The Fundamentals of a Fitness Lifestyle

“After all is said and done, more is said than done”

--Italian proverb

It is irrefutable: certain healthy behaviors can contribute to longevity. In other words, exercising reduces your risk of dying. Period. *Sarcopenia*  is what occurs to our bodies as the result of a phenomenon called aging. It’s just a fancy word meaning that our muscles weaken and shrink as we age.

The research indicates that physical exercise is an effective method to relieve tension. A good workout enables our body to function more efficiently. The physiological benefits include improving your cardiovascular system, strengthening your heart, better elasticity of blood vessels, putting more oxygen in your body and finally, lowering your blood levels of fats like cholesterol and triglycerides. In sum, these benefits lower your risk of experiencing heart conditions, strokes and high blood pressure.

In terms of the psychological/mental benefits, exercising is an excellent way to release negative emotions like anger, irritability and frustration. Physiologically, it enhances our mood by releasing positive biochemicals in the brain. A regular exercise program reduces the amount of adrenal hormones in your body—a stress chemical. Further, greater levels of endorphins are released--- and this chemical is pain relieving, mood elevating. Increased endorphins in the brain account for the runner’s high we hear about. The research also indicates that our problems seem less important and troubling when we exercise--- swim, run, walk or cycle. Remember—exercising uses up any of the excess stress chemical adrenaline which is beneficial to us. Like our bodies needing rest—we need to rest and relax our brain, and exercise is the best way to rest our mind.

Exercise and proper eating habits can actually form new bone tissue, improve cardiovascular endurance and add muscle strength. Eating lox and bagels does nothing for your bone tissue. In addition to these benefits, exercise strengthens the heart and lungs and lowers blood pressure. Individuals who regularly exercise are less likely to experience chronic fatigue. Feeling tired usually results from poor circulation which is related to an absence of physical activity. The muscles of inactive older adults usually shrink which reduces their strength. An exercise program which includes light weight lifting builds and maintains muscular strength and endurance. According to researchers at the Human Population Laboratory of the California Department of Health, the following list of behaviors are associated with health and longevity:

1. Regular exercise
2. Moderate use of (or abstinence from) alcohol
3. Regular meals
4. Weight control
5. Adequate sleep
6. A good breakfast
7. Abstinence from smoking

The researchers found that males could add 11 years to their life and females could add another seven years to their life by practicing six of the seven behaviors. As you can see, an active lifestyle adds years to life. So, how much time is required daily to achieve the benefits of exercise and fitness? The fitness experts agree that about 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity of physical activity three days a week is acceptable.

This doesn’t necessarily mean that you need to lift heavy weights or run 12 miles a day. The goal of incorporating a fitness program into your wonderful life is to reduce your risk of coronary artery disease (CAD).

CAD is America’s number one killer and it includes heart disease and stroke, in addition to atherosclerosis. About one million people die from these diseases every year.

The best way to reduce your risk is by strengthening the working of your heart and improving the circulation of the blood in your body. First you need to understand that your heart doesn’t have to work as hard at pumping blood through your body when you exercise regularly. The added oxygen in your blood that comes from regular physical activity enables your heart to meet its demands with less strain. This translates to your heart pumping more blood with each beat, which means it isn’t beating as often.

What are the different forms of exercises to consider? First of all, consider what your skills and abilities are before selecting a form of exercise. The kinds of exercises include:

Strength Training (lifting weights):

The value in lifting weights is that it makes your bones stronger, improves balance and mobility and it increases muscle strength and mass.

Stretching (flexibility):

The benefits of stretching are that it improves your flexibility, reduces your risk of injury and muscle strain, and stretching increases blood flow and helps loosen muscles in your arms, shoulders, back, chest, buttocks and thighs. You can warm up and cool down with about 10 – 15 minutes of stretching exercises.

Aerobic (endurance exercises):

Aerobic sorts of exercises strengthen your heart and improve overall fitness by increasing your body’s ability to use oxygen. Examples of aerobic exercises are swimming, running, walking, cycling and dancing—activities that are sustained and that involve the major muscle groups. Aerobic exercises increase your heart and respiratory rate.

Anaerobic Exercise:

Anaerobic exercises are sometimes referred to as low impact does not necessarily increase your respiratory or heart rate because you don’t exercise vigorously. The goal of an anaerobic activity is to improve muscle strength and flexibility.

The benefits of a fitness program include the following:

1. Your blood gets enriched and improves your circulation
2. Exercising restores your elasticity and strengthens muscles
3. Imagine increasing your endurance
4. Your posture will improve
5. Exercising improves your cardiovascular system; strengthens heart and creating elasticity blood vessels.
6. Exercising increases oxygen throughout your body
7. Your blood levels of fats such as cholesterol and triglycerides are lowered by exercising
8. Exercising lowers your risk of developing heart conditions, stroke and high blood pressure.
9. Exercising will boost your morale and confidence, making you feel and look younger
10. Your agility and mobility improves by exercising

##### The psychological benefits to exercising include the following:

##### It is an outlet for negative emotions such as frustration, anger, and irritability

##### Exercising puts you in a more positive mood by producing biochemical changes in the brain. A consistent exercise program reduces the amount of adrenal hormones in your body—a stress chemical secreted when we’re under stress.

##### A positive outcome of exercising includes your body releasing greater amounts of endorphins—a pain relieving, mood elevating chemical in the brain.

##### Exercising promotes deep, restful sleep.

1. Most individuals do not worry when exercising—giving them an opportunity to focus on other things while exercising. In other words, these individuals are resting their minds.

A study on walking reported in the New England Journal of Medicine showed that routine brisk walking helped prevent heart disease in women. This study included about 72,000 women between the ages of 40 and 65, and it spanned eight years. The researchers found that walking reduced the risk of heart attacks in women. What was really astonishing was that walking reduced the risk of heart attacks just as much as other more vigorous and intense exercises. So, what does this mean for you? It means you don’t have to run a marathon to reduce your risk of heart disease.

The study also found that women who walk briskly for about three hours a week lower their heart attack risk by 30 to 40%. Again, what’s so striking about this finding is that this 30% to 40% is the same reduction in risk for women who run, swim or do aerobics. So what does all this mean? It means that you don’t have to run, swim or do aerobics to reduce your risk of heart attack. The thing is though, when you walk you really need to walk briskly. The goal should be to walk one mile in twenty minutes. If you decide to get addicted to walking, then start walking five or more hours every week. If you do, you’ll reduce your risk of heart attack in half. I want you to know that there are other great benefits to walking. Walkers lower their blood pressure and cholesterol, burn calories and improve their bone strength.

Tips To Keep You Motivated To Exercise

I know. It’s awful difficult to stay motivated to work out. So, here are some tips to consider when you’re about to start an exercise program:

1. Select activities you’ll truly enjoy.
2. Incorporate the exercise into your daily routine.
3. Attempt to exercise with a partner or group of people. The social interaction helps a lot.
4. Maintain a log of your program and progress.
5. If possible, exercise to music.
6. Wear proper fitting shoes and comfortable clothes while exercising.