



Women & Exercise.

It is a well-known fact that every body benefits from exercise. The question is, are there any additional or unique benefits for women to exercise?

The most common reason for women to exercise is weight management. This improves the muscle to fat ratio, helps to increase energy expenditure, and of course, makes it easier to lose weight.

Exercise is a helpful adjunct in the treatment and prevention of depression. It is interesting to note that depression and an increase in weight often goes hand in hand. In my experience, it is very helpful to get an overweight depressed patient exercising as soon as possible. I would even dare to say if the patient were willing to start exercising, I would postpone treatment with anti-depressants for a while. I normally advise patients to start with short sessions twice a day, for instance a 5-minute session in the morning and a 10-minute session in the evening. Start with any exercise the patient is willing to do. Depressed patients are normally not very motivated to exercise. They will definitely fail to embark on more time-consuming and difficult exercise programs. The secret is to get the patient to start exercising. The thought of "just 5 minutes" is far easier to conquer than "you should exercise for at least 30 minutes three times a week". A schedule of three times a week has the inherent ability to fail. The interval between the exercise sessions is too big. It will never become a habit.

Furthermore, thirty minutes a day seems like the impossible to a depressed patient. They will be discouraged even before they began. One needs to change a lifestyle and start new habits. Do short exercise sessions more frequently. Five to ten minutes twice a day is far more likely to succeed than 30 minutes three times a week.

Once they are on the go one can gradually increase the tempo and the workload and even change the type of exercise.

Other benefits of exercise for women include a reduced risk of breast and endometrial cancer as well as the risk of developing endometriosis.

The benefits of exercise in osteoporosis are well known. A large number of women over the age of 60 are suffering from complications of osteoporosis. If these women were more active in their younger years, they would have had healthier and stronger bones in later life. In South Africa osteoporosis is often seen in women as young as thirty. Almost 30% of women over the age of fifty are affected by osteoporosis. Any weight-bearing exercise is of value in the prevention of osteoporosis.

Do not ask me why, but nothing, except maybe a new yellow polka-dot bikini before the summer holidays, motivates women more to start training than pregnancy. Exercise during pregnancy is a good idea, provided you are already training. Do not start a new program without the input from health professionals. Physically active women recover more quickly after childbirth. They also have fewer complications during pregnancy and during the delivery than inactive women.



Exercise also contributes to a better posture and self-esteem of pregnant women. This, in my opinion is very important. Good self-esteem makes it easier to cope with lesser problems during pregnancy like heartburn and reduces the likelihood of postpartum depression after delivery.

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