

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

The Benefits of Regular Exercise

Exercise improves physical health - Physically active individuals have a much better health outlook than their sedentary peers. Even modest regular physical activity has a positive influence on people's health and vitality. A minimum of 20 to 30 minutes of moderate activity a day most days of the week will benefit health and assist with weight loss. A formal workout is not necessary to have these benefits; a brisk walk will suffice (although a more vigorous workout will suffice that much more).

Exercise reduces risks for serious illness - Exercise reduces people's chances of developing and dying of illnesses such as heart disease. It does this by lowering illness risk factors such as triglyceride and overall cholesterol levels, while improving the level of HDL (the "good" cholesterol which is thought to reduce the risk of heart disease). Weight-bearing exercise and strength training activities help to maintain or increase bone mass, reducing a person's risk for osteoarthritis and associated bone fractures. Regular exercise also lowers resting blood pressure rates for hours after an exercise session is over. In addition, moderate exercise may significantly reduce the risk of developing type II diabetes. Arthritics who exercise often experience more strength and flexibility in their affected joints as well as a reduced pain levels. Furthermore, exercise may delay or prevent the development of arthritis in other joints. Regular walking of over a mile a day has been shown to reduce the risk of stroke significantly. Exercise even appears to reduce the risk of developing some cancers, especially cancers of the breast and colon.

Exercise increases energy and vitality feelings - Sedentary individuals often complain of being too tired to work out. Ironically, exercise improves people's capacity for work so that people who exercise on a regular basis actually have more energy and greater strength and endurance for daily activities than do their sedentary peers. The feeling of increased energy, and vitality is one of the first things people tend to notice a few weeks after beginning to working out on a regular basis.

Exercise helps people perform activities of daily life more easily - Physically fit people are stronger, healthier and more energetic than sedentary people. They are able to solve problems more readily, deal with stress more effectively, think faster and remember things more efficiently. Overall, activities of daily life become less of a chore for active people.

Exercise helps people to lose and maintain weight - An exercise session burns calories and elevates metabolic rate both during exercise and then for hours after exercise is completed. It helps to preserve and build lean muscle mass. It works to suppress appetite. All of these benefits work together to make exercise vital for maintaining weight loss.

Exercise improves mood - Exercise helps people to relax, improves sleep and reduces muscular tension. That glow of relaxation after a workout is restorative. Research shows that one of the best things a person can do when depressed is to force themselves to exercise. The mood elevation effect is immediate.

Exercise improves self-confidence - One of the reasons many individuals do not attempt an exercise program is because they feel they are not very athletic or coordinated. Once an exercise program is begun, however, these same individuals discover that they are indeed able to work out successfully: gaining muscle tone and strength, improving their stamina, and improving how they feel emotionally. These revelations are very empowering. It is this increased sense of self-confidence and improved sense of well being that eventually becomes the sustaining force that helps people to continue their exercise program.

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Exercise provides socialization opportunities - Exercising outside the home, whether in the great outdoors, at a gym or recreation center, in an exercise class, sport group, walking or running club, etc., all lead to encounters with other people who also enjoy working out. New acquaintances and friendships develop readily in such contexts. Over time, having the pleasure of one's exercise group's company becomes another reason to exercise.

Family relationships can benefit from exercise too. On days when the weather is nice the entire family may enjoy a walk or the couple a bike ride with the children in child seats behind the parents. If the family is involved in that very active phase of rearing young children, a parent's exercise break between work and child responsibilities will likely help them to be a calmer, more able parent.