

## **To Exercise or Not to Exercise: That's a Good Question**

**by Linda Jones Haught**

I'm not just trying to borrow from the most famous words in the English language. I really believe this is a question you need to grapple with before getting too far along in life. You need to know the truth, not just what the marketers of the latest fads have to say.

Most people realize that there is some benefit in exercise, but they also believe it is minimal enough not to invest the time and energy it would require. After all, it is not worthwhile to invest much to get little. So, it is prudent for us to ask, "How much return will we get for our labor and sweat?"

The TV news has been telling us for quite awhile that 65 percent of the U.S. population is overweight. Actually, a greater percentage than that is over fat. According to the Wall Street Journal the economic consequences will eventually bring about a world-wide catastrophe because of the degenerative conditions and diseases spawned by living with excess body fat.<sup>1</sup> The article points out that the biggest worry is the already surging rate of Type II Diabetes. Some experts say that if we continue the current rate of world increase, there will be 320 million diabetics within 15 years –more than the U.S. population. The authors blame the increase on the fact that even in third world countries they have traded their shovels in for bulldozers and bikes for motor scooters.

When we fail to consume much Oxygen or expend a lot of calories each day, our metabolism (the rate at which we use calories) goes down every year. Eventually, we look around for the latest diet in order to lower our caloric intake. We throw our bodies into a caloric deficit and manage to shed some pounds. Unfortunately 98.5 percent of those who lose weight gain it back in two to five years. That is because these dieters have become metabolically smaller. For them to keep the weight off, they must take in fewer and fewer calories just to maintain their weight loss. In many cases they will not only gain the weight back but gain additional pounds as well.

Therefore, it would good for us to at least consider raising our metabolism as opposed to drastically cutting our caloric consumption. The advantages of exercise over dieting don't stop with an elevated metabolism. Other positive side effects of exercise include wider blood vessels, a stronger heart, greater lung capacity, denser bones, increased killer "T" cells in the immune system, faster lymphatic circulation, and increased hormones that help us combat stress.

Besides all these benefits, once you achieve a high degree of aerobic fitness, you won't even have to debate about which diet is the best one. Your body will be better trained at burning fat instead of storing it because you will have increased the number of lipolytic enzymes that help us burn fat.

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<sup>1</sup>Ron Winslow and Peter Landers, "Weight Rises in Many Nations As Bulldozers Replace Shovels, Motor Scooter Unseat Bikes," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 July 2002, section B, p. 4.

Consider that last year it was announced at the annual meeting of the *American Academy of Neurology* that exercise is the single most important factor in living to old age. At the annual meeting of the gastroenterologists researchers declared that you are 60 percent less likely to get gallstones if you exercise hard on a regular basis. According to a recent study presented in *Circulation: A Journal of the American Heart Association*, women who scored lower in exercise endurance were 3 ½ times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease than those with a good exercise capacity.

Perhaps you are older and feel you cannot handle a conditioning program. According to the National Institute on Aging, the idea that older people should take it easy is a major contributor to their downfall.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of regular well-planned exercise, older people lose 20 to 40 percent of their muscle mass, which means they don't have much horsepower anymore. A lack of exercise causes a lack of lubrication in the joints, and connective tissues begin to adhere to each other causing stiffness. Dr. John Bland pointed out in *Arthritis Magazine* that even for an arthritic "exercise may hurt, but not exercising damages the joints." (Check with your doctor before beginning your exercise program.)

If you have decided that the payoff for exercise is great enough to merit your effort, what exactly should you do? First, you will need to get in shape to get in shape. That means you must build a body support system that will enable your body to endure physical exertion without a high risk of injury. Your muscles and connective tissues must be strengthened so that you can work hard without breaking down.

If your goal is to dump fat and become efficient at burning it, you must build your hip and thigh muscles to withstand repeated use in an intense aerobic activity. Intensity is crucial when trying to get your body to dump fat. One researcher commented that if your only weapon against fat is walking, you will eventually lose the battle. In order to perform more intense exercise like aerobics, cycling, jumping, or running, you must strengthen what the Bible calls the loins in the virtuous woman passage of Proverbs.

To achieve and maintain a good ratio of fat to lean body mass, most women must work hard aerobically for about 30 minutes a day, six days a week. Some may get by with less, and a few may require slightly more. It is something you must get used to and build up to incrementally. Once or twice a week you will have to work hard enough to get really out-of-breath by means of intervalled spurts or longer periods of slightly less intensity.

Although looking good and feeling better may require a lot of sweat and effort, you can still greatly improve your cardiovascular health without knocking yourself out. By simply walking briskly (15 to 20 minutes per mile) for 20 to 30 minutes a day, you can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease.

Strength and balance can be improved by engaging in a program with weights or some type of resistance training. The popular Pilates programs are very helpful in this regard although they are not recommended as an effective fat-loss regimen.

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<sup>2</sup> Exercise: A Guide from the National Institute on Aging, Publication No. H1H 99-4258, p. 36.

I wish that all of you could join my aerobics class or run with me on the off-days because you are most likely to keep it up with the camaraderie of a group. But since that is not possible, perhaps you could get a group of your own started in the church fellowship hall. At the very least, you should have an accountability partner to strengthen your resolve.

For a two-page Incremental walking, jogging, or running program or information about aerobics and strength-training videos, e-mail [Lhaught@att.net](mailto:Lhaught@att.net). Please try again if you do not get a response the first time in the event of a buffer overload.