

The Benefits of Regular Exercise & Good Nutrition - A Way To Promote Good Health by Ellen Bodner, PT, DPT

Recent studies show that daily exercise keeps you healthy and strong and improves the overall quality of your life. The numerous benefits of exercise include a decrease in body fat and obesity and a reduction in the risk for type 2 diabetes, improvement in the cardiovascular system by lowering cholesterol and blood pressure, prevention of osteoarthritis by reducing weight and stress on the joints, strengthening of bones and joints and prevention of osteoporosis, decreasing the risk of falls by maintaining flexibility and balance and improvement in functional activities required in the activities of daily living.

Exercise has been shown to improve the endocrine and immune system and may prevent breast and colon cancer, maintain brain health, mental acuity and memory and delay the onset of dementia and Alzheimer's. Quality of life is improved by helping to control chronic pain, fatigue stress and depression. Yet it is estimated that more than 60% of adult Americans and close to 30% of children are either overweight or obese and in poor condition from lack of exercise and increased consumption of hi-fat foods.

In order to maintain your health and help prevent chronic disease, the newly updated guidelines from the American Heart Association and the American College of Sports Medicine recommend that you need 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise five days a week or three days of 20 minute vigorous intensity workouts. To lose weight, you need about 60 minutes of moderately intense exercise daily. An hour of vigorous aerobic exercise includes brisk walking, jogging, treadmill, bicycle, racquet sports, weight training or swimming. Less strenuous activity includes walking, gardening, golf, bowling and housework. Workouts should include weight and resistance training to increase bone and muscle strength.

If you have a history of any medical conditions, you should first consult with your doctor before beginning any type of exercise program. When getting started, it is recommended that you be under the guidance of a trained health care professional who is knowledgeable about the correct methods of stretching, flexibility, strengthening and aerobic training. This healthcare professional can design and supervise a program that best suits your individual needs, help to prevent injuries to your muscles and joints and make your workouts more enjoyable and beneficial.

The saying "you are what you eat" could not be truer based on all current research. If you are moderately overweight or obese or have any medical conditions, consult with your doctor before beginning any weight loss program. Weight management simply involves using up more calories than you ingest. The first step to losing weight should be to reduce your portions by 25%. Your menu should include 5 servings a day of fruits and vegetables and a reduction in the intake of saturated fats from red meat dairy products and processed foods.

If losing weight in the past has been difficult for you, you may benefit from nutritional

counseling with a licensed dietician who can design an individualized weight loss program for you. A good source of nutritional information can also be found at www.mypyramid.gov and on www.eatright.org.

Ellen Bodner, PT, DPT is the owner of Next Step Health & Fitness which is a division of Ellen Bodner Physical Therapy in Queens, New York. Call 718-217-2875 to schedule an appointment.