

Personal Training by Robert J. Bovee

Researched & Written by Robert J. Bovee Certified Master PPT, RTS, ETS, FTS, LMS, WMS, HWFS, SNS,SSCS, MES, E/FT, PSCS, PRCS

How Important Is Exercise?

In the good old days, people got plenty of exercise. Our ancient ancestors hunted animals for food, foraged for edible plants, and created everything they had from their own physical labor. There was no need to think about when they would squeeze in a workout - their daily lives were filled with physical activities. Even our great-great-grandparents were more active than most of us. Many occupations and much of daily life, including housework, consisted of physical labor.

Our bodies function best when we participate in daily activity. And while we are grateful for our cars, washing machines and construction equipment, modernization has had at least one unfortunate side-effect: for most people, physical activity is not a “natural” part of daily life. To exercise daily, many of us must create opportunities to be active, such as attending an exercise class, playing sports or going for a swim. And these opportunities often compete with other important priorities. In fact, when life gets busy, it can be tempting to put an exercise program on hold.

How important is exercise?

We might begin to answer this question by asking, “How important is your health?” When health problems arise, work, family and other responsibilities suffer. By taking care of your health, you are indirectly fulfilling your responsibilities as a parent, worker or friend. So the importance of health is not truly separate from the other important priorities in your life.

Regular physical activity has many wonderful benefits for people of all ages. It reduces risk of many chronic diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and type II diabetes. It strengthens muscles and bones, helps improve sleep quality and reduces stress. The list of physical and psychological benefits goes on and on, but the key to achieving these wonderful benefits is lifelong, regular physical activity, not an occasional walk on the weekend, although that would be better than nothing.

Because it is lifelong activity that matters most, a missed tennis game or aerobic workout appears insignificant. And, in truth, missing one session doesn’t really matter in the great scheme of things. There will always be circumstances that make exercise temporarily impossible. Yet at the same time it matters greatly since lifelong physical activity is made up of these single sessions. Each session requires that decision: “I will make the time.”

Averages are interesting, but usually meaningless for any given individual. No one can say for sure to what extent exercise will benefit your health in particular. Some people, especially those at risk for premature artery disease, may add an extra ten or more years to their lives (and life to those years), while others will die of causes unrelated to lifestyle. There are no guarantees! Because lifestyle-related illnesses are by far the leading cause of death and disability in North America, it makes sense to play the odds and take reasonable steps to stay healthy, such as eating well and exercising. Best of all, regular physical activity has plenty of short-term benefits such as stress reduction and increased stamina. Most people would agree that enhanced quality of life is the best exercise benefit of all.

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In addition to the quality-of-life benefits mentioned above, regular physical activity has many “invisible” benefits. Improved blood sugar control, blood pressure, blood cholesterol levels and immunity are difficult to detect, but tremendously important for good health.

Many people begin exercising to lose weight and become discouraged when only a few pounds come off. Even if little weight loss occurs, you may still experience less apparent, but nevertheless dramatic health improvements. A focus on developing a healthful lifestyle has more positive returns than a focus on an impossible weight-loss goal.

You say lifelong physical activity is important. I’m already in my fifties and have just begun exercising regularly. Is it too late to bother?

It is never too late. Regular physical activity has tremendous benefits for all age groups-midlife and beyond. Except for the small number of people whose physician tells them they should not exercise for medical reasons, exercise will still decrease risk for chronic disease and enhance quality of life.

For more information, please contact Robert J. Bovee at **(585) 330-0614**.