

Physical Activity

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY HELPS TO DEFY AGING

Rev up your metabolism, and revive your muscle mass.

Typically, a loss of muscle mass, accompanied by a gain in fat mass, occurs with aging. However, researchers at the University of Arkansas for Medical Science have found that we can control our metabolic rate and thereby improve our physique as we age.

The single most important determinant of metabolic rate is lean body mass. The more lean tissue you have, the higher your metabolic rate: put simply, an active body is too busy processing calories to store extra as fat. Strength-training exercises can raise our metabolic rate by about 30-50 calories per day, and over the course of three months of strength-training that is appropriately designed for your needs, you can gain about 3 pounds of muscle, amounting to a total boost in the basal (resting) metabolic rate of 7%.

Chores are good for you.

The Nurses' Health Study, a 20+ year-long study of over 80,000 women between the ages of 34 and 59, found that sedentary women who began to engage in heavy gardening or heavy housework became the least likely to die a premature death.

J Public Health, April 2001, via Fitness Management August 2001.

Become a Brainiac

Studying brain scans of men and women age 55+, University of Illinois researchers have found that men who regularly worked out lost significantly less brain tissue as they aged than men who exercised rarely or not at all. Study author Dr. Arthur Kramer remarked that this is proof that working out can keep your memory strong and prevent the loss of cognitive function as you get older.

Sweat it out

Researchers from Oklahoma State University found that sweating is beneficial for mental health. Enjoy a post-exercise sauna with friends and you will find that 'sweat therapy' provides relaxation and stress relief. The team also found the therapy to promote conversation between sauna participants, establishing a positive social setting.

Susman E., 'Sweating might be good for the mind' UPI Science News, Aug. 18, 2003.

Watch the water

Excessive fluid intake during exercise can be dangerous, and potentially fatal. University of South Africa researchers warn that consuming a lot of water during exercise can cause a condition called hyponatremic encephalopathy, where a lack of salt in the blood causes the brain to swell. To-date, 250 cases of this condition have been reported and at least 7 people killed including a 28-year old woman runner in the 2002 Boston Marathon. To quench thirst, limit water intake to 400-800 ml (14-28 fluid ounces) per hour of physical activity.

British Medical Journal 2003;327:113-114.

Attack of the Killer Baby Fat.

A Norwegian study of 227,000 people found that men who were under- or over-weight as teenagers have a greater chance of dying during adulthood than their ideally-weighted peers. Exercise can help you stave off a premature death due to your weight woes, the researchers finding that working out for just 1/2 hour a day can increase your chances of reaching age 90 by up to 31%.

Get a dog.

Man's best friend can be your personal fitness trainer. Requiring frequent walks but sharing unconditional love with its owner, a dog (well matched for your lifestyle and personality) will bring much joy while helping you shed pounds.

Klatz, Ten Weeks to a Younger You, 1999.

Can't play the pain card

Make no mistake or excuses, muscle pain and discomfort are no longer acceptable excuses to avoid regular exercise. After working out, try taking Alka-Seltzer, which contains sodium bicarbonate and aspirin. The sodium bicarb inactivates the lactic acid produced by muscles during exertion, while the aspirin helps ease the pain while kidneys flush the toxins. [Not recommended for those allergic to ingredients of Alka-Seltzer, or to those with kidney or liver problems.]

Caffeine

Researchers at the Australian Institute of Sport found that athletes who consumed a small intake of caffeine before exercise could continue for up to 30 minutes longer than those who had not consumed it. The caffeine also enabled the athletes to increase the amount of weight lost during physical activity. It also produced a 3.5% increase in exercise capacity.

The team suggests that substances in caffeine trigger muscles to use fat to fuel exercise instead of using the usual stores of carbohydrates. Other studies have found that caffeine taken during exercise can delay the onset of fatigue by up to 60%. (Intakes tested have typically been modest, ie 6-8 ounces of cola or coffee.)

'Caffeine boosts athletes' stamina' Nutraingredients.com, Aug. 5, 2003

Work out at work.

If you are one of the millions with a desk job, be sure to get out of your chair once an hour for 5-10 minutes to do some standing stretches. Gently stretch your shoulders, arms, neck, back, sides, chest, and calves. This can improve circulation and relieve neck and back stiffness. Done regularly, this also can improve your motivation to do some serious aerobic exercise after your workday ends.

Shea M, 'Better Fitness' Parade magazine, July 2, 2000, p. 7.