

## **The Benefits of Exercise**

The benefits of exercise are many, from producing physically fit bodies to providing an outlet for fun and socialization. When added to a weight control program these benefits take on increased significance.

We already have noted that proper exercise can help control weight by burning excess body fat. It also has other body-trimming advantages: 1) exercise builds muscle tissue and muscle uses calorie up at a faster rate than body fat; and 2) exercise helps reduce inches and a firm, lean body looks slimmer even if your weight remains the same.

Remember, fat does not “turn into” muscle, as is often believed. Fat and muscle are two entirely different substances and one cannot become the other. However, muscle does use calories at a faster rate than fat which directly affects your body’s metabolic rate or energy requirement. Your basal metabolic rate (BMR) is the amount of energy required to sustain the body’s functions at rest and it depends on your age, sex, body size, genes and body composition. People with levels of muscle tend to have higher BMRs and use more calories in the resting stage.

Some studies have even shown that your metabolic rate stays elevated for some time after vigorous exercise, causing you to use even more calories throughout your day.

Additional, benefits may be seen in how exercise affects appetite. A lean person in good shape may eat more following increased activity, but the regular exercise will burn up the extra calories consumed. On the other hand, vigorous exercise has been reported to suppress appetite. And, physical activity can be used as a positive substitute for between meal snacking.

### **Better Mental Health**

The psychological benefits of exercise are equally important to the weight conscious person. Exercise decreases stress and relieves tensions that might otherwise lead to overeating. Exercise builds physical fitness which in turn builds self-confidence, enhanced self-image, and a positive outlook. When you start to feel good about yourself, you are more likely to want to make other positive changes in your lifestyle that will help keep your weight under control.

In addition, exercise can be fun, provide recreation and offer opportunities for companionship. The exhilaration and emotional release of participating in sports or other activities are a boost to mental and physical health. Pent-up anxieties and frustrations seem to disappear when you’re concentrating on returning a serve, sinking a putt or going that extra mile.

### **Tips to get You Started**

Hopefully, you are now convinced that in order to successfully manage your weight you must include exercise in your daily routine. Here are some tips on an exercise program.

1. Check with your doctor first. Since you are carrying around some extra “baggage,” it is wise to get your doctor’s “OK” before embarking on an exercise program.
2. Choose activities that you think you’ll enjoy. Most people will stick to their exercise program if they are having fun, even though they are working hard.
3. Set aside a regular exercise time. Whether this means joining an exercise class or getting up a little earlier every day, make time for this addition to your routine and don’t let anything get in your way. Planning ahead will help you get around interruptions in your workout schedule, such as bad weather and vacations.
4. Set short term goals. Don’t expect to lose 20 pounds in two weeks. It’s taken a while for you to gain the weight, it will take time to lose it. Keep a record of your progress and tell your friends and family about your achievements.
5. Vary your exercise program. Change exercises or invite friends to join you to make your workout more enjoyable. There is no “best” exercise – just the one that works best for you.

It won’t be easy, especially at the start. But as you begin to feel better, look better and enjoy a new zest for life, you will be rewarded many times over for your efforts.

### **Tips to Keep You Going**

1. Adopt a specific plan and write it down.
2. Keep setting realistic goals as you go along, and remind yourself of them often.
3. Keep a log to record your progress and make sure to keep it up-to-date.
4. Include weight and/or percent body fat measures in your log. Extra pounds can easily creep back.
5. Upgrade your fitness program as you progress.
6. Enlist the support and company of your family and friends.
7. Update others on your successes.
8. Avoid injuries by pacing yourself and including warm-up and cool-down period as part of every workout.
9. Reward yourself periodically for a job well done!