

20 ways exercise benefits your health (part two)



Last week, I offered you ten ways that regular exercise can benefit your overall health. We covered everything from mood, to blood sugar, to sexual performance—but we still left a lot unexplored! This week, I'm rounding out the list with ten *more* ways that your health benefits from regular physical activity.

Without further ado, let's get started:

11) Pregnancy: Exercise cuts the risk of gestational diabetes. Expectant mothers who remain active give birth to healthier kids with long-term benefits that may extend into adulthood.

12) Microbiome: Take your gut bacteria out for a run! It turns out athletes have a healthier balance of intestinal microorganisms than their sedentary peers. The weight loss associated with caloric burn during exercise might be accentuated by a shift toward GI species associated with favorable metabolic effects in exercisers.

13) Vision: Exercise may slow progression towards macular degeneration; it may also

retard vision-robbing conditions like glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

14) Skin: Does exercise really make you look younger? Does it retard wrinkles? While the final word isn't out yet, it makes sense that improved blood perfusion to the skin may deliver cosmetic benefits.

15) Liver: A common disorder called metabolic fatty liver disease (MAFLD) affects 25% of the world's population, making it the leading cause of liver disease leading to cirrhosis and liver transplants. While diet is paramount for reversing MAFLD, a new study suggests exercise may be even more effective than just weight loss alone in correcting liver abnormalities.

16) Sleep: Exercise is recognized by sleep authorities as one of the leading non-pharmacological interventions for addressing insomnia. Exercisers fall asleep more easily and have deeper and more restorative sleep. It's generally recommended that workouts be undertaken earlier in the day to avoid their stimulating effects close to bedtime. Over-training may have the paradoxical effect of interfering with normal sleep patterns.

17) Menstrual cramps: A recent study evaluated the effectiveness of exercise for period pain. The authors concluded "exercise, performed for about 45 to 60 minutes each time, three times per week or more, regardless of intensity, may provide a clinically significant reduction in menstrual pain intensity."

18 Sarcopenia: Age-related muscle loss contributes to frailty; strength-training can offset it. On the other hand, it's been demonstrated that weight-lifting should be complemented with aerobic training to optimize muscle preservation.

19 Anti-aging/Longevity: What's the good of looking awesome when it won't make you live longer? Research indicates that physical fitness is an excellent predictor of longevity and quality of life. In a recent study of women, "Good exercise capacity predicted lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other causes." A recent study of individuals using wearable technology to measure their activity showed that higher levels of exercise outperformed chronological age as a predictor of their risk of dying ("The quick and the dead").

20) Immunity: A startling validation of the power of exercise to enhance immunity arrives with the news that physical inactivity is a major risk factor for succumbing to COVID-19; only advanced age and organ transplant surpassed it as vulnerabilities. That's because exercise triggers a cascade of beneficial immune responses. A comprehensive review explains how exercise helps us achieve "Goldilocks immunity"—robust protection from pathogens like the coronavirus—while at the same time putting the brakes on runaway immune responses that produce life-threatening crises in COVID-19.

Can you think of any additional benefits of exercise? Email your comments to radioprogram@aol.com and we'll air some of them during our popular weekly podcast, Q&A with Leyla.