

# The Importance of Being Active!

(extended version)

Becoming more active often carries with it some negative feelings. However, many have lost sight of the positive aspects of regular activity. We are now more oriented to the pleasures of life and we shun things that cost us something in the way of time, money or effort. Many avoid pain at all costs. We are a microwave, “I want it now” society. Short term gratification reigns supreme. I want it now and I want it my way.

Our muscle strength generally decreases about 15% every ten years after age 50, and 30% every ten years after age 70. This occurs to a greater degree in women than in men. Training can improve strength by 25 to 100% or more in older adults.

**For a moment, think about some of the wonderful aspects regular, daily, safe, appropriate activity:**

- ♦ It gives us time with friends and loved ones to build those relationships.
- ♦ It has a pain relieving effect. The body’s natural pain killers produced by the brain (called endorphins) are ten thousand times more potent than morphine. These are increased through physical activity.
- ♦ It momentarily takes us away from the usual daily stresses, and offers a time of mental rest and time for reflection, problem solving, prayer and meditation on God.
- ♦ It burns calories and helps us manage our weight.
- ♦ It helps to lower our blood pressure which lowers our risk of a stroke or heart attack.
- ♦ It improves our lung function making it easier to breathe when we exert ourselves.
- ♦ It lowers the fats in our blood decreasing our risk of heart disease, stroke and hardening of the arteries.
- ♦ It lowers our blood sugar and improves the effect of our insulin, decreasing our risk of diabetes and improving the control of diabetes for those who have the condition.
- ♦ It strengthens our bones decreasing the risk of osteoporosis and the associated risk of fractures of the hip and spine.
- ♦ It improves the function of people with arthritis, and decreases pain.
- ♦ It improves the quality of sleep.
- ♦ It reduces the risk of falling in the elderly and people who are debilitated.
- ♦ It reduces the rates of depression and increases our short term memory.
- ♦ It decreases fatigue and increases our overall sense of well-being.
- ♦ It causes an overall decrease in the risk of death (mortality) and chronic disease in general (morbidity).

**It is important to recognize some of the common barriers to obtaining regular activity. There are ways to overcome these barriers. Some of the barriers include:**

1. A negative attitude – Focus on the positive aspects of regular daily activity and how it will impact your life as indicated in the list of above.
2. Discomfort – Start low and go slow! Discuss specifics with your doctor if needed.
3. Disability – Special exercises can be easily set up by a physical therapist or your doctor. Some who are wheel chair bound enjoy a program entitled “sit and be fit” that involves fun exercises one can do while seated.
4. Poor balance – assistive devices can be used to increase safety.
5. Habit – Regular daily activities do become a habit after awhile and they become less of a “chore”; more of a “get to,” and not a “have to.”
6. Cost – Walking and other simple exercises using household items can be used to promote active lifestyles at no cost.
7. Bad weather – Walking in the mall or other facilities that are easily accessed, free or at low cost are usually available. Again, regular in home activities such as a stationary bicycle or treadmill are helpful.
8. Boredom – The feeling of routine can be overcome by listening to your favorite God honoring music, watching “healthy”, God honoring TV or movies or reading while on the treadmill, stationary bike or other exercise devices. **Use caution while listening to music while walking that may drown out cars or other sounds that may alert you to danger.**

When in doubt, or if you have any unexplained symptoms, get a clearance from your doctor before engaging in any strenuous exercise or activity. This is especially true if you are considering aerobic exercise (running, biking, swimming, etc.) or resistance training (weight lifting or similar strengthening exercises). Obtain clearance from your doctor if you have any kind of heart disorder, high blood pressure, or metabolic disorders (like diabetes or thyroid disease). Also, consider talking to your doctor regarding performing a treadmill stress test if you want to engage in a vigorous activity and:

- ♦ Are a male 45 or older
- ♦ Are a female 55 or older
- ♦ Have known heart disease
- ♦ Have two or more risks for heart disease:
  - High blood pressure
  - Tobacco use
  - High cholesterol
  - Obesity
  - Family history of early heart disease
  - Have a sedentary life style (couch potato)

**Some general principles to consider while becoming more active include:**

- ✓ Make it **fun, easy to perform and inexpensive** or it likely will not last.
- ✓ Chose a good time of day and try to be consistent. Wear comfortable clothing and avoid becoming chilled or overheated. Be sure the area is well lighted and safe.
- ✓ Start low and go slow. If you must stop your activity routine for a few weeks or longer, start the process over and slowly build up your endurance again.
- ✓ Consider mixing your routines such as walking, swimming or biking most of the days and doing strength training two days per week using small weights or bands.
- ✓ Stop if you feel pain or any other unexplained symptoms.
- ✓ Call 911 if you experience chest pressure, trouble breathing or get very short of breath, light headed or dizzy, nauseated or other serious unexplained symptoms.
- ✓ If you can check you heart rate (using a finger monitor), walk or exercise at a pace to increase your heart rate to 60% of your “Maximum Heart Rate” (MHR). This is calculated using the formula:  $220 - (\text{your age}) = \text{maximum heart rate}$ . Multiply this by .6 for 60% and .85 for 85% of this number.
- ✓ Week by week or month by month, slowly work your way up to 85% of your MHR if possible.

**Some specific ideas to become more active:**

- Walking is a great way to start (outside, in the mall or on a treadmill). Start with 10 minutes daily and add 5 minutes each week to a maximum of 30-60 minutes daily.
- A stationary bike is also a great way to exercise especially if you listen to music or watch a program during your activity. Also, start low and go slow as mentioned above.
- Always be able to carry on a conversation during activities (“talk test”). Stop immediately and call 911 if you develop any chest pain, breathing trouble, lightheadedness or other unexplained symptoms.
- Strengthening exercises can include placing your hands on your hips while seated and then stand up from the chair (chair squats); holding small weights in your hands (like a can of soup) while raising your arms to your sides, to the front and shrugging your shoulders. Then bend your arms at the elbows and lower them back down. “Wall push ups” involve facing the wall, placing your hands flat against the wall, lowering your body against the wall then pushing your body away from the wall returning to a near standing position.

**What does God’s Word have to say about the importance of our health (taken from the NIV)?**

- † Physical training is of some value but godliness is of value for all things for this present life and the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8).
- † We are temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- † Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and we are not our own. We were bought with a price and must glorify God in our body. So, what we do with it and how we care for it is very important (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Seek out a good friend or loved one and discuss your desire to improve your life style including an increase in activity. Choose something you will likely enjoy, is safe and simple, done at a time and place that is convenient, regardless of the weather. Then begin. Start low and go slow. Clear any health questions or concerns with your doctor. Report any unexplained symptoms or problems. Keep focused on the benefits and soon it will become a habit that will continue to pay you interest in the years to come.