

Move It!

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What if someone told you that you can reduce your risk of heart disease and other health-related issues, relieve your stress, increase your energy, sleep better, reduce some effects of aging, and lose weight? Most of us would jump on that train. Well hop on board because you have the ability to accomplish those goals by choosing to move. (Indeed, the American Heart Association has a program entitled exactly that at www.choosetomove.org) What exactly does that mean? In one word: exercise. And what exactly is exercise? Webster defines it as “bodily exertion for the sake of developing and maintaining physical fitness.”

Now that warmer weather is here, it's time to shake off those winter blahs and start some purposeful bodily exertion. Most experts recommend 30-60 minutes a day most days a week (www.health.gov). That doesn't mean you have to spend a lot of money on a gym membership or lock yourself into a strenuous workout program that you dread. What it does mean is that you need to get your body moving and all movement counts.

There are several different types of exercise from which to choose. Aerobic exercise (also known as cardiovascular) moves large muscle groups. You breathe deeper, your heart works harder, and it improves both heart and lung function. Walking is an example of aerobic exercise. Weight bearing exercises build bones by working against gravity and it helps prevent osteoporosis and fractures. Again, walking is an example of weight bearing exercise. Weight training builds strength and muscles and can be done as calisthenics or weight lifting. Stretching improves flexibility, improves your posture, and increases blood flow to the tissues, and reduces your risk of injury.

What is the very best exercise? Easy answer: it's the one you will do. You know your body best and can design a program that you will stick to. Consistency is the key. Choose something you like to do and stay with it. There are so many choices of exercise that you don't need to do something you hate just because you think you should. If you need motivation, find a friend who will exercise with you. Vary your routine so you don't get bored and every once in a while, break the rules. For example, shorten the time of your exercise period, do a lighter workout, or take the day off. Listen to your body and it will tell you how to structure your exercise for the day.

Remember that if you haven't exercised in awhile, you may not be good at it the first time. That's okay. You've taken the first step and every journey starts with that single step. You will find that the longer you stick with your personalized program (that you designed for yourself), the better you'll get and the better you'll feel.

How do you get started? First, check with your doctor. Once you've been cleared physically, pick an exercise you know you will do regularly. One of the easiest things to start with is simply walking. All you need is a good pair of comfortable shoes. Start with 10 minutes and gradually work up to longer periods. If you prefer a structured class, (aerobics, jazzercise, etc.) check out your local YMCA or gym. There are a plethora of exercises to engage in and lots of places to do them. Congratulations on taking that first step to improving your health. May it be followed by many more!