

KEEPING IT OFF!

Lesson #5: Lifestyle Activity

Americans weigh more now than ever. In fact, in 2005, $\frac{2}{3}$ of U.S. adults are overweight or obese. Why? We use our bodies less and eat more than our sedentary bodies can burn. For most of us, excess weight is the result of not only eating too much, but also a sedentary lifestyle.

For thousands of years, humankind's everyday existence, our very survival, required physical exertion. Automation has changed that. Our daily work generally lacks strenuous physical labor and we have become sedentary to a degree that was never before possible. *Physical inactivity has become the rule, not the exception.* Today we must devise ways to obtain regular activity that once was an automatic part of daily living.

An enjoyable life requires a balance between rest, relaxation, work, and exercise. An acceptable level of physical activity is a necessity. Physical activity plays a major role in your overall wellbeing and can provide concrete ways for you to devise a weight maintenance program. A gradual approach is vitally important. Over-ambitious efforts (too much too soon) are usually short-lived and are also potentially hazardous. Do not try to remedy a lack of physical fitness that has developed over the years with heroic attempts to whip yourself into shape overnight. Activities should not be physical punishment endured as a penalty

for previous sedentary habits, but a pleasurable and even exhilarating experience.

Lifestyle Activity

In the 1970s and 80s, it was felt that vigorous intensity and endurance exercise was needed to obtain significant benefits. In the 1990s, it became apparent that the exercise intensity needed to produce health benefits was less than the amount needed to improve physical fitness. Recent studies suggest that **the number of minutes spent active is more important than the intensity, particularly when it comes to weight control.**

This new way of thinking emphasizes the importance of *lifestyle activity*. In particular, to maintain a healthy weight, it is important to not only increase activity, but to spend less time being sedentary. Lesson #5 is not about running marathons or becoming a professional athlete. Instead, let's focus on what is needed to be successful with your weight.

Who Should Be Active?

Activity should play a role in everyone's weight reduction and weight maintenance program. However, whenever I say the word "exercise," I always get the same response: "Aargh!, Groan!" This is why in this lesson, I want to focus on *daily lifestyle activity* rather than *exercise*, per se. A recent study divided people in to two groups. The first group was started on a trainer-supervised exercise

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program at a local gym. The second group was encouraged to increase their daily lifestyle activity by fitting walking in to their daily routine. Both groups did well with weight maintenance; however, there were two interesting findings. First, the group undergoing supervised exercise did **not** fare any better than the lifestyle activity group, contrary to expectations. Second, the dropout rate for the supervised exercise group far exceeded the dropout rate for the lifestyle activity group. This clearly illustrates why for weight maintenance we are shifting our focus to activities that can be easily incorporated in to our daily routine. Thus the term, *lifestyle activity*.

If a person says that she does not have time for exercise, what she often means is that exercise does not place high on her list of priorities. When one feels time-pressured in other areas, it may seem difficult to schedule time for physical activities. Ironically, the time-pressured individual is often the one who needs physical activity as an outlet for stress and tension which might otherwise be internalized. Moreover, when

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inactive for a period of time, a loss of physical energy results. This loss of energy makes resumption of any activity even more difficult. Often one feels embarrassed about beginning a fitness program due to a lack of skill or coordination. Do you feel self-conscious about doing anything in public when you are overweight?

It is critical at this point to reassess your priorities and give personal health and emotional well-being the high priority they deserve. Regular and prudent activities result in a greater sense of well-being, greater energy, and a calmer, more relaxed attitude toward the pressures of daily life.

What are the Benefits?

The beneficial effects of regular activity include quicker weight loss and increased muscle tone (this is especially important for the overweight patient as their skin and muscle tissues have been stretched). Improved physical fitness results in relief of tension, a general feeling of well-being, and an improved self-image. Regular activity enhances quality of life by increasing capacity for work and play, allowing participation in enjoyable leisure activities. Continuing physical activity simplifies maintaining weight loss and increases body firmness. There is also good evidence that it is an effective means of preventing heart disease and reducing the risk of developing diabetes.

Without a good effort at increasing physical activity, most weight maintenance efforts will fail. In one study, among people who were successful at weight maintenance (this was defined as maintaining weight within a 5 pound range for a full year after weight loss), 96% had incorporated some form of activity in to their daily routine.

In addition to the benefits for weight maintenance, activity helps with so many other health issues. Here are my top ten favorites:

Best tool available for weight maintenance

Independently lowers risk of development of coronary heart disease

Lowers blood pressure

Relieves fatigue / Improves Sleep

Prevents osteoporosis

Raises HDL (good) cholesterol

Lowers Triglycerides

Reduces anxiety and depression

Decreases insulin resistance

Lowers diabetes risk / improves diabetes management

What Kind of Activity?

Different types of exercise serve different purposes. Some types increase cardiovascular fitness while others improve muscle strength or flexibility. The overweight patient will find it beneficial to increase even those activities with low levels of intensity. In fact, for weight maintenance, the number of minutes spent being active seems more important than the intensity. This is because by increasing the time spent active, two important things happen. First, we set a goal of burning 2000 to 2500 calories per week (a difficult goal to achieve if the intensity level is so great that adequate time can not be achieved). Second, the more time we are active, the less time we are sedentary.

Any activity counts! Whether you realize it or not, you exercise in some way every day of your life. Bending over to pick up objects from the floor, reaching for something on the top shelf, climbing stairs, and even just getting out of bed uses calories. Increasing even these activities will be helpful. Make sure to have the right equipment available – for walking, for example, a good pair of shoes and a water bottle to bring with will prevent injury and dehydration.

While increases in routine activities are helpful, I strongly encourage you to begin the kind of regular lifestyle changes which will make a more significant

contribution to your weight control efforts. Moderate-intensity physical activity on a daily basis is best. **This is any activity that while doing you can comfortably say 3 to 5 word sentences before needing a breath.** If you can speak comfortably, consider picking up the pace. If you can only get out 1 word at a time, you are probably overdoing it. Some examples of good activities include: walking (for most people at a pace of 15-20 minutes per mile), cycling for pleasure, and golfing without a cart. Certainly any other activity counts as well. Think about what you enjoy and try to use that to your advantage. Do you enjoy shopping? Consider walking to the store or mall instead of driving. Or do a few laps up and down the mall to see all the stores at the mall before going in to browse. Is it too hot? How about a quick cool-off in the pool! Is it a beautiful day? Consider a hike, or walking on the paths by your house.

What I strive for is an activity pattern that becomes part of the daily routine rather than the exception. If we put off activity until the end of the day when we are tired, we are much less likely to be successful. In addition, the activities don't all have to be at once. Consider your morning routine: you wake up, get ready for work, have breakfast, drive in, etc. Instead, vary the morning routine: rather than just driving in to work, after you park, walk 2 laps around the building (20 minutes) to help wake yourself up and clear out the cobwebs. At the end of the day, repeat – 2 laps around the building to stretch out your legs after a hard day. You just started working in 40

minutes every day that you work! These minutes add up quickly.

How Much Activity Do I Need?

Start slow with what is comfortable. Don't try to make up for years of being sedentary in one day! If you are only comfortable walking for 10 minutes, this is fine. Just make it a part of your daily routine. Every week, increase by 5 minutes.

The Institute of Medicine recommends working up to a **minimum of 60 minutes** of moderate-intensity activity on a daily basis to maintain a healthy body weight. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee agrees: they now recommend 60-90 minutes of daily moderate-intensity activity to sustain a healthy weight as an adult.

This seems like a lot! Clearly doing something is better than doing nothing for people who are not regularly physically active. But if we can find ways to work walking in to our daily schedules, 20 minutes before and after work, and 20 minutes at lunch can be possible. It doesn't require going to the gym, putting on special exercise clothes, building up a sweat, taking a shower... By working in these smaller, less vigorous segments every day, you will be burning **2000-2500 calories a week**. This adds up! That's 3

pounds of fat in a month, *36 pounds in a year!*

Most people who increase their activity experience a period of exhilaration, calm, and increased relaxation following the exercise period. Capture that feeling in your imagination by consciously focusing on the body sensations which represent the pleasant aspects of exercising. If you feel sick, sore, or totally exhausted after exercising, you are trying to do too much too soon. Do not use exercise as punishment.

How Can I Do This?

The current recommendation is to accumulate a minimum of 10,000 steps per day, or 60 minutes of moderate exertion every day of the week. But in our busy, time-stressed American lifestyle, how can we fit that in every day? Here are a few ideas:

Start slow. Do what is comfortable. If 5 minutes of walking is as far as you can comfortably walk, that's fine! Increase 5 minutes every week until you are doing a minimum of 60 minutes per day.



You don't have to do it all at once. Consider doing part in the morning, part at lunch, part in the early evening.

Do something you enjoy! Decrease sedentary activities to increase your

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activity level. Instead of shopping on the internet, go to the mall or to the store.

Wear a pedometer, and log your steps every day in your food journal. Keep a weekly average.

Park in the back of the lot, not in the front.

Take the stairs, not the elevator.

Take the batteries out of the remote control for your television.

Use a bathroom across the house.

Separate your laundry, and carry each load as a separate trip instead of taking it all together.

Drink adequate water when you walk. Make sure to drink *at least* 8 ounces of water for every 15 minutes of activity.

Reward yourself for being active: If you reach your activity goal each day, put \$1 in a shoe box. Label the box with what you want to use the money for - a massage, going to a show, etc. When there's enough money in the box, use it!

Take a class you enjoy. This can be anything from ballroom dancing to golfing (but don't use a golf cart!)

Other Activity Ideas

Although I certainly encourage walking, there are other types of exercise you can do as well. Generally, there are 3 types of exercise, and all are beneficial:

Aerobic: This is an activity that elevates your heart rate. Examples include: walking, jogging,

swimming, tennis, mowing the lawn, cycling, hiking, aerobics, water aerobics, racquet ball. Warm up and warm down are recommended, 5 minutes each. This can be doing the activity, just at an easy rate (biking slowly, walking, etc). This helps get your muscles going to avoid injury.

Resistance: This is weight-lifting types of activities. When done with low weights and high repetitions, these activities also count as aerobic exercise. If you'd like to build muscle mass, I recommend the following. First, for each type of exercise, I recommend a level where you can do 3 sets of 8-12 repetitions. In addition to weights, consider theraband or theratube. These are basically big rubberbands that can be used for a variety of exercises. They have the advantages of: they are inexpensive, you can't drop them on your foot, you can do them anywhere including at work, they travel well (you can throw them in your suitcase). Finally, if you are not familiar with how different weights work, it is critical to receive instruction so that you do it correctly, and without hurting yourself. Ask a friend, your nutritionist, or the CNC front desk for a recommendation. **Building your lean body weight is the best way to improve you metabolic rate!**

Stretching: Don't ignore this important modality! You can do

WEEK FIVE CHECKLIST

- Remind yourself to exercise by placing exercise reminders in visible places such as on the refrigerator door, television set, or steering wheel.
- Record exercise in your diary. Many people find that a graph showing their progress aids motivation.
- Make a list of the benefits you see from your activity program (e.g., faster weight loss, greater loss in measurements, healthier, etc.)
- Build a reward system into your exercise program. Reward yourself by doing something you particularly enjoy after you achieve a short-term goal.
- Make activities part of your everyday routine, rather than an exception. Find ways you can incorporate activities you enjoy to your busy work-week.
- Wear a pedometer, and shoot for 10,000 steps per day.
- Set a goal of being active for 60 to 90 minutes every day.

stretches on your own. Remember that stretching is generally recommended after exercise rather than before. Consider Yoga, Pilates, or other classes you may enjoy.

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