

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

Exercise and Fitness



Transitioning from high school to college can be a stressful time. Trying to juggle classes, choosing a major, participating in extracurricular activities, and making new friends can all contribute to the stress, positive or negative, that you may feel as a new college student. It's easy to forget about taking care of yourself during this transition. However, your success academically, as well as outside the classroom, partially depends on how you manage your stress; one of the ways you can do this is engage in regular exercise.

Exercise provides many benefits, besides just keeping our bodies physically fit. Exercise can play a key role in stress reduction, weight loss, and lowering the risk for life-threatening diseases, including diabetes, heart disease and several types of cancer. Further, it can keep your blood pressure and cholesterol levels within a healthy range and improve your quality of sleep. Overall, exercise is a major component of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

In order to get the most benefit from exercise, it is important to participate in exercises that focus on three main areas: cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility. Exercises that improve cardiovascular endurance are those which require your body to use oxygen. Good examples of these are walking, running, or biking. Dedicating as little as 30 minutes per day to some type of cardiovascular exercise could improve your level of cardiovascular fitness.

Muscular strength and endurance can be improved by incorporating a resistance training component to your workout program. Unlike cardiovascular exercise, exercises geared toward muscular strength and endurance should not be performed more than 2-3 times per week. Finally, flexibility can be addressed by including stretching as a part of your warm-up and cool-down. One of the best things about flexibility exercises is that they require no equipment. You can do them at any time. Not only will they help to



improve your overall flexibility, but they can help reduce muscle soreness after you exercise.

With all the activities and daily excitement on a college campus, it is easy to let physical fitness fall by the wayside. However, it is just as simple to make exercise a part of your daily life. While working out at the campus fitness center or at an off-campus gym are good ways to maintain fitness, there are other options that only require a few minutes a day and can be just as beneficial. Perhaps you always catch the bus to class. If you live on campus, try leaving a little earlier and walking to class instead. Maybe you live off-campus and have access to a car. If so, try parking a little farther from the door when you go to the grocery store or visit the library. If you have a decision between taking the elevator or taking the stairs, choose to take the stairs more often. Consider trying a new class at the fitness center, and recruit a buddy to go with you. If a fitness class is not exactly your style, recruit a buddy to take a walk around campus with you. Rent or borrow a bike for the day, and take a ride around town. You may discover something that you've never noticed before AND get a good workout.

While exercise can play an important role in maintaining a lifestyle, there are necessary precautions to take when beginning an exercise program for the first time. It is always best to see a physician before starting any type of exercise program to make sure you are physically able to participate. Once you have been cleared, there are several other key points to remember as well. You should always warm-up before you exercise and cool-down once you are finished. Ideally, the warm-up should be 10-15 minutes, and the cool-down should be 5-10 minutes. If you choose not to warm-up and cool-down, you put yourself at risk for potential injury. Also, remember to stay properly hydrated by drinking water before, during, and after your workout. By the time your body realizes it is thirsty, you are already dehydrated. It is best to treat dehydration by preventing it. Lastly, if you find yourself dizzy or experiencing shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, STOP! Again, you could put yourself in harm's way by continuing to exercise in those instances.

Now that you know the basics to exercise and fitness, get moving!

Here are some tips to get you started:

- ***Set realistic goals for yourself.*** Do not expect to run 2 miles the first time you put on a pair of sneakers. Start with several short-term goals and a long-term goal in mind. Be specific about what you want to accomplish, and give yourself a time period in which to accomplish these goals.



- ***Dress comfortably and appropriately.*** Just because your favorite sneakers are good for walking to properly and that are appropriate for your activity.
- ***Sweat the small stuff.*** This is opposite to the old cliché, “Don’t sweat the small stuff.” However, in this case, it all counts! Exercising can include more than just running or biking. Every little bit helps, whether it’s doing indoor chores, playing a quick game of Frisbee, or walking to a friend’s dorm instead of sending them an email. All of these are ways to at least get you moving.
- ***Pace yourself.*** If you are not used to exercising or have not exercised in a long time, it is best to start out slowly. As your body becomes used to moving again, you can increase the intensity of your workouts.
- ***Remember to eat a balanced diet.*** Just like a car needs gasoline in order to run, our bodies need food and water for fuel. Our bodies burn calories on a regular basis just doing activities of daily living (ADL’s). As a physically active person, you will burn even more calories; thus, you need to re-fuel your body with healthy, nutritious foods.
- ***Vary your workout.*** If you do the same exercises over and over, you will become bored with your workout, and your body may reach a point where it no longer receives the same benefit. If you have conquered one specific activity, increase the intensity, or add a new activity. Try a new exercise class each week, or reintroduce yourself to a favorite childhood activity (e.g., roller-skating).
- ***Find a workout buddy.*** In the early stages of an exercise program, it’s easy to become frustrated when no results are visible. Recruit a buddy, so you can feel accountable to someone other than yourself. Cheer each other on, and help each other to stay motivated.
- ***Cut yourself some slack.*** If you find that you are not seeing results as quickly as you had hoped, do not beat yourself up over it. It will take time before you begin to see measurable changes, so don’t be alarmed if you don’t see them right away.
- ***Give yourself a hand.*** When you finally do begin to see changes, celebrate your success. Treat yourself to a new accessory or a movie each time you reach a short-term fitness goal. When you reach your long-term fitness goal, give yourself a really nice treat, such as a new outfit or a spa visit.
- ***Have fun.*** One reason that people don’t continue exercising is that they don’t enjoy it. Do what it takes to make exercising fun for you. Listen to songs or music that inspires you, or wear a cool workout outfit.



So now what? You already have plenty to do with your homework due and your many club meetings. How can you possibly find the time to exercise? Well, if you knew of a magic pill that could possibly prolong your life, help you lose weight, and make you feel better mentally, would you take it? Of course, in this case, you would. The magic pill is exercise, and the time is now. So, get moving!

Candace S. Parham, M.A.

*Research & Evaluation Manager
Center for the Advancement of Public Health*

References

National Women's Health Resource Center, Inc. (2003). Adding Fitness to Your Daily Routine. Retrieved January 2007 from <http://health.discovery.com/centers/nutritionfitness/nwhrc/fitness/fittreatment.html>

National Women's Health Resource Center, Inc. (2003). Fitness: Get the Facts. Retrieved January 2007 from http://health.discovery.com/centers/nutritionfitness/nwhrc/fitness/nwhrc_fitness.html

Prentice, W.E. (2003). Arnheim's Principles of Athletic Training. A Competency-Based Approach, 82-115.

