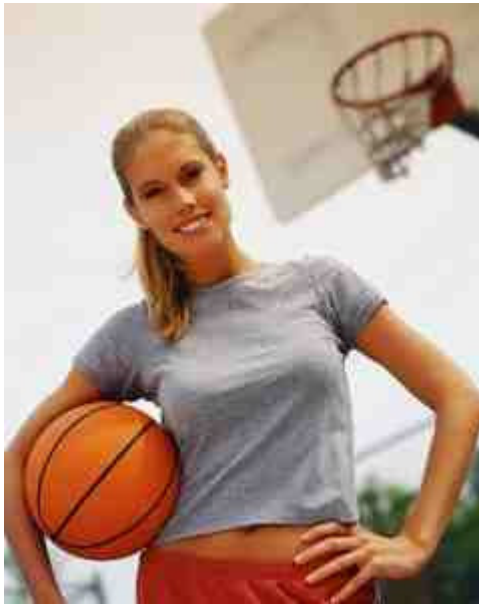


The *Benefits* of Exercise

We are often told that exercise is good for us. However the phrase “good for us” is a bit vague and considering the effort, motivation and dedication often required to become a regular exerciser, surely being told it’s “good for us” needs to be expanded on...



In this article, I want to list the benefits of exercise and hopefully, in turn, help raise your motivation levels and make it easier to stay on the straight and narrow road to better health and fitness!

There are many benefits associated with regular exercise and they can be broadly divided into two categories – physical and psychological. Some of these benefits may be a bit of both so I’ve listed them according to my interpretation...

Let’s get physical!

The human body consists of molecules, chemicals, minerals, cells, tissue, organs, bodily systems, muscles, bones, blood and numerous other components – all of which benefit from regular appropriate exercise. Some of the physical benefits of exercise include:

- Improved cardiovascular health (cardiovascular referring to the heart and lungs)
- Improved cardiovascular fitness
- Improved circulation to extremities (no more cold feet!)
- Reduced likelihood of developing varicose veins
- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced likelihood of suffering heart attacks and strokes

- Lowered resting heart rate
- Improved blood lipid profiles
- Increased energy expenditure leading to lowered body fat levels
- Reduced stress levels/stress management
- Lowered risk of developing diabetes and lowered resting blood glucose levels
- Lowered incidence of all causes of mortality
- Improved muscle tone
- Increased muscular strength, power and endurance
- Greater muscular flexibility
- Increased range of movement at major joints
- Increased bone density & decreased risk of Osteoporosis
- Stronger ligaments and tendons
- Improved co-ordination, balance and proprioception
- Increase immune system efficiency
- Improved posture
- Lowered incidence of non-specific back pain
- Increased resistance to fatigue
- More energy for day to day activities

Are you mental?

Many people are very surprised to learn that exercise has a very positive effect on our psychological state also. A healthy body and a healthy mind often go hand in hand...

- Elevated mood state due to release of exercise induced endorphins
- Increase mental focus
- Provides a tremendous feeling of satisfaction and achievement
- Lowered stress levels
- Reduced likelihood of developing depression
- Increased self confidence
- More positive outlook on life – a “can do” attitude
- A healthier attitude towards food
- Greater self awareness

That's not all folks!

And if those reasons weren't enough, here are a few more often forgotten benefits of being fit, healthy and a regular exerciser:

- Exercise provides us with a great opportunity to increase our social circle
- Makes us more attractive to the opposite sex
- Can help develop both self sufficiency and team work

- Gives us more latitude with what we choose to eat
- Teaches us to be goal orientated
- Improved time management, organization and planning ability
- Improved quality and enjoyment of life!_

Never too late.

Generally, people are living considerably longer than they used to. This gives the impression that society is now healthier than ever before. Sadly this is not the case. Chronic degenerative diseases plague modern man, as does obesity and other conditions associated with poor nutrition as inactivity. Modern medicine is now so advanced that we can keep people alive longer and control symptoms with medication. However, this long life is often accompanied by poor quality of life, disability and unpleasant side effects from medication. People **are** living considerably longer than their predecessors but their quality and enjoyment of life is much lower than it could be. Personally, I can't imagine a worse fate than living a long time but losing quality of life. It's never too late to begin experiencing the benefits of exercise – the body is a remarkable machine which adapts readily to change and has this capacity long into our twilight years. Improved fitness, strength and health are there fir the taking!

How to use this information?

The next time you find your self tempted to skip a workout, eat junk food or are not sure if you should even begin trying to be more physically active, try this exercise...

Divide a piece of paper into two with a vertical line. This is your "Benefit versus Cost" list. On the left hand side, write the heading "**Benefits**" and on the right hand side write the heading "**Costs**". List as many benefits as you can think of including the ones listed above and any others you can think of. On the other side, make a note of any costs you feel are associated with maintaining a healthy lifestyle. By cost, I don't just list financial implications, but the cost in terms of time, sacrifices and changed behaviours.

In this exercise, in the majority of cases the benefits will always greatly out weight the costs. Sure, you may have to cut back on pizza night form three times a week to once a month, you might find you need to get up forty five minutes earlier, you might miss having beers with your friends after work but compared to what you'll be getting in return, the sacrifices you'll make are really very small indeed!

So, the next time someone says "why do you bother with all that exercise stuff", reach into your pocket, get your "Benefit versus cost" list out and then reel of all the great things you are getting back in return for your investment.

The ancient Greeks were a clever bunch and had a great many sayings and expressions that are as true today as they were when they were first uttered by Socrates, Hippocrates and the other fathers of modern knowledge.

One of my favourites is this "Make time for exercises, or make time to be ill".

Right, I'm off for a workout!!!