

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Time To Stop Making "No Time For Exercise" Excuses

from the American Counseling Association

Once upon a time, not all that long ago, scheduling time for exercise wasn't a necessity for most people. Earlier generations faced a much more physical life. Walking was usually the prime means of transportation, and most jobs and home life required a great deal more physical labor.

Life today is much less physically demanding for most of us, but can be much more mentally and emotionally challenging. And for many of us, facing all the demands of modern life, it can seem difficult to squeeze in time for exercise.

And yet we all know that staying physically active is good for both our bodies and our minds. So how do we make it happen?

One starting point in getting more active is to recognize that staying physically active isn't an all or nothing proposition. While a daily hour at the gym might provide the maximum benefit, research has shown that any amount of exercise produces health benefits. One study found that women who exercised just 2.5 hours a week reduced heart disease risk by 30 percent. And studies find exercise doesn't have to be just in one long time period. Shorter blocks of 10 or 20 minutes of being active still add up to better health.

Being physically active doesn't have to mean a gym or running marathons. Any activity that raises your heart rate and has you breathing harder is providing health benefits. Raking the lawn, doing housework, walking the dog or playing with the kids -- they all can count as positive exercise.

Physically, being more active can reduce your risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes and some types of cancer. It helps with weight control and seems to fight many of the negative effects of the aging process.

On the mental health side, exercise has been shown to fight depression, reduce anxiety, lower stress, and even reduce the symptoms of ADHD. Regular exercise has been linked to improved memory and thinking, especially for those of us getting up there in years.

When it comes to exercise, the only bad choice is not to do it. Take a careful look at your day and odds are good you'll find that there's a spare 15 or 20 minutes when you can take that walk, or go play with the kids. And that will be, instead of making excuses, exercise and good for you.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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