

Resolute Resolutions

Before the New Year becomes not so new and the resolutions begin to fade into forgetfulness, this week's article harps again on the benefits of exercise. I hope that by learning a bit about exercise and its benefits for your body it might help you keep on the right track.

Exercise gets the heart pumping, the muscles working, releases a variety of "feel good" chemicals into the body and leads to longer, happier lives. Exercise keeps the mind sharp and protects against the loss of memory that comes with aging. A study of persons older than 65 years found those who did regular exercise three or more times per week had a significantly reduced chance of getting Alzheimer's disease.

The immune system performs better, the heart works more effectively, blood pressure can be lowered and cholesterol levels can drop. The list of health benefits is seemingly endless. Regular exercise has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety and depression. Exercise may prevent the development of diabetes, helps people to stop smoking and is suggested to help with the prevention of and recovery from colon, breast and prostate cancer.

There is no shortage of reasons to exercise. Take your choice of motivation—any reason that keeps you exercising will work.

While working on your shape, you should try to do at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted exercise at a time. This allows your heart rate to increase and then stay at the increased level for long enough to become trained.

A study that looked at how often you need to exercise to lose weight found those who exercised only two times each week did not see much change, while those who exercised three times each week achieved modest results and those who exercise four or more times each week saw the greatest improvements. Regardless of how often or how long people exercise, the best results are achieved when there is a set schedule that is maintained.

Strength training is another type of exercise that includes any use of weights or exercises aimed at toning or working muscles. This can include the traditional type of lifting weights, or can be done by holding weights while running or walking, doing exercises in a pool where the water gives resistance to motion, or by climbing stairs or other activities that cause a group of muscles to become tired.

When you exercise the muscles, they increase in size and strength. The muscle cells also become able to use more energy, so they become better at using burning carbohydrates and fats. The body itself then becomes better at burning away the fat that is stored all over the body.

Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed a scary trend among American adults. Alarmingly, 60 percent of Americans don't exercise enough, and more than 25 percent aren't physically active at all. If there are not substantial changes in the future, there will be serious consequences for both the physical and financial health of our country.

So, do not let yourself become a statistic—make the choice to exercise and lead the life that you want to. Make it a good New Year!

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This column is about health related issues with a focus on a rural community. The purpose of this column is to be informative and to comment on interesting medical and health related topics. Any questions or concerns that may arise regarding topics covered by this article should be addressed to your primary care doctor.