

Dealing with Stress:

EXERCISE

Exercise is an important part of feeling good and dealing with life's challenges. Recent scientific research indicates that exercise may play an important role for functioning optimally both mentally and physically. Because there are so many health benefits to vigorous exercise, you may want to consider incorporating some form of exercise into your daily schedule.

The Benefits of Exercise

In recent years, evidence has accumulated demonstrating the effectiveness of exercise in maintaining a healthy body and mind.

- **Regular exercise** has been found to be effective in maintaining physical and mental fitness. Exercise may reduce depression, enhance self-esteem, and relieve anxiety. Regular exercise also has cardiovascular benefits. It lowers blood cholesterol levels, blood pressure, is ideal for weight loss, and helps to reduce stress.
- Regular exercise may be helpful if you are feeling depressed. The Surgeon General's recent report stated that exercise is effective in **dealing with depression**. Numerous studies have shown that exercise alters mood and attitude. Both aerobic and non-aerobic exercise has been demonstrated to improve mood in men and women compared with those who did not exercise.
- Exercise may **reduce anxiety**. Anxiety often interferes with sleep and concentration. People who exercise regularly demonstrate less anxiety than their sedentary peers. Exercise produces a relaxation effect and a sense of well-being that can last for up to four hours after a workout. For college students, a well planned exercise program can enhance performance and the enjoyment of school and personal activities.
- Exercise, combined with **good nutrition**, can help with weight loss and maintenance. Weight loss improves physical appearance and enhances self-esteem, self-confidence and a sense of well-being. It also offers the psychological benefits of looking and feeling healthy. Exercise helps burn fat, even at rest, and allows lean muscle tissue to develop.

Keeping Stress in Check

Stress is the physical and mental tension you feel when you are faced with change. Stress can attack your self-esteem and lessen feelings of self-worth. Activities that allow your muscles to relax or that expend large amounts of physical energy can reduce stress. Controlling stress is an important part of success in school, career, and relationships.

Starting Your Exercise Program

The U.S. Health Department recommends increased and sustained cardiovascular elevation for 15-30 minutes, 3-4 times a week. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends 20-60 minutes of aerobic exercise, 3-5 times a week for optimal fitness. Recent studies have discovered that resistance exercise, such as weightlifting, is important to any well-rounded fitness program.

Choosing the Type and Intensity of Exercise

Luckily, you do not need to train like an Olympic athlete or join an expensive gym to benefit from exercise. Choose exercises or activities that you enjoy. It is much more likely that you will stick with an activity that you like. You can even make it a social event by inviting friends to share in the activity. Be consistent. Inconsistent exercise is much less beneficial than a sustained exercise program. The types of exercise you can do are numerous and include walking, running, biking, swimming, calisthenics, tennis, basketball, skiing and weightlifting to name just a few. Most studies show that moderate exercise is highly beneficial. Enjoy your exercise. But don't overdo it.

Diet and Supplements

Whenever we exercise, we use up vital nutrients and produce free radicals. To prevent damage to our arteries or internal organs from an exercise program, it is wise to eat a diet of complex carbohydrates, protein, and essential fatty acids. You may want to consider supplementing your diet with antioxidants such as vitamins C, E, and beta-carotene, as well as the minerals selenium and zinc. A good multi-vitamin may also be helpful.

Ask Your Doctor

Always start a fitness program slowly and progressively increase your level of activity as your body adapts. It may be wise, especially if you are over thirty or have any significant health problems, to get a medical check-up. Tell your physician that you are planning to start a fitness program. There is a free health clinic on campus located in 114 Roosevelt Hall , 951-5580. Why not make an appointment today.

Getting into shape can be fun. In as little as six weeks, you will notice a real difference in the way you look and feel. Remember, have fun and enjoy being fit!

For More Assistance

If you wish to start an exercise program you can contact the Office of Recreation, Intramurals and Athletics in 215 Roosevelt, 951-5950. If you are interested in attending a stress management workshop or wish to speak to a counselor, come to Personal Counseling in 1303 James (0203J after October '04), 951-5363.

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