



PHYSICAL ACTIVITY CAN IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

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One of the South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines is “be active”. The human body is built to move but we often disregard physical activity in our wellness goals. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines physical activity as “any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure”, the important part of the statement is that it must use up energy^{1,2}.

Our bodies move all day but this does not use as much calories as we often take in. Adding additional exercise helps burn more calories and has many health benefits. Before we talk of the benefits, what is considered exercise? You don’t need to be a “gym bunny” and live at the gym to be physically active. There are many ways to add in some extra energy burning activities.

The world health organisation recommends that following exercise for different age groups:

- Children and youth aged 5–17 should get least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily.
- Adults aged 18–64 should do at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity³

Aerobic activity is not just aerobics but any exercise that gets the heart pumping. The American Physical Activity Guidelines send a very encouraging message to the public. Everyone can choose different activities that they enjoy such as dancing, martial arts, tennis, canoeing, swimming, lifting weights, and even just walking. You have the freedom to select when to exercise to best fit into your busy lifestyle⁴.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

There can be many benefits of exercise and increasing your physical activity

Exercise controls weight

Exercise can help manage weight goals such as weight loss. As previously stated physical activity burns energy (calories). The more intense the activity, the more calories you burn.



Exercise combats health conditions and diseases

There are many risks for developing health conditions but exercise helps the body increase the good fats such as high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol, and it decreases unhealthy fats. Exercise helps keeps your blood flowing smoothly, which decreases your risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Regular exercise helps prevent or manage many health problems such as

- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Many types of cancer

Exercise improves mood

Exercise stimulates chemicals in the brain that help you feel happier and relaxed. That's why taking a nice long walk can help release some of the stress of a busy day. Exercise also helps us feel better about our bodies and this boost your self-esteem and build your confidence.

Exercise boosts your energy

Regular exercise lets your tissues use oxygen better and strengthen your cardiovascular system, thus improving your endurance so that you don't manage the daily chores of life.

Exercise can be social!

Exercise can be a fun and engaging way to meet people and reconnect with family and friends. Exercising can help you enjoy the outdoors or just make you happy to do things with family and friends. Improve your social life by joining a running club, taking a dance class, joining a sports team and enjoy the company of other likeminded individuals⁵.

CONCLUSION

Exercise and physical activity are great ways to feel better, boost your health and have fun.

Spread your activities throughout the week. If you have specific fitness goals you will find benefits if you increase the duration of exercise higher than the recommendations.

Remember to check with your doctor before starting new exercises especially if you have any health concerns or have never really exercise before in order not to overdo it or hurt yourself.



REFERENCES

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