

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND WEIGHT LOSS



 dietflex

 LOZ life

WHAT WE'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOLD

You're probably very familiar with the adage that to lose weight you need to eat less and exercise more. Many people believe that losing weight is a simple mathematical equation: if calories in are less than calories out, we lose weight. This can work to a certain extent, but it's actually not quite so simple. The problem is that the human body is not a mathematical model, and there are many chemical and hormonal reactions that influence how we use and store energy.

Research has shown surprisingly little evidence to support the role of physical activity in weight loss, but instead has shown that it can certainly help in preventing weight gain.

TIME AND INTENSITY

Regardless of your current fitness level, would you rather walk or run 5km? Most people would accept that running 5km would burn more energy than walking 5km because the intensity is greater - you have to work harder.

What about running 5km in 30 minutes or walking 5km in 30 minutes? The time and the distance are the same, so is the intensity any different?

Obviously, people who are fit for running will find this example a lot easier to test than those who are not so fit, because their body is adapted to the task and so less effort is required.

Research on female groups of brisk walkers, slow walkers and non-exercisers shows that increasing volume of exercise leads to greater maximal oxygen consumption (you get fitter) and greater body fat loss (you get slimmer). Similar results were observed in research on female bicycle riders. The evidence appears that cycling harder and for longer increases the weight loss benefits. It is assumed that these results can be applied to a variety of different exercise forms.

So in your daily walk, aim to increase the distance and your speed for best results. If you can currently walk 2km in 30 minutes, aim for 2.2km in 28 minutes.

FREQUENCY

Running 5km once a week might be good for you, but is it better to run 3 times per week? 5 times? Daily?

It really depends on the actual activity being undertaken as well as the individual person. Someone who is very fit for running this distance could easily do it daily. Someone just getting started in running may find that aiming for this distance is too much initially, or that they should do it only 2 or 3 times per week. Gradually build up so that you can enjoy your exercise while getting the best results.

VARIETY

Many people find an activity and try to stick with it. Some are successful, others not. The difference may be that the successful ones enjoy the activity more, don't get bored, keep their long-term goals in mind, or don't suffer from over-use injuries.

The popular saying "Variety is the spice of life" applies to exercise for many people. Daily walking, group exercise and housework (is that daily or weekly?) might be the base of your exercise routine. Add in things like going out dancing, or the occasional game of tennis or golf and you've got great variety in your exercise routine. This will help to keep interest and motivation high and they increase the amount of daily exercise without adding a huge time burden.

The other significant advantage of variety is that there is less chance of over-use injuries. Many people whose only exercise is running, for example, find they have problems with knees or shins. Tennis players may get tennis elbow. Most physical activities with repetitive movements present the risk of over-use injuries.

Variety allows time for muscles and joints to recover. Doing something different from day to day helps with variety for your body and your mind.

OVER-DOING IT

Exercise is beneficial for a wide range of health reasons including bone density, immune function, mental outlook and digestion, amongst a host of other benefits.

Many people, especially women, try to lose weight by eating small amounts and exercising a lot. In theory, this should work. In practice, it rarely does. Caloric restriction combined with exercise can result in short term weight loss: the problem is that it almost inevitably results in a rebound to an even heavier and fatter state.

Eating too little forces the body to access every calorie consumed, and the shortfall of energy is taken from muscle tissue rather than fat stores. What happens then is that, despite losing weight, you get relatively fatter, weaker, and more likely to regain any weight you've lost. Your metabolism slows down and so you burn less energy at rest.

Combine this with exercising too much. The body is placed in a very stressful situation, so the hormone cortisol is released in larger amounts. Cortisol burns muscle tissue for energy and it stores fat, particularly around the tummy. It also helps to retain sodium, which increases

blood volume and blood pressure. Ultimately, exercising too much means that the anticipated result – losing weight – is the opposite of what ends up being achieved.

Exercise increases many people's appetite. It may not be clear whether this means that they actually become hungrier, or feel like they should (or could) eat more. It seems to be different for different people. Regardless, if exercise makes you eat more then you may be risking the small potential weight loss benefits that exercise might otherwise provide. Think about what is happening for you: are you hungry? Are you eating enough in the first place? Do you feel that if you eat less and exercise more, you'll lose more weight?

Another problem with over-exercising, and this has nothing to do with weight loss, is that it can cause injury. When we get tired we're less attentive to our surroundings and to our body, we become less careful, and our body responds less quickly.

Signs that you might be exercising too much include such symptoms as muscle fatigue or joint pain, insomnia, loss of appetite, an increased number of illnesses such as colds and sore throats, and a lack of motivation. Over exercising can result in injuries to an exhausted body and will cause you to become more susceptible to illness.

START SLOWLY

If you are in the beginning stages of improving your health and nutrition, it is important to ease into your new exercise routine so as not to risk injuring a body that is not used to exercise. Slowly adding to your workouts each week will allow you to strengthen your body and lose weight at a healthy pace without the risk of overtraining or fatigue.

Wherever you are in your weight, fitness and wellness journey, eat well and gradually increase your exercise. If you notice that your weight loss slows, despite exercising a lot, it may be best to slightly reduce your exercise volume and intensity. This is a better option than doing even more and risking unintentionally sabotaging your weight loss.

THIS WEEKS CHALLENGE:

1. Keep a record of all your regular exercise. You might increase time or intensity.
2. Try adding one day of a different type of exercise.

