level of "good" cholesterol and lowers the level of the "bad" cholesterol

- **Decreases risk of diabetes** - Physical activity lowers the risk of type 2 diabetes and increases glucose uptake for those who already have diabetes. Fit women have diabetes 6% less often than unfit women
- **Decreases risk of cancer** - Physical activity lowers the risk of colon and breast cancer
- **Decreases risk of osteoporosis** - Regular exercise delays bone loss and promotes bone formation
- **Decreases arthritis symptoms** - Regular exercise helps keep joints flexible and helps build muscle to support the joints
- **Decreases number of sick days** - Exercisers feel sick almost 30% less often than non-exercisers
- **Decreases chance of premature death** - Fit people live longer than unfit people

Whether we like it or not, we need to take regular exercise to stay in optimum condition. After all, it is what years of evolution have designed us for and without it our health can suffer both physically and mentally.

