



Heart-Healthy Benefits of Exercise

Your Body Benefits from Your Hard Work

-- By Jen Mueller, Certified Personal Trainer

"Exercise improves your health." You hear it all the time, but what does that really mean? How much of a difference can exercise make in your life, and how much do you really need to do? You'll be happy to know that you don't need to spend countless hours in the gym to achieve the heart-health benefits of getting active.

Lower Blood Pressure

- A study by the National Institutes of Health showed that regular exercise (30+ minutes of moderate activity, 5+ days a week) reduced blood pressure in 75% of subjects who had high blood pressure. The reductions were approximately 10 mmHg for both systolic and diastolic blood pressures.
- According to the American College of Sports Medicine, the blood pressure lowering effects of exercise can be observed as soon as one to three hours after a single 30- 45 minute workout! This response can linger for up to nine hours post-exercise. Permanent blood pressure changes can be seen as early as three weeks to three months after beginning an exercise program.

Improve Cholesterol Levels

- A 2001 review involving patients with high cholesterol demonstrated a change in HDL (good cholesterol) and LDL (bad cholesterol) levels after a 12-week exercise program. On average, subjects experienced a 4.6% increase in HDL, a 5.0% decrease in LDL, and a 3.7% decrease in triglycerides.
- Other studies show widespread improvements in cholesterol levels are related to the amount of activity and not the intensity of exercise. The more minutes you exercise per week, the more your cholesterol levels will improve, even if accompanied by a minimal weight change.

Prevent Type II Diabetes

- The combination of physical activity and weight loss has a powerful effect on preventing the onset of Type II diabetes in high-risk individuals. In a recent study by the Diabetes Prevention Program, participants who exercised and lost excess weight had a 58% reduction in the onset of Type II diabetes over 2.8 years, compared to the control group.

Most of these health benefits can be achieved through moderate-intensity physical activity. Experts recommend at least 30 minutes, 5 days a week. Moderate-intensity activity causes a slightly increased rate of breathing and heart rate. It can be described as feeling "light" to "somewhat hard".

There are easy ways to add this type of activity to your daily routine:

- Park the car farther away from your destination.
- Get on or off the bus several blocks away.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- Take fitness breaks instead of cigarette or coffee breaks. Walk, stretch or do some office exercises.
- Perform gardening, yard work, heavy house cleaning, or home-repair activities.
- Avoid labor-saving devices; turn off the self-propel option on your lawn mower or vacuum cleaner, and hide all of your TV remotes.
- Exercise while watching TV. For example, use hand weights, a stationary bike or treadmill, stretch, or perform body-weight exercises such as crunches, push ups and squats.
- Keep a pair of comfortable walking or running shoes in your car and office. You'll be ready for activity wherever you go!
- Walk while doing errands.

The good news is that it's never too late to start an active lifestyle. No matter how old you are, how unfit you feel, or how long you've been inactive, research shows that starting a more active lifestyle now—through consistent, moderate-intensity activity—can make you healthier and improve your quality of life.