

It's Never Too Late to Start Moving!

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Another glorious holiday season celebrating the birth of our Lord has passed and hopefully inspired rebirth in our own lives. With the start of the New Year, many of us make New Year's resolutions that include increasing physical activity and a journey toward taking better care of ourselves. It can be easy to put off "until tomorrow", "until I have more free time", "until I get new sneakers", etc. Unfortunately, as we procrastinate about becoming more active, our bodies can pay quite a price.

Muscle is "expensive" metabolically for your body to maintain. So if your body senses it doesn't need it because the muscle isn't being used, you begin to lose it. Inactivity also affects many other components of health including the brain, heart, blood vessels, bones, liver, digestive system, anxiety, depression, self-esteem, your body's ability to process glucose and much more. The good news: It's **never** too late to start moving!

We need about 30-60 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week to gain health benefits and help control weight. *And*, it doesn't have to be all at once. Shorter sessions of activity will give you the same benefits. For instance, 15 minutes of stretching in the morning, 15 minutes of walking during lunch, and perhaps 30 minutes of walking the dog at night. The little "bites" of activity matter too. Take the stairs instead of an elevator or park further away when shopping. If you have children, involve them in some activities so they see you making health a priority.

Here are 10 reasons to begin some form of physical activity:

1. **Type 2 Diabetes** – The most common type of diabetes where the body becomes resistant to insulin in the blood. This isn't just an adult disease. It is becoming common in young people and is a disease of *inactivity*.
2. **Cancer** – Research shows that if you are physically active you have a 30%-40% lower risk of colon cancer than people who are not. Exercise boosts the immune system.
3. **Brain Activity** – People who are more physically active have a lower risk for dementia.
4. **Heart Disease** – Physical activity affects the heart muscle and blood vessels. Regular activity boosts "good" cholesterol, reduces "bad" cholesterol, can lower blood pressure and make the lining of the blood vessels more flexible. All of these factors reduce the risk of developing heart disease.
5. **Stroke** – You are 25% less likely to have a stroke if you are active. Blood pressure can be lowered and you reduce your risk of stroke-causing blood clots forming in vessels.
6. **Muscles** – Muscle wasting (loss of muscle tissue) starts at age 40 for women and in the late 50's for men. As we lose muscle, we lose strength. Maintaining muscle is one way to ward off the frailty that contributes to older people losing their independence.
7. **Osteoporosis** – Bones start weakening and disintegrating long before they actually break. Incorporating weight-bearing physical activity, like lifting light weights, walking or jogging, can help minimize decline in bone density.
8. **Mental Health** – Physical activity reduces the chances of developing depression and helps improve mental health if you already have depression.

9. **Weight** – Moderate physical activity helps you prevent that slow, steady gain of 1-5 pounds over a year's time. Often, that weight gain is abdominal fat that is linked to a higher risk of heart disease.
10. **Immune System** – Regular, moderate exercise boosts the immune system and therefore, reduces your chances of illness.

Before beginning any exercise program, make sure you check with a medical professional to ensure your readiness to increase your activity level. For more information on increasing your physical activity, try these web sites:

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute:

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/phy_act.htm

American Cancer Society:

http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/ped_3.asp?sitearea=PED&level=1