Is Exercise Truly Medicine?

No doubt about it—exercise is good for us. But did you know that physical activity can be just as effective as prescription medications in some cases? A study published in the journal BMJ compared how well various drugs and exercise succeeded in reducing deaths among people diagnosed with common and serious ailments, including heart disease and diabetes. Researchers ultimately found that exercise was often as effective as drugs at preventing death from these conditions. The study also confirmed what mounds of scientific research have found time and time again: regular exercise lessens the likelihood of developing chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes in the first place.

So whatever your reason is to exercise—maintain weight, tone muscles, improve your mood, etc.—know that it truly is medicine for your body!

What’s the Right Prescription?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults get at least two hours and 30 minutes of moderate activity (like brisk walking) a week, or one hour and 15 minutes of vigorous activity (like running) a week.

But Wait! If you’re thinking you just don’t have the time or motivation to squeeze in the weekly recommendation, listen to this: there’s evidence that short but frequent bouts of exercise are just as beneficial as 30 to 60 minutes at the gym. For example, a study published in Preventive Medicine found that multiple workout sessions as short as six minutes a piece could help sedentary adults reach fitness goals similar to those achieved by working out for 30 minutes at a time. Additionally, a study published by the American Journal of Sports Medicine revealed that short walks after dinner were more effective than long exercise sessions in reducing the amount of fat and triglyceride levels in the bloodstream after a hearty meal.

Bottom Line:

Whether it’s a few 10 minute walks a day, a fitness class or 30 minutes on the treadmill, working in any type of physical activity will reap some health benefits. So, stick with what works for you and get a move on!
This is my preferred Sunday morning breakfast. It is divine and a truly healthy “comfort” dish.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- ½ bell pepper (color of choice), chopped
- 2 large cloves of fresh garlic, chopped
- 1 28 oz. can diced tomatoes with juice
- 1 tsp dried oregano or 1 tbsp chopped fresh oregano
- 1 tsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 small package frozen chopped spinach, thawed and excess water squeezed out
- 4-6 large omega 3 eggs
- 1 cup stone ground grits, cooked according to package instructions
- Hot sauce (optional)
- Chopped fresh cilantro or parsley
- Grated parmesan or extra sharp cheddar cheese

**DIRECTIONS**

In a large skillet over low to medium heat, sauté the onions, garlic, and bell pepper in the olive oil until a bit soft. Add the oregano and stir for about 1 minute. Add the diced tomatoes with juice, balsamic vinegar, and spinach and stir. Turn up the heat to bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cook the tomato sauce, stirring occasionally until it thickens a bit—about 15-20 minutes. With a large spoon, create a cavity or pocket within the tomato sauce. Crack an egg and release it into the cavity. Do this for the remaining eggs. Try to keep them evenly spaced into the tomato sauce. Cover the skillet with a top or tin foil and poach the eggs to desired consistency within the sauce. For each individual serving, spoon some grits in a single serving bowl and spoon an egg and tomato sauce on top. Garnish with hot sauce, fresh cilantro or parsley and grated cheese.

Serves about 4-6

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**Superstar Food of the Month: Parsley**

This refreshing herb provides vitamin A, potassium, calcium, vitamin C and can boast a higher concentration of flavonoids than any other food! Flavonoids are powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compounds that provide cardiovascular protection, cancer protection and hinder the aging process. Add chopped parsley to your favorite salads and pastas or go green with your rice dishes by adding a generous portion of chopped, fresh parsley.
Pre-Plate, Lose Weight?
The Importance of Pre-Plating Everything You Eat

Whether it’s a meal, a snack or a dessert—it’s critical to consciously measure your portions, put them on your plate and then take a moment to look at your food before it crosses your lips. It may sound silly, but it’s a strategy that can keep you from overeating. Indeed, studies show that if you take a moment to view all of your food before eating, you tend to eat less. Dr. Brian Wansink, the country’s pre-eminent expert on how our environment influences eating behavior, has found that people eat about 14 percent less if they pre-plate all the food they intend to eat, as opposed to placing a smaller portion on the plate and returning for additional helpings or, even worse, consuming the food directly out of its container.

Dr. Wansink’s studies have confirmed that the less visual perspective we have of the quantity of food we are eating, the more we eat regardless of how full we feel. In other words, mindfully placing your portion on the plate and knowing that it’s all you are going to eat will help you eat less. On the other hand, eating directly out of a box, package or container doesn’t give you any visual perspective of how much you’re eating and places you at especially high-risk for overeating. And of course, being able to preview the entirety of your food on a plate is also essential for practicing portion control. In a country where big dishes bursting with food have unfortunately become the norm, this is paramount for achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight.

Here are some additional tips:

› Pre-plate not only your meals, but also any snacks and desserts you intend to eat.

› Use simple visual cues to achieve the proper portions or serving sizes of different foods. For example, a serving of meat should be about the size of a deck of cards, a serving of nuts the size of a golf ball, a serving of cheese the size of six dice, a serving of oil, salad dressing or mayo the size of a poker chip, and a serving of dark chocolate the size of a package of dental floss.

› Make a concerted effort to specifically look at the food on your plate before you eat it.

› Be conscious and visually in tune with the food leaving your plate and entering your mouth.

The Right Dish Matters

To examine the impact of pre-plating, Cornell University’s Brian Wansink served a group of study subjects a bowl of soup and instructed them to eat until they felt full.

One group was served the soup out of a normal bowl, while a second group was served what appeared to them as a normal bowl, but in reality was secretly constructed to remain “bottomless” no matter how much the study subjects ate.

Those with normal bowls ate about 155 calories (about 9 ounces of soup). Those eating from the bottomless bowl ate on average almost twice as much soup—268 calories (15 ounces). Some consumed more than a quart! Even though the bottomless group ate 73 percent more soup, they reported the same degree of fullness as the regular bowl group.

The strategy for pre-plating your food really is as easy as it sounds: Don’t let anything cross your lips until it has been portioned out on a plate.
Go for a walk every day and reverse your physiological age by 10 years. A three-year study of 220 retirement-age men found that the exercise group showed a 12 percent increase in aerobic power and a 10 percent increase in strength and hip flexibility, preventing a decades worth of physical aging.

Eat a cup of blueberries or other purple whole foods like grapes, beets and blackberries. Some studies have shown that the flavonoids (antioxidants) in these foods can help protect nerves in your brain and even form new ones to reverse cognitive aging. Try to eat a cup of these foods daily.

Stand on one leg for 10 seconds. We begin to lose lean muscle mass as we age. Balancing moves strengthen your muscles and force you to flex your "brain muscles" as well. Try this: while brushing your teeth stand on your right leg for 10 seconds. Then switch to your left.

Eat fish twice a week to cut your risk of a fatal heart attack. Some research has found that eating fish once or twice a week can cut your risk of having a fatal heart attack by more than a third.

Attend a professional workshop or sign up for a class. It forces you to actively participate and learn which can help build and maintain your cognitive function.

Drink 5 glasses of water a day to reduce your risk of heart attack. Scientists at Loma Linda University found that men who drank five eight ounce glasses of water a day were 54 percent less likely to suffer a fatal heart attack than those who drank two or fewer glasses every day.

Practice at least one relaxation technique every day. Scientists are finding that psychological stress negatively affects the aging process. In fact, some studies have found that chronically stressed people have shorter telomeres (DNA that protects your genetic data). You can't prevent stress but you can effectively cope with it via relaxation techniques like deep breathing, exercise and talking with friends.

Adopt a younger, more positive mindset instead of focusing on your chronological age. Some research has found that when elderly participants are treated as physically capable and encouraged to think of themselves in this way, their bodies actually followed suit, with tests showing improvement in dexterity, speed of movement, memory and blood pressure.
DID YOU KNOW?
Recent research has found that children laugh on average 300–400 times a day, while adults only do it 10–15 times. Laugh breaks bring a sense of playfulness back to your day and will cause your facial muscles to contract, which can increase blood flow and help reduce wrinkles.

9 Improve blood flow to your heart by laughing every day. A report from the University of Maryland found that having a laugh break, like watching a humorous 15-minute video, can improve blood flow to your heart by 50 percent.

10 Opt for whole grain cereal over the refined, sugary kind to lower your chances of developing heart disease. Australian researchers found that regular consumption of cereal made from refined grains raises insulin and lowers good cholesterol (both of which can increase your chances of developing heart disease.)

11 Eat a small handful of nuts. Researchers at Loma Linda University found that eating a small portion of nuts five days a week can add nearly three years to your life. Nuts are rich in good-for-you omega-3 fats which can help reduce the risk of heart disease, the leading killer in the U.S.

12 Try your hardest to take at least one vacation a year. Unplugging is critical to your longevity. Studies show that people who take more vacations tend to live longer.

13 Get up and stand every hour. Researchers say that sitting for more than three hours a day can cut your life expectancy. If you’re tied to a desk there is hope—getting up to stand and stretch every hour for a minute or two can help negate the risks of sitting.

14 Make a social date every week. Maintaining strong social connections is linked to longer life expectancy. Investing in your relationships truly does pay off!

15 Try to be conscientious. In the Longevity Project, Stanford researchers found that conscientious people live longer than any other personality type. Scientists believe that conscientious people take time to think about their choices and the possible benefits and consequences, which ultimately leads to a healthier lifestyle.

16 Place mushrooms in the sun for 15 minutes and then eat them! Some research has shown that low levels of vitamin D can be linked to conditions such as diabetes, asthma and even certain types of cancer. Mushrooms are a great source of vitamin D, and you can increase their vitamin D content by simply placing them in sunlight for 15 or so minutes before eating.
High blood pressure isn't painful or uncomfortable—it usually doesn't cause any symptoms. Of course, this doesn't mean it's harmless. High blood pressure can increase your risk of developing serious conditions like heart attack, stroke, aneurysms, cognitive decline and kidney failure.

Fortunately, most people can lower their blood pressure or maintain a healthy range with certain lifestyle behaviors. Relaxation, in particular, is an especially helpful weapon when it comes to a healthy blood pressure. To be sure, taking some time to unwind can not only help you lower your blood pressure, but it can also make you feel better overall. Take note of these tips:

**Use your commute for deep breathing.** Slow, deep breathing can decrease harmful stress hormones, which elevate renin, a kidney enzyme that raises blood pressure. Use your daily commute to and from work to incorporate some deep breathing. For two to five minutes inhale deeply through your nose and then exhale through your mouth and expand your belly. Meditative practices such as yoga and tai chi are also great options for deep breathing.

**Take 10 minutes to decompress from the day.** Even when your workday is over, it's likely that you're still carrying around the tension of the day—whether it's a knot in your shoulders, clenched fists or quick, shallow breathing. Take some time to release the tension of the day. Try placing a warm heat wrap around your neck and shoulders for 10 minutes, or simply take a few minutes to close your eyes and relax your face, neck, upper chest and back muscles.

**Watch one fewer TV show or visit one fewer social media site before bed to get extra sleep.**

Sleep shortfalls can lead to an array of health problems, from being more likely to catch a virus to weight gain to increased risk of developing high blood pressure and heart disease. For optimum health, experts recommend seven to nine hours of sleep daily for most adults. Unfortunately, most adults regularly fall short of that goal. If you fit in this category, try removing one or two activities like TV watching or web surfing to make room for more sleep.

**By the Numbers**

Knowing your blood pressure numbers is important, even when you’re feeling fine.

Blood pressure is measured as systolic (sis-TOL-ik) and diastolic (di-a-STOL-ik) pressures.

Systolic refers to blood pressure when the heart beats while pumping blood. Diastolic refers to blood pressure when the heart is at rest between beats.

You most often will see blood pressure numbers written with the systolic number above or before the diastolic number:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>&gt; 120/80</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prehypertension</td>
<td>120-139/80-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Blood Pressure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>140-159/90-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>160+/100+</td>
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</tbody>
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If your blood pressure is normal, make sure you still go in for routine visits with your health care provider to keep it that way. If your blood pressure is high, your doctor can recommend a plan to control it and reduce your risk of disease and bodily damage.
When we were young, physical activity used to be second nature to us—running to greet friends, skipping for no reason, kicking any ball that was near our feet, etc. Fortunately, those days don’t have to be gone. If you’re yearning to feel young again, you just need to act the part. Here is how you can regain the joy and enthusiasm you had as a kid and integrate movement with “PLAY”—four easy principles designed to get you moving again!

**P—Periodic Physical Activity:** The average American sits motionless anywhere from 7.7 to 15 hours a day; a sedentary lifestyle that researchers say actually shuts off the body’s ability to burn fat efficiently. It doesn’t take much to add a little motion into your day.

**PLAY:** Set an alarm clock on your smart phone to remind you to get up and move around every hour. Pace when you talk on the phone, stand while doing deskwork, turn long meetings into “walking meetings” with groups of co-workers around the office.

**L—Lengthening and Loosening Breaks:** We often forget how important it is to keep our bodies and minds loose throughout the day. One way to “loosen up” is through laughter. Next to exercise, laughing on a regular basis is one of the most powerful forms of activity you can perform for your health. Laughter has been shown to burn calories, release feel-good endorphins, tighten your tummy and lower blood pressure.

**PLAY:** Consider switching to comedy radio during your commute or finding a joke of the day on your favorite social media site.

**A—Aerobic Activity and Active Games:** Chances are you haven’t found joy in physical activity. Remember how much you loved to run around outside as a kid? Why not embrace the same aerobic activities of your youth?

**PLAY:** You’re not too old to organize a game of tag or dodge ball, and you’ll find joyous play does more than strengthen muscles—it will strengthen social ties and friendships as well.

**Y—Youthful Resistance Training:** In today’s technological age, less and less is being asked of our muscles and we are, unfortunately, reaping the costs with compromised health, excess weight, aches and pains, premature aging and weak muscles. Studies are now confirming that one of the most critical steps to recapturing our youth, vitality and health is strength training. If you want to look and feel younger Youthful Resistance Training is one of the best things you can possibly do.

**PLAY:** Aim for two to three 15-minute sessions of strength training a week. This can include everyday activities like carrying groceries. Or try mixing in some push-ups or tricep dips during commercials while watching TV. You don’t necessarily have to buy free weights or join a gym to incorporate strength training into your routine.
Top of the Mornin’ to Ya!
The Benefits of A.M. Exercise

Although exercise is extremely beneficial no matter what time of day you choose to do it, there are a few reasons you may want to become an exercise early bird.

• It begins the day on a positive, healthy note that can help set the tone for the rest of the day.

• It increases the chances that you will choose a healthier breakfast. You likely wouldn’t want to “ruin” your workout with a sugary, calorie-loaded donut or bagel.

• Morning exercise primes your brain for learning and has been shown to enhance focus in the first one to two hours post-exercise.

• It enhances your sleep. Studies show that regular morning exercise improves sleep patterns.

What’s In A Number?

1 in 3 people

According to the American Heart Association, high blood pressure, also known as hypertension, affects 1 in 3 American adults and is a leading risk factor for death in men and women.

7.7 to 15 hours

The average American sits motionless anywhere from 7.7 to 15 hours a day.

14 percent

People eat about 14 percent less if they pre-plate all the food they intend to eat as opposed to placing a smaller portion on the plate and returning for additional helpings.

16 Simple Ways to Live Longer

Get Your Plate Right

4 Ways to Get Fit and Feel Like a Kid Again

Get Better Sleep, Lower Your Blood Pressure

Bottom Line:

- It increases the chances that you will choose a healthier breakfast. You likely wouldn’t want to “ruin” your workout with a sugary, calorie-loaded donut or bagel.
- Morning exercise primes your brain for learning and has been shown to enhance focus in the first one to two hours post-exercise.
- It enhances your sleep. Studies show that regular morning exercise improves sleep patterns.

Watching a 15-minute video that makes you chuckle can improve blood flow to your heart by 50 percent.

The most common type of heart surgery usually takes 3 to 5 hours. Of course, this doesn’t include the months of recovery and rehabilitation that often go along with heart surgery.

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