

EXERCISE

How much, How hard, How often?

Each of us is bombarded daily on television, in magazines and newspapers and the internet with information pointing out the necessity of physical activity to achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Despite being aware of its health benefits, Americans have shown little increase in activity levels during the past decade. Indeed, this fact is in part responsible for the growing obesity epidemic in the United States. Approximately two thirds of the American population is overweight or obese.

As a result, last October, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued the governments first-ever Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, These outline exactly how much and what kinds of activity are needed to assist Americans to control their weight and reduce their risk of major health problems, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, certain cancers and metabolic syndrome.

The necessity of physical activity guidelines was apparent as a result of the wealth of information developed over the past quarter of a century which clearly demonstrates the marked benefits of activity in improving health and addressing weight.

HHS convened a panel of experts who reviewed thousands of studies on the effects of physical activity on health. The panel then developed recommendations for three age groups: (1) Children and Adolescents, (2) Adults, (3) Older Adults. Persons with disabilities were included in the groups. The findings and recommendations are quite interesting and worthy of study. I thought that this month's edition should focus on this important and timely subject along with the recommendations put forth.

The HHs committee noted that baseline activity varies greatly among individuals and because of this focused on what they named "health-enhancing activities," which when added to activities of daily life improve your health. Examples of health-enhancing activities include brisk walking, swimming, jogging dancing, weight lifting and yoga. (You will find many more examples included in our "on-line journal" located on our home page www.hateyourweight.com. This journal is free to all and there is no obligation for its use.)

The committee then broke personal activity into four categories:

1. Inactive (no activity beyond baseline daily activities)
2. Low (beyond baseline, but less than 150 minutes per week)
3. Medium (150 to 300 minutes per week)
4. High (more than 300 minutes per week).

EXERCISE and HEALTH MAINTENANCE

Research suggests that the optimal time of exercise for health maintenance is 150 minutes per week of moderate- intensity aerobic activity (e.g. brisk walking) or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity (e.g.

jogging or swimming laps). Any additional activity is a bonus! Increments of brief activity as small as 10 minutes are beneficial! This fact should put to rest the standard excuse of “I don’t have any time to exercise.” If you have a few minutes go up and down a flight of stairs, walk around the parking lot or block or jog in place. Keep moving!!

The guidelines also encourage strengthening exercises at least two days a week to increase and preserve bone and muscle. Such activities include lifting weights, resistance bands, calisthenics, and heavy gardening.

EXERCISE and WEIGHT LOSS

More activity is needed for weight loss-MUCH MORE!! For many people achieving weight loss and preventing regain requires 300 minutes per week of moderate activity or at least 150 minutes per week of vigorous activity. To determine if you are engaged in moderate activity, you should be able to talk, but not sing. During vigorous activity, you should not be able to say more than a few words before having to take a breath. You can “tradeoff” minutes by substituting one minute of vigorous activity for two minutes of moderate activity. For example, 15 minutes of jogging plus 15 minutes of brisk walking is equal to 45 minutes of brisk walking because the vigorous activity (jogging) counts double.

Take time to figure out how to build these minutes into your daily life. The rewards will be great!

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

As we have discussed the positive effects on our health from appropriate exercise are enormous but there are great quality-of-life benefits that will accrue if you follow the guidelines including less depression, improved body self image and increased enjoyment of being around others. For most people the research concludes, the benefits far out-way any potential risks but be sure and always see a physician prior to beginning any new exercise program!

KEY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES FOR ADULTS

1. Avoid inactivity-don’t just sit there MOVE! Even 10 minutes of activity will result in benefits!
2. Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week. Spread aerobic activity as evenly possible over the week to reduce the risk of injury.
3. Exercise beyond the minimum to gain additional benefits-including weight loss . Aim for 300 minutes of moderate activity or 150 minutes per week of vigorous activity.
4. Include muscle-strengthening activities at moderate or vigorous intensity that involve all major muscle groups, two or more times per week. Allow your muscles to strengthen and recover by not working out the same body part two days in a row.
5. Aim to be as active as you circumstances allow! This is particularly true for older and disabled individuals!
6. Always see a physician before you begin and as you progress! An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!!!!

Benton Baker III MD, FACS, FACOG would be honored to assist you with your health, weight and wellness issues. He can be reached at the MD'S Weight & Wellness Center, 200 River Pointe, Suite 115, Conroe, Texas 77304. Phone 936-756-8446 (THIN).