

# EXERCISE OR SUPER-SIZE?

## *Exercise and Fitness*



Sure, you've heard a million times that exercise is important for so many reasons: it's essential for your heart, it strengthens your muscles and bones, it lowers the risk of disease, it lifts depression, it lowers stress, blah, blah, blah. You may still be thinking, who cares? I'm only 18 years old – I'll worry about all that down the road. But wait. Consider this: until 20 years ago, children almost never got Type 2 diabetes (the kind associated with extra weight and lack of exercise), also called "adult onset" diabetes, but now nearly half the new cases of Type 2 are in young people. If that doesn't grab your attention, perhaps the more superficial but nonetheless rewarding motivation of an improved appearance might interest you. Becoming a movie-star clone isn't the goal here, but the increased self-confidence and self-esteem that result from a commitment to some type of challenging exercise are very attractive qualities. And less flab and toned muscles don't hurt either. Still not convinced? Ever heard of the "freshman fifteen?" It's the common phenomenon where first year college students gain about 15 pounds from eating unlimited cafeteria food and ordering 2 a.m. pizza deliveries. How about the freshman thirty? Hey, everything these days is becoming "super-sized!" Why not fight back? Open your mind to the possibility that you, too, can jump on the exercise bandwagon and be glad you did! Whether it's happily or reluctantly, let's assume you get on board here. The following myths, truths, and tips concerning exercise can help you figure out what approach best suits you.

### **MYTH 1: All Exercise is Created Equal**

Wrong! A variety of exercises is essential to your body's optimum health. These exercises are most simply categorized into three areas: cardiovascular (or aerobic), strength or resistance training, and stretching or flexibility.



- ***Aerobic exercise includes any activity that makes your muscles use oxygen.*** This causes your heart to work harder to get more oxygen to your muscles. Typical examples would be biking, jogging, brisk walking, skiing, basketball, swimming, dancing, or soccer. Any such activity that lasts longer than 3 minutes is considered aerobic. Aerobic activity is valuable for many reasons, and should probably be the main focus of your exercise program. Over time, it decreases your resting heart rate, which puts less stress on your heart; it increases the levels of HDL (the good cholesterol in your blood), and it burns calories, which helps you lose weight.
- ***Strength or resistance training builds strength, muscles, and promotes healthy bones.*** It also is essential for increasing your resting metabolism, because muscles burn more calories at rest than fat—and they look better, too! Aim for 2-3 sessions of resistance training a week, with at least 36 hours rest in between to allow the muscles to repair. Example of this type of exercise includes free weights, resistance bands, weight machines, and calisthenics.
- ***Flexibility or stretching exercises are also key, because they not only increase flexibility, but also improve balance and posture, prevent injury, and they feel great!*** Do them frequently, alone, or as warm-ups and cool-downs. Yoga and Pilates are not only popular examples of exercises that incorporate flexibility and stretching, but they also build strength, and can be meditative and stress-reducing.

### **MYTH 2: No Pain, No Gain**

Sure, a little soreness is normal after you first start exercising or when you try a new exercise, but pain is neither desirable nor healthy. Stop if you hurt.

### **MYTH 3: The More Intense, the Better**

It is a common myth that the more intense the exercise and the faster the heart rate, the better the workout will be. Aim for a “target heart rate” most of the time, and vary the intensity of your effort (also known as “interval training”) to most efficiently raise your metabolism. How do you find your target heart rate? Subtract your age in years from 220, which will give you your maximum heart rate. Then multiply that number by 0.60 and then by 0.85. Those numbers (60% and 85% of maximum) are the lower and upper limits that your heart rate should fall between. Start at the lower end as a beginner then strive for the higher number as you increase your conditioning.



## **TRUTH 1: 30 Minutes is All It Takes**

Are 30 or more minutes of moderate physical activity on all or most days of the week enough? Yes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American College of Sports Medicine. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services boasts higher standards—they recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise most days of the week. Remember that those minutes can be broken into 10 or 15 minute increments throughout the day and the activity can be as simple as walking briskly to classes. A good goal for many people is to work up to exercising 4 to 6 times a week for 30 to 60 minutes at a time. Remember that exercise has so many benefits that any amount is better than none.

## **TRUTH 2: A Strong Body Means a Strong Mind**

Thomas Jefferson once wrote that to be successful in academic studies, a person should “give about two [hours] every day to exercise; for health must not be sacrificed to learning. A strong body makes the mind strong.” Jefferson may have been a little disappointed with our measly 30-60 minutes a day! Don’t forget that exercise can be done during all times of the day. It’s very important to take frequent “mini exercise breaks” during your day—say a 1-2 minute break every hour of sedentary work. This will really help reduce fatigue and your risk of developing an overuse injury from the computer, for example! Walking, marching in place, and stretching exercises are all ideal for these mini-breaks.

**If you ever ask yourself how to find the time to be more active, think about trying one or more of the following suggestions:**

- ***Wake up earlier.*** Set your alarm fifteen minutes early. (Compensate by going to bed 15 minutes earlier.) Use the extra minutes to exercise.
- ***Take a break between classes.*** Use this break time to take a walk around the campus.
- ***Use everyday activities.*** Bike to class, walk to the store, park further away than you normally would and walk, choose the dining hall on the far side of campus, or take the stairs.



## **TWELVE PEARLS OF WISDOM**

Finally, let's throw out some pearls for you from the "Exercise Words of Wisdom Archives." Mind you, these are just a few—the tips in those archives are endless—so feel free to research them on your own!

1. **Do it your way.** If you can't find time for an aerobics class, make time for activities you enjoy. And it's OK to have fun! Reading, listening to music, or watching TV while exercising are great ideas. Dance, walk through the zoo, or learn a new sport!
2. **Vary your routine.** Keep your body guessing, and avoid the risk of boredom, burnout or injury.
3. **Choose a comfortable time of day.** Morning may not be for you (although it's great to ensure it isn't bumped off your day's priorities). Don't work out too soon after eating and be sensible about outdoor activities if it's extremely hot or cold outside.
4. **Work your heart.** Choose an activity that gets your heart pumping. If you choose to walk, walk briskly! Try to work out at least three times per week.
5. **Build your strength and flexibility.** Always take time to warm up and cool down. Stretching is a great way to do both, and it increases flexibility. Working with weights is a great way to increase muscle strength, which is another important component of physical fitness.
6. **Don't get discouraged!** It can take weeks or months to notice some of the improvements from exercise. Don't be obsessed with the scale—focus on the immediate benefits of increased energy, less stress, and more self-confidence.
7. **Surround yourself with support.** Get a partner, or two or three! Or join a team! Exercising with someone else can make it more fun and more difficult to back out of when motivation lags. Even if you're not a NCAA level athlete, there are opportunities to play team sports everywhere. Check out intramural and club sports like soccer, basketball, lacrosse, ultimate Frisbee, and tons more; and meet new people to boot!
8. **Make exercise a priority.** Be determined to stick with it. If illness or other problems prevent you from doing your exercise, start back as soon as you are able. Remind yourself of the reasons you are exercising, and all of the benefits. We all make time for the things that really matter to us. This is no different.



9. **Keep in mind that it is possible to get too much exercise.** Always pay attention to your body—it will let you know when you are pushing too hard. Don't let exercise become as addictive as drugs or alcohol (because it can). Excessive exercise is a component of some eating disorders; watch for red flags such as feeling overwhelmed by guilt when you take a day off, or skipping times with friends, classes, or other activities to exercise. As an old saying goes, the poison is in the dose.
10. **Set realistic goals, and slowly increase the time that you exercise, the frequency, and the intensity.** Don't try to do too much too soon. If you have any problems (injuries, bone or joint complications, for example) that could be made worse by a change in your level of physical activity, consult your health care provider before changing your routine. If you've had a hard time or a bad experience in the past, remember that you can do it now! Physical activity can help make you healthier and happier.
11. **Reward yourself when you achieve your goals!** And, lastly-
12. **Strive for balance,** but GET OFF THAT COUCH!

Now that you've read these recommendations on exercise, why don't you investigate for yourself? Those exercise archives are quite fascinating reading; and new information is always surfacing. Most importantly, pick what's best for you.

**Maureen Haberman, R.N., M.S.N., F.N.P.**

*Nurse Practitioner, Clinic Coordinator  
Student Health Services*



## REFERENCES

Elder, B.M. (2002, April). Measuring Physical Fitness of Adults in the Primary Care Setting. *The American Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 9-21.

Exercise: A Healthy Habit to Start and Keep. Retrieved June 2005 from <http://home.mdconsult.com>

Fighting Fat. (2003, March). *Better Homes and Gardens*, 134-138.

Finding Time to Exercise it can be done. (2005). Retrieved June 2005 from <http://exercise.about.com/cs/fittingitin/a/timetoexercise.html>

Gavin, M. (2005). Exercise. Retrieved June 2005 from [http://kidshealth.org/teen/school\\_jobs/college/exercise.html](http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/college/exercise.html)

Kaiser Permanente. (2004). 10,000 Steps. Retrieved December 2004 from <http://www.kaiserpermanente.org/>

Landry, G. Finding Time to Exercise. *The Sideroad*, Retrieved June 2005 from [http://www.sideroad.com/Weight\\_Loss/finding-time-to-exercise.html](http://www.sideroad.com/Weight_Loss/finding-time-to-exercise.html)

Metabolism to the Max. (2004). *The Compass*, 3-4.

