



WELLNESS

Wellness Monthly

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

January 2010

This Month's Topic:

New Year, New You

Getting Fit and Staying that Way

Fitness club managers say January 2 is the day they expect to see lots of new members arrive on their doorstep. After all our holiday feasting and winter comfort eating, many of us start the New Year by heading straight for the gym.

But the real fitness challenge isn't doing more sit-ups than you did last week. It's setting up an exercise program and sticking to it. Regular exercise helps you manage your weight, but the benefits go far beyond dropping a few pounds.

Feel Better

According to researchers at the Mayo Clinic, exercise can help improve your mood. When you exercise, your body produces chemicals that help you feel happier and more relaxed.¹ Exercise can help erase stress, help control the symptoms of menopause, and can even reduce arthritis pain and stiffness.

Gain Energy

Of course a vigorous workout can make you feel tired — but it's a "good tired." As you get into an exercise routine, you'll find you have more energy, and more stamina, than you did before. Your heart, lungs and muscles get healthier. Bonus: stronger muscles help you burn more calories and that helps you lose weight.

Lower Your Risk

Regular exercise reduces your risk of heart disease, reduces the risk of getting colon or breast cancer, helps control blood pressure, lowers cholesterol levels, strengthens your bones, and even lowers the risk of developing diabetes.² The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that, "people who are physically active for about 7 hours a

week have a 40 percent lower risk of dying earlier than those who are active for less than 30 minutes a week.”³ And that should be enough to get everybody off the couch!

Ready to Get Going?

Watch your fitness level increase as the numbers on your scale go down, by combining three types of exercise:⁴

- **Aerobic exercise** — When you increase your heart rate, you can improve the health of your heart and lungs, increase circulation, and burn calories.
- **Strength training** — Whether you’re lifting weights, doing Pilates, or using stretch bands for resistance, you build endurance and strengthen your muscles, too.
- **Flexibility training** — Stretch your muscles and improve your range of motion. Yoga and tai chi are just a couple of ways to improve your flexibility.

The Mayo Clinic also recommends adding core stability and balance training to your routine.⁵

For more information about health and fitness, UBH is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life’s challenges. And always check with your health care provider before beginning any new exercise program.

Making and Keeping Resolutions

We’ve all done it. We’ve charged headfirst into a New Year’s resolution, only to run out of steam after a few weeks. A new year is a great time to focus on new habits. The key to success is not to make too many resolutions, and make each one do-able.

Let’s say you really want to lose 40 pounds and fit into your “skinny jeans.” That’s a big goal, so break it down into smaller pieces. Make your first goal to lose five pounds. Decide how you’ll do it. In this case, you might exercise four times a week and eat smaller portions. When you’ve lost the first five pounds, congratulate yourself. Then go on to the next five. You’ll feel good each time you cross a goal off your list, and before you know it, you will have achieved your larger goal.

Ten Steps to Fitness

It takes time to make a new habit part of your daily life — so start today. Before 2010 is a month old, you’ll be well on your way to a healthier lifestyle.

1. **Take a walk.** Schedule a brisk walk before breakfast or after dinner. Walk your dog. Pick at least one place you drive to each week and walk there instead.
2. **Stretch!** Write the alphabet with your toes before getting out of bed. Take a stretch break every hour at work. Reach toward the ceiling. Touch your toes.
3. **Take the stairs.** Riding the elevator burns zero calories – walking up the stairs gets your heart pumping.
4. **Park farther away.** Instead of circling the parking lot looking for a spot near the door, park at the end of the row and walk.

5. **Go dancing.** Take ballroom dancing, join a square dance club or just dance in the living room to your favorite tunes.
6. **Play with your kids.** Go to the park and throw a softball or a Frisbee, learn to hula-hoop, or kick a soccer ball around.
7. **Ride your bike to work.** Do something nice for your body and for the planet.
8. **Jog with a buddy.** Being accountable will keep you both moving forward.
9. **Hop in the pool.** Check with your community pool for classes and lap swim times.
10. **Exercise with a group.** Your local YMCA or fitness club offers workouts to fit any schedule and fitness level.

Resources:

Use the search phrase “physical fitness” for information on developing a responsible fitness program for the entire family.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP): United Behavioral Health (UBH)

Toll-free number: 1-866-248-4105 (7 days/24 hours)

Access code: 61570

www.liveandworkwell.com

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.

¹ Mayo Clinic. Exercise: 7 benefits of regular activity. Available at www.mayoclinic.com/health/exercise/HQ01676.

² United States Department of Health and Human Services. Physical Activity Fundamental to Preventing Disease. Available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/physicalactivity/>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Physical Activity for Everyone: Physical Activity and Health, The Benefits of Physical Activity, (last reviewed December 3, 2008). Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/index.html>.

⁴ The Merck Manual of Health and Aging. Exercise: Types of Exercise. Available at http://www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual_ha/sec3/ch60/ch60d.html.

⁵ Mayo Clinic. Fitness Training: 5 elements of a well-rounded routine (last reviewed Sept. 5, 2009). Available at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fitness-training/HQ01305/NSECTIONGROUP=2>.