

The Difference between Exercising for Health and for Fitness

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When someone asks me what sort of exercises they should do, it is important to know their goals. I would recommend different types of exercise depending on whether their goal was to reduce their risk of heart disease, lose weight, rehab from an injury, treat back pain, improve their flexibility, improve their strength or train for a certain sport.

Exercising for health involves 30 minutes of activity that will raise your heart rate and burn calories at least five days weekly. This can include walking, jogging, biking, swimming, cutting grass, shoveling snow, raking leaves, etc. The 30 minutes does not have to be all at once; it can be divided into three, 10-minute segments. That is what you need to do to reduce your risk of heart disease. Period. Anything more that you do will help to further decrease your risk of heart disease, but in increasingly smaller increments.

Now, if your goal is weight loss, attempting to look good, or training for a sport, we are talking about exercising for fitness. This is a step up and requires a bigger commitment. Exercising for fitness requires amping up the intensity, as we discussed last time. It also involves more than cardiovascular exercise (unless you are training specifically to run distances). Most of the time, training for fitness requires cardiovascular exercises, resistance training, as well as flexibility training. For certain events, it also requires neuromuscular (balance) exercises.

If you are relatively new to exercising for fitness, it is probably best to use a trainer initially. Most gyms have trainers you can work with. They will help set up an individualized program to help you attain your goals. In addition, they will help ensure the exercises are performed correctly. Needless to say, a certain level of fitness is required prior to fitness training. Once you have your goals set and have an understanding of how to do your exercises, there are a lot of other sources available for further reference, such as Men's Health, Women's Health, Men's Fitness, and Shape magazines. There is also any number of books and DVDs for specific training. There are enough routines out there that variety should not be an issue.

Next month we'll talk about core training for chronic back issues.



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