



Why is Exercise Important?

Why do we exercise? If you don't exercise, why do you think it's important to start? Do you have questions about how to get started and what to do?

We all know that exercise is good for us and we need to do it regularly, but why?

This lesson is going to cover the basic health benefits of regular exercise, as well as tips on how to get started and stay consistent.

The first focus is on the health benefits of regular exercise and why it needs to become part of your regular lifestyle. Let's start with mental health. Exercise is generally a mood booster. It makes us feel better, refreshes us mentally, and increases our energy. Regular exercise can also improve memory and focus. Along with counseling and/or medication, exercise helps to fight anxiety and depression.

The benefits of regular exercise on your physical health are tremendous. Blood pressure and blood sugar are better controlled with regular exercise. Exercise also increases your "good" cholesterol. Regular exercisers have lower risk of certain cancers, too. Regular exercise can help improve sleeping habits, which increases energy. The more fit you are, the more you're able to perform everyday tasks, which can also improve performance at work. If you're stronger, it's easier to perform everyday activities, such as carrying groceries up and down steps, playing with kids or grandkids, etc.

What about your bodyweight? Regular exercise is one of the top predictors of whether or not someone will keep their weight off. Regular physical activity will not only help you lose weight; it's vital in keeping weight off FOREVER!

There are three primary forms of activity needed as part of our weekly exercise schedules. These are cardiovascular exercise, strength training, and some form of flexibility or mobility training.

Cardiovascular (cardio) exercise is any form of exercise that increases your heart rate for a period of time and involves the major muscle groups of the body. Examples of cardio include walking, biking, swimming, running, elliptical, etc. The weekly recommendation for cardio is 3 days per week or more and 30 minutes (or more) per day. The 30 minutes can be broken up throughout the day into three 10-minute sessions; it does not have to be done all at once. The intensity level should be moderate. You should be breathing a little harder, your heart rate should increase, but you should still be able to talk.



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Strength training is another part of the exercise puzzle. Strength training includes resistance bands, free weights, weight machines, kettle bells, or even lifting soup cans! We want to do this activity 23 days per week and typically 20-30 minutes per session. Muscle burns more calories than fat, so regular strength training can help maintain muscle mass and keep our metabolism high.

The final form of exercise in your weekly routine should include some form of flexibility or mobility training. This can be as simple as doing 5-10 minutes of stretching following a workout, or you can do yoga, Pilates, or some type of mobility exercise. The purpose of this is to keep the body flexible and reduce the risk of injury. Yoga is great for stress relief and breathing practice as well.

Now that it is known what to include in exercise programs, though it may feel overwhelming in implementing this into daily/weekly routines. Here are a few tips for getting started.

- Make it as simple as a 10-minute walk at breakfast, lunch, and dinner which would equal 30 minutes of cardio for the day, just like that.
- Do you have social support? Do you have an exercise buddy? It's helpful to have someone to be accountable to. When one person is not feeling as motivated, the other can encourage them.
- Keep track of exercise; use pen and paper or an app on a smart phone.
- Add variety and fun. Choose something you enjoy so you're more likely to continue with it, and add variety to help prevent boredom.
- Make it a part of your weekly schedule by writing it on the calendar.
- Start slowly and build. We do not need to run a marathon day one.
- Keep exercise clothes and shoes ready at all times: in your car, your office, and your home.
- Do something active with your kids or grandkids; go for a hike or a bike ride.
- Park farther away at work or the store, or take the stairs; little bits of activity add up throughout the day.

The first step is to get moving!