

Exercise—Worth it Even Without Weight Loss

You're in the gym every week, sweating and working hard, but some of those extra pounds aren't coming off. Is it worth all the trouble? Yes! Regardless of weight loss, regular cardiovascular, strength and flexibility training improve many aspects of your fitness and may help reduce some of the risks associated with obesity or a sedentary lifestyle.

Move it!

The body, that is. Your body needs regular physical activity that uses large muscles and increases both heart rate and blood flow back to the heart (aerobic activity). A few examples of aerobic activity are walking, running, biking and swimming. Even low-intensity activity such as gardening counts if it is regular! Be sure to ask your doctor before starting an exercise program. Whether you use a gym in a structured way or add several short segments daily of aerobic activity, you are moving in the right direction. Consider the following possible benefits of regular, moderate cardiovascular training:

- elevated mood, reduced stress and improved self-esteem
- improved insulin sensitivity—helps control or possibly prevents type 2 diabetes
- reduced blood pressure
- increased HDL (the “good” cholesterol)
- makes the heart stronger and more efficient—decreased risk of cardiovascular disease
- reduced risk of certain cancers
- enhanced immunity

Pump it up!

OK, you're moving your body, but what about those muscles of yours? Have you avoided strength training for fear of adding inches to overall girth? Have no fear. Regular weight lifting or other kinds of strength training at just the right load for you can increase your strength and endurance with little risk of gaining inches. If you have concerns, ask a personal trainer to design a strength program just for you. Here are some of the benefits of strength training two to three times a week:

- increased strength—this may improve all of your daily activities
- increased metabolic rate—you burn more calories throughout your day
- decreased fat mass in the body
- decreased risk of osteoporosis
- as with cardiovascular training, elevated mood, reduced stress and improved self-esteem

Stretch it!

If you are regularly moving and strengthening your body (and even if you aren't), you need to stretch it. The word flexibility refers to the range of motion around a joint. Do you desire the comfortable

ability to move throughout the day? Flexibility training can keep you moving with comfort. How else does stretching help you?

- it decreases the risk of injury during exercise
- improves posture
- increases relaxation

Change it!

It's possible that you started losing weight after committing to exercise and eating right, then suddenly hit a plateau in which the pounds won't budge. Don't give up! According to Eric Harr, writer for *Shape* magazine, your body might have adapted to the exercise routine you've taught it. The solution is simple—confuse your body! Even if these changes don't make a huge difference on the scale, they might prevent you from growing bored with your routine:

- Cross-train—try a new machine or other form of aerobic exercise each month.
- Increase the intensity of one of your workouts each week.
- Change the order of strength moves or slow down your repetitions.
- Take just a few days off from exercise to let your body rest—come back ready to move!

Keep up the good work!

Cardiovascular, strength and flexibility training are worth your time and effort, even if you aren't weighing in like you hoped to. Exercise alone may not be enough for many of us to lose weight. Most of us have to work harder to eat a healthy, balanced diet with reasonable portions. You can talk to your doctor or a registered dietician if you need direction with your eating habits. But don't let lingering extra pounds discourage you from continuing to exercise. If you regularly "move it, pump it and stretch it" you are taking an active role in improving your health and preventing disease.

Sources: Eric Harr (2003) "Pushing Through Plateaus." *Shape*, (23) 38-40; *Program Design for Personal Trainers* by Douglas S. Brooks, M.S. Moves International, 1977.

Resources

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www.exrx.net

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