

Exercise makes us happy. It does this by directly impacting brain chemistry, stimulating the release of those hormones in the brain responsible for feelings of happiness, contentment, and fulfillment.

Serotonin is one of those chemicals, and it has an enormous influence over many brain functions. Some of its numerous influences affect sleep, mood, memory and behavior. Low serotonin levels have also been linked to disorders such as depression, sleep disturbance, aggressive behavior and violence.

Regular exercise and its subsequent boost in physical fitness have been found to raise serotonin levels, reducing stress and elevating mood and feelings of well-being.⁴

Additionally, from childhood through old age, exercise has been shown to improve scores of mental acuity. Forty-one adults aged 58 through 78 were studied. Three months into the six-month study, those who had started an exercise program and worked up to a 45-minute walk three times a week showed increased brain activity as measured by magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). Their decision-making abilities also improved.⁵

Exercise is proven to help diabetics control their blood sugars. It plays this powerful role by improving insulin sensitivity, increasing absorption of blood sugar into cells and lowering body fat. Non-diabetics dramatically decrease their risk of ever developing diabetes in the first place by exercising. As a means of both treatment and prevention of diabetes, exercise is invaluable.

Would you like to reshape your body? Exercise is the best way to transform your physique. It offers the greatest guarantee of success in any effort to lose weight and successfully keep it off. Your body cannot reach its full potential without it. Health risks associated with excess weight are counteracted with exercise.

With A Purpose

After 28 years of research and observing the benefits of an active lifestyle, Exercise Physiologist Fred Kasch believes that “aging naturally accounts for about one-third of a body’s aerobic decline. Inactivity, unnaturally, is responsible for the remaining two-thirds of the downward slide.”⁶ “Exercising will prevent most age-related deteriorations through age 60,” adds Jim Graves of the University of Florida Center for Exercise Sciences.⁷ Basically, research is confirming that by staying active, we can change the way we grow old. Not only that, but life quality will improve as well. Flexibility, strength, and cardiovascular conditioning are three important components of fitness.

The body adapts to its condition, whether it is overactive or underactive. In most cases, drastic changes are too great to be beneficial. Know your fitness level. Begin slowly without causing undue stress to your body and gradually work yourself up to new high points. Stay well hydrated and find a fitness activity that you enjoy. Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.) wrote, “Walking is a man’s best medicine.” It can be that simple. But rather than taking aimless strides, do it with a purpose.

You are capable of more than you realize, and now is the time to experience it—no matter what your age. Scheduling time in your daily routine to plug in a challenging activity that you enjoy will bring great rewards.

New Life

Living with the purpose of being all you can be can get complicated in this world. Striving for our personal best often involves pushing others down in the process. Competition and comparisons usually lead to empty victories. God has another way.

He has invested so much, enabling us to be all we can be. In Christ, He seized for us a hope, a future, a new reality. The Bible says, “God has provided some better thing for us.”⁸ The actual attainment of something better too often seems beyond our grasp. While sympathizing with this fact, the apostle Paul also understood how to realize it:

“I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection! But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be. No, dear friends, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.”⁹

Through His death on Calvary, Christ ransomed every person on this earth back to Himself. He pushed Himself past the point of what He thought possible to endure. It was His ultimate high point. By His life, death and resurrection, He changed the eternal destiny of fallen humanity. He has already won the ultimate victory over sin and death and is offering it to us—a new and improved life, a hope and assurance of salvation. It is a done deal.

Now is the time to step out of spiritual, as well as physical, mediocrity. Ask yourself why you are settling for less when you can have all that Jesus Christ won for you—as a gift. Why not be all He created you to be?

¹ Monday, January 19, 2004, Posted: 2:22 PM EST (1922 GMT) CNN.

² “Making the Difference,” Health Nugget, December 1995.

³ *Proof Positive*, Neil Nedley, MD, p. 352.

⁴ Internet, “Better Health” Channel, November 7, 2001.

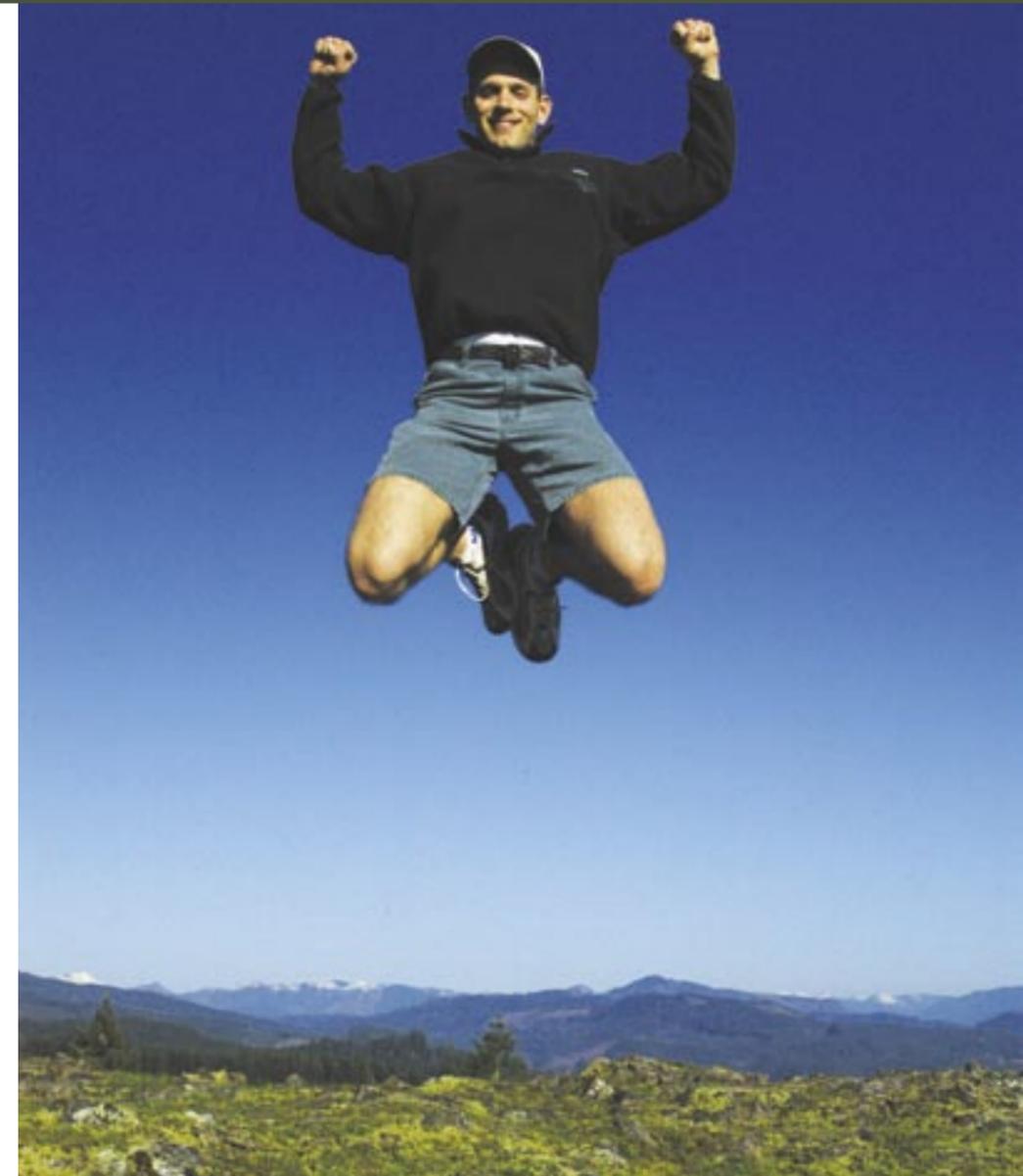
⁵ Online edition, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, Feb. 23, 2004.

⁶ *Health*, May/June, 1993, p. 62.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hebrews 11:40.

⁹ Philippians 3:12-14 (*New Living Translation*).



EXERCISE

Being All You Can Be

EXERCISE Being All You Can Be

“Exercise and you can change the way you grow old.”
—Fred Kasch, Exercise Physiologist

Although it is not the tallest in China, Mount Taishan is revered by many as China’s most sacred mountain. There is said to be a spiritual advantage to climbing this mountain. Six thousand two hundred and ninety-three steps lead the persevering to the top. The Chinese believe that if you climb Taishan, you will live to be 100.

The Chinese may have something here. The very act of getting to the top of any mountain has been scientifically proven to not only lengthen your life, but also enable you to be all you can be while living it.

There are more than 600 muscles in your body. These muscles have been given names such as *gastrocnemius*, *brachialis*, and *sternocleidomastoid*. They help make up the most incredible machine this world has ever seen—your body. Muscles prove that you were designed for action. With exercise, your body machine will operate longer, stronger and more efficiently. Without it, the machine rusts and deteriorates. When groups of muscles are not used they weaken and waste away.

90 Years Young

Take, for example, a man who has dedicated his life to proving this concept. At the age of 90, he is still going strong—literally. His name is Jack LaLanne. At 85 he was as fit as the average 29-year-old in terms of heart rate, body fat, flexibility and strength. He still has a 32-inch waist, 44-inch chest, and 15-inch biceps, *and* can touch the floor with the palms of his hands without bending his knees. At 55 beats per minute, his resting pulse is still that of an Olympic athlete. What is his secret? He has followed a vegetarian diet and exercised vigorously every day for over 70 years!

His message for us is this: “The only way you hurt your body is [by] not using it. That’s the killer: inactivity. You’ve got to work at living. Take care of the most important thing in your life, your body.”

He offers these tips for longevity:

- Exercise 30 minutes a day, three to four times a week. Change your routine every two to three weeks.
- Set short-term fitness goals and follow through.
- Slowly change a few bad habits by starting good habits.
- Eat foods in their natural state and in as many varieties as you can.
- Pass on caffeine, sugar and cigarettes.
- Drink plenty of water.¹

Jack LaLanne has advocated exercise for the majority of his life. He has pushed his body to do stunts we would never think possible. His life is a testimony to the fact that his philosophy is right on. He wanted to become the best that he could be and has achieved his goal.

Not all of us have what it takes to swim across ocean bays handcuffed while towing a boat, as Jack LaLanne did at the age of 70. Nor do we need to. But frankly, most of us are still living below our potential. We have settled into flab, disease, debilitation, sluggishness, and depression. We’ve settled for less.

Thrust

If your goal is to be all that you can be, it is going to take planning and thrust. Haphazard efforts at anything in life are basically a waste of time. Putting your body in motion, no matter how you move or what the activity, is beneficial. But to really get results and feel good about where you are going, you will want to put some intensity into your exercise. That may sound uninviting, but the more you experience it, you won’t settle for anything less.

Whether your goals are to lose weight, look better, lower your risk of disease, strengthen your body, or create a more positive mental and spiritual outlook on life, you will achieve greater success by reaching what has been labeled “the high point.”

For the Chinese, that high point is reaching the top of Mount Taishan. For Jack LaLanne, it may be lifting a heavy weight just one more time. For someone else, it may be increasing the intensity or speed of walking, bicycling, or swimming. It means concentrating on mentally thrusting your body past personal mediocrity and soaring over that last hurdle to reach the summit. Too often drugs are used to achieve this experience. Swallowing, snorting, smoking and injecting are means of reaching a high point. But those who follow that pathway are left empty and disappointed. Drugs destroy. Pushing your body to be all you can physically be makes you come alive.

Quality vs. Quantity

When it comes to exercise, strive for quality rather than quantity. Exercising to the point of excessive stress or strain can be counterproductive. For example, pushing yourself too hard in a marathon triggers the release of *cortisol*, a hormone associated with psychological stress that depresses immune function. The system does bounce back, but the body has not benefited as it could have from more moderate exercise.

One can walk five miles in a day, but if it is done in a languid sort of manner, it is not nearly as effective as, say, walking two miles in which you start at a medium pace and then push yourself through intervals to achieve greater intensity and vigor. Challenging yourself as your body is ready for it (and conditioned for it) will enable you to reach new levels of fitness healthfully.

It’s time to revitalize your body by eating and exercising properly. According to medical research, simple changes in these areas can reduce risk of obesity, high

blood pressure, heart disease and stroke, diabetes, osteoporosis, many cancers, anxiety and depression.

Benefits

The effects of inactivity are not only seen in muscular deterioration but in bone degeneration as well. Osteoporosis is characterized by decreasing density of bone mass. While inadequate intake of calcium is seen as a risk factor for this disease, there is more to the picture.

For example, let’s say I am inactive all day long but consume a lot of calcium. If I’m not walking, carrying loads, working in the garden, or making a conscious effort to exercise, bone loss is inevitable. Moving bones with force bends them slightly, stimulating new bone formation.

While it is true that there are several variables in the development of osteoporosis, bone will not thicken and strengthen without regular, weight-bearing exercise. To retain their minerals, bones need to be pressed, pushed, pulled and twisted against gravity.

Exercise strengthens heart muscles. A well-exercised, conditioned heart uses less energy to pump. Blood circulation becomes more free and pure. Blood vessels maintain their elasticity. Exercise can reduce the risk of heart disease up to 50%. Those who are active experience lower harmful cholesterol levels and decreased blood pressure. Both of these risk factors subtract years from your life.

A study was conducted using 50 non-exercising women between the ages of 30 and 40. They were divided into two groups. One group remained sedentary while the other group walked 45 minutes a day, five times a week. After 15 weeks, the walkers experienced half as many days with cold and flu symptoms as the non-exercisers. Blood tests revealed a steady increase in the disease-fighting activities of immune cells that fight off viruses and cancer. In addition to this, a steady rise in levels of antibodies that neutralize bacteria and viruses was observed.²

Several studies show that exercise has a positive effect on the immune system and quality of life for those with HIV. Simple, consistent exercise raises CD4 T-cell counts. CD4 cells are specific types of white blood cells. “If the immune system’s CD4 cells are very healthy, it will take up to 200 times the number of viruses to infect these cells and bring about an HIV infection.”³ An HIV-positive individual with high levels of CD4 cells is typically asymptomatic (that means not showing symptoms of disease). When CD4 counts drop, symptoms of AIDS become apparent.

Once HIV has been diagnosed, wasting becomes a very real concern. Symptoms of wasting include lowered resistance, loss of muscle mass, weakness and impaired function. To prevent this weakening, strength training to build and maintain muscle mass is of great value. Exercise also increases appetite, metabolism, functionality (allowing you to perform physical tasks with greater ease), and helps keep you energized. It can also help control some long-term side effects. Preserving muscle mass and weight will not only give you the best chance of maintaining your quality of life, but it may also increase long-term survival.