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There are many reasons to exercise

By **Flori Meeks**, contributing writer

For something that has so much to do with our bodies, exercise sure can get tangled up with what's going on in our minds. Starting and remaining faithful to an exercise routine just won't work until we commit to making it work.

The good news is, if we want them, there are plenty of motivational reasons to be found for exercising. Regular activity helps us:

- mentally — it can lessen depression and make it easier to deal with stress;
- personally — it makes us look better by toning bodies and eliminating fat;
- physically — exercise increases energy, builds strength and stamina and enhances coordination.

And these benefits are just the tip of the iceberg.

Studies have shown exercise to be an effective mean of preventing coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity and osteoporosis. It's believed to reduce the risk of developing color cancer and breast cancer. Exercise also can help people improve their immune systems, combat the likelihood of many degenerative problems and manage diabetes and some mental health disorders.

A good exercise program even can reach into our wallets by reducing the likelihood of medical expenses, which helps hold the line on rising medical benefit costs.

But to realize these benefits, we need to be exercising. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows only one in four American adults engage in regular physical activity. Becoming physically fit requires a serious commitment to a lifestyle change. Most exercise experts recommend devoting 30 minutes to moderate physical activity at least three times a week. Total physical fitness really involves three areas: aerobic conditioning that gets the heart and lungs pumping, flexibility exercises to keep the body limber and strength training to tone muscles.

But don't jump into strenuous exercise without preparation. Developing an exercise program always should start with a visit to the doctor. It's also wise to develop a strategy. Ask yourself what type of activities you enjoy, what fits into your schedule and what kind of special clothing or equipment you might need. Experts recommend selecting more than one kind of exercise so you can vary your routine and keep it interesting.

With your plan in place, start exercising slowly and gradually lengthen your workout to avoid burn out and injury. It also helps to recruit an exercise buddy. You can help each other make the exercising fun and keep each other accountable. Or, consider making exercise a family affair. This is especially worthwhile for parents, because regular exercise is critical to children as well as adults.

At times it's going to take a creative approach to keep the routine going. Medical experts say exercising in 10-minute periods three times a day still "counts" toward getting your 30 minutes of exercise. Do what it takes, but don't give up on yourself. The results are too important to miss.

This is the third article in a series on health-related issues. By being an informed health-care consumer, OU employees can help contain and reduce benefit costs to the university.

SUMMARY

For something that has so much to do with our bodies, exercise sure can get tangled up with what's going on in our minds. Starting and remaining faithful to an exercise routine just won't work until we commit to making it work. The good news is, if we want them, there are plenty of motivational reasons to be found for exercising.

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