

Life Letter *mature*

Exercise can make life more comfortable

We've all heard about the benefits of physical activity and proper diet. However, our "Western Lifestyle" has led to ever increasing waist sizes and the associated health problems of becoming sedentary.

As we age, we need fewer calories in our diet. This can be difficult because of the proliferation of fast food restaurants and processed foods. These seem to be convenient because of busy lives. A little effort to avoid highly processed foods and eat more fresh produce instead can pay big dividends later.

Studies have shown that a regular, brisk activity level has many long term benefits. They include:

Stronger heart. According to the Lifestyle Medicine Institute, almost half of us will die of heart and vascular disease.

Lower blood pressure. High blood pressure can lead to heart attack and stroke. Exercise can lower blood pressure, protecting the entire cardiovascular system.

Strengthens bones. Our skeletal system is meant to be used. A sedentary lifestyle can lead to calcium and mineral loss. Weak bones are easier to break and harder to heal.

Feel better. Studies have shown that regular brisk exercise releases endorphins, resulting in a "natural high" that can be long lasting. Life becomes more fun if you feel good.

Helps maintain desirable weight. Exercise builds muscle and burns fat. Moderate levels can also act as a natural appetite suppressant.

Improved circulation. This can lead to a clearer mind, faster recovery from injuries and better sleep.

Battle depression. Studies have shown that outdoor exercise is a valuable tool for battling this debilitating malady.

Lower cholesterol. Regular exercise has been shown to reduce LDL cholesterol levels in the blood and can actually raise HDL levels. LDL is the bad cholesterol and HDL is the good one.

Walking is an ideal exercise because it's easy, almost everyone can do it and it's inexpensive. A treadmill set up in front of a TV can help you fight potential boredom when the weather is bad outside. Set a pace that's right for you, adjust it as your physical condition improves and stop when you want.

Swimming and aquacise (exercise in water) can be a good start as the water can support your body putting less strain on joints until you get stronger. Weight training helps improve muscle tone and can also battle osteoporosis. Start light and work up to a comfortable level.

Not intended as specific health advice. See your doctor for an exercise program that's right for you.

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