



Promoting Health, Vibrancy, & Flourishing Lives

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Do you want to feel more healthy and energetic? Don't we all? Physical activity can help:

- Engaging in physical activity helps build positive resources and promotes health, vibrancy, and flourishing lives (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004).
- Physical activity, movement, and play are essential to our physical, social, emotional, cognitive well-being and for our development at every age.
- Epidemiological data and considerable research indicate that physical activity is a major factor in reducing the risk of disease and disability, and for improving our well-being.

CALL TO ACTION

A “critical call to action” was made at the United Nations High-Level Meeting on Physical Activity and Non-Communicable Diseases that I attended in 2011. This summit identified physical activity as “a fast-growing public health problem contributing to a variety of chronic diseases and health complications, including obesity, heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, depression and anxiety, arthritis, and osteoporosis.” Three urgent, guiding principles were articulated:

1. Exercise and physical activity are important to health and the prevention and treatment of many chronic diseases.
2. More should be done to address physical activity and exercise in different settings, including at home and at work.
3. Multi-organizational efforts to bring a greater focus on physical activity and exercise across settings are to be encouraged.

LIFESTYLE MEDICINE

In Spring 2018, at the inaugural [American College of Lifestyle Medicine Summit](#), leaders in health, medicine, fitness, and well-being, joined forces. They sought to define the empirical, fast-growing science of Lifestyle Medicine. As defined, Lifestyle Medicine directly encourages:

- Healthful eating of whole plant based foods
- Developing strategies to manage stress
- Forming and maintaining positive relationships
- Improving your sleep
- Cessation of smoking
- Increasing physical activity.

The rationale is that Lifestyle Medicine not only has the power to prevent, treat, and reverse disease, but it may also contribute to real health care reform.





INFUSING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PROMOTING HIGH PERFORMANCE LIVING

This worksheet offers strategies and information on how you can become more positively self-determined to infuse more physical activity, vibrant health, and positive energy into your life.

Our bodies are important to how we think, feel and behave. Vibrancy is a quality of harnessing zest, enthusiasm, and vitality. A focus on the somatopsychic, how our body impacts our mind, as well as the psychosomatic, raises our whole experience of living.

“Our bodies are important to how we think, feel, and behave.”

We have the ability every day to heighten our proprioception: the amazing knowledge of our body in space. With this, we positively impact vibrant health, usually manifested in uplifted energy, confidence, and enhanced performance (Teixeira, 2012). It also feels great.

TIPS TO GET MOVING MORE AND WELL

Is there a way you can increase your motivation to move well and more at home and at work? Can you take your levels of physical activity and fun in frequency, intensity, duration, creativity and enjoyment. Here are some tips to help you get going:

1. Set Goals. Create a strategy that will set you up for success. Write down an action plan that is simple, realistic, and optimistic. Tweak it as needed and as you like. Some people like the SMART goal model: Systematic, Measurable, Action Oriented, Realistic, Timed. Think about and write your short term/long term goals.

- 2. Prioritize Activity.** Your action plan should consider how you can prioritize physical activity in your busy schedules. In the 1440 minutes of your day, give at least 30 minutes, 5-6 days per week to physical activity, especially aerobic fitness.
- 3. Start Small and Progress.** If you’ve been inactive, find simple ways to get moving more and well. Take the stairs and frequent short walks. Gradually increase your activity to 30 minutes (non-consecutive minutes are ok), on most days. For example, start by challenging yourself to power walk for 20 minutes. As you progress, increase the intensity so that you’re working in your target heart rate zone alternating with easy and challenging intervals of walking--and, if you want, some running. Try this for 4 to 5 days per week for 8 weeks, alternating with a light, and then a more challenging day. Note your progress, and aim to mark your feelings in a journal at least once a week.



- 4. Straighten Up.** As you get moving, remember to “posture check” yourself. Think of lifting your heart, opening up and increasing your postural awareness: Crown of the head to the sky, tall neck, rib cage lifted up, shoulders down and in, abdominals in and up, hips in alignment, knees in line with hips and ankles, good, balanced foot placement. Then give yourself a big whole hearted forward and backward hug. It’s a great stretch, feels good, and can prime your senses.



5. **Learn to Love Change.** Mixing up your routine keeps it fun, reduces the risk of overuse injuries, and boosts your skill levels. Practice Cross Training (not Cross Fit®), which incorporates a variety of activities (e.g., exercises, dance, sport, recreational moves). This activates different muscle groups, keeps training interesting, and helps reduce the risk of boredom.



6. **Pick a Partner(s).** Having trusted accountability buddies can boost adherence, motivation, and success, and research shows that being part of a group can positively impact health and well-being (Putnam, 2000). Having social support can offer us companionship, strength, and can give us a sense of purpose around our commitment to train. Start a walking club at work, walk with family members, and/or check your local community center, church, or park/recreation program for activities you might enjoy.
7. **Break a Sweat.** Incorporate aerobic movement --“the key to fitness” (Cooper, 1977)--to improve your physical, emotional, social, and neural health and protect you against non-communicable diseases (Ratey, 2008; O’Brien, 2013).
8. **Be Safe.** Create a SAFE, effective training space, even in your office, with a warm, welcoming atmosphere, encouraging positive connections (O’Brien, 2015; Peterson, 2007).
9. **No Pain, Just Gain.** Create an exercise plan that promotes injury-free health. Even in moderation, physical activity, exercise, and movement enhance positive health and well-being. You do NOT need to feel pain to get great benefits. Listen

to your body’s cue, and move with good form and safety first. Avoid the weekend warrior syndrome. Don’t overdo it! Listen to your body, challenge yourself, and have fun.

10. **Aim For Exhilaration.** Leave your training session feeling great, wanting a little more. Feel exhilarated, not exhausted.
11. **Reward your Achievements.** Savor your successes. Find meaningful ways to celebrate your accomplishments.
12. **Get Out in Nature.** The term “green exercise” emerges from a growing body of research that shows that interacting with nature can positively affect our health and well-being, relieving stress, and promoting lucidity and clearer concentration (Archer, 2007). Breathing fresh air and being exposed to the land, sky, and nature’s panoply of colors offers refreshing sensory stimulation. The awe of our surroundings bolsters our appreciation of the beauty of nature. We can reenergize by getting away from stress giving us time to reflect and gain clarity in thinking.
13. **Get Moved By Music.** Being “moved” by music is an ancient, global tradition. Music can enhance our performance, increase our motivation, boost our stamina, and reduce exercise recovery times. What music moves you? Can you think of and play-list tunes from your peak years to boost your energy and your inclination to move? Music is a great way to quickly enhance mood (O’Brien, 2014; Langer, 2009).
14. **Adopt a Play Mindset.** To boost your motivation to move, think of play. What did you enjoy as a child. Are any of those interesting, modifiable, or viable now?
15. **Laugh!** Bring humor, smiles, and laughs to your training (O’Brien, 2013; Seligman, 2011).



PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

The investment into daily activity boosts not only physical health but also psychological well-being. For example, exercise:

- Acts as a relief from tension, depression, and fatigue. “It’s an ideal antidepressant” (Ornish, 2018). Tal Ben-Shahar has stated, “Not exercising is like taking a depressant!”
- Helps create a sense of independence/self-care/positive self-determination.
- Helps cultivate experiences of joy, self-worth, mastery, possibility, and fulfillment.
- Can result in experiences of “flow” (as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi).
- Fulfills a need to play and have fun.
- Inspires others by being a positive role model.
- Builds confidence and kinesthetic awareness.
- Creates change in values generally as well as positive feelings about your body.
- Boosts greater sexual appreciation (Ornish, 2018).

HEALTH BENEFITS OF AEROBIC ACTIVITY

“Aerobics is the key to fitness.”
– Dr. Ken Cooper

Aerobic activity has special benefits. “Aerobics” means “with oxygen.” Aerobic exercise, in the presence of oxygen, trains the heart and lungs (cardiopulmonary system), the brain, and all bodily systems. Some examples of aerobic activities for you to incorporate include:

- Brisk walking (100 steps/minute)
- Dancing
- Running
- Water Fitness/Swimming
- Cross Country Skiing

- Bicycling
- Hiking
- Skating
- Skiing
- Surfing
- Basketball

Important benefits of aerobic activity include:

1. Boosts Your Energy. An important benefit of aerobic activity is that it gives you more energy. As your heart strengthens, it will pump more blood with less work, and your resting pulse will drop, as your body’s amazing efficiency improves.

2. Boosts Your Brain Power. A growing body of research has demonstrated that aerobic exercise boosts our brain power, increasing brain derived neurotropic factor, which is like Miracle Grow for your brain’s synaptic connectivity. Ratey (2008) discusses how aerobic exercise benefits the brain:

- Generates new brain cells, which is called “neurogenesis”
- Strengthens between cell connections
- Promotes neuroplasticity: restoring, repairing, and building resilience in the brain.

Boosting our executive function is important because it helps us plan, organize, and initiate action. It helps us learn from mistakes and maintain focus, and improve working memory. On the other hand, dysfunction in the executive function leads to a disruption in the organization and control of behavior. Additionally, aerobic exercise in the middle years has been shown to greatly reduce the risk of cognitive disorders later in life (Aamodt & Wang, 2007).

In short, aerobic exercise makes us smarter daily and for the long haul, while also making us look better, feel better, do better, and boost our mood.



FITTING IN MORE PHYSICAL FITNESS EVERYDAY

The many benefits of physical activity should have us all feeling inspired to get moving. But how do we fit it into our busy schedules? Most of us are sitting way too much. Changing this will take time and perseverance, but it will be worth the effort.

Creating more ways to incorporate physical activity into your work day is a good place to start. Below are some strategies for doing so:

- Standing or walking meetings
- Treadmill or standing desks
- Energy breaks during meetings
- Exercises at your desk like seated push ups, seated jumping jacks, knee raises
- Joining forces to train together with colleagues in meaningful activities. You can Race for the Arts, Walk for the Cure, and find ways to be a positive role model.
- Have an office mini Dance Break – take turns picking music and coming up with cool moves.

For more ideas and encouragement, check the [Exercise is Medicine](#) website.

RELAXATION TRAINING

While being more physically active is essential for our health, so is calming the high physiological arousal that our stressful work often generates.

“Arousal” generally is not a bad thing, but arousal that triggers our stress response can be harmful if not “shut off.” “Arousal” is simply the physiological and psychological state of being awake. It is also the stimulation of our sensory organs. Arousal is important in regulating consciousness, attention, alertness, and information processing. Arousal can be learned and with intention, and practice, we can

consciously regulate, maintain, and establish better, more consistent performance.

Green and Green (1977) studied autonomic function control. Their findings demonstrated how, with training, individuals can alter their:

- Brain waves
- Heart rate
- Respiration
- Blood pressure
- Body temperature
- Other bodily processes generally associate with the autonomic nervous system.



Relaxation Training is a practice used to increase calmness or otherwise reduce pain, anxiety, stress or anger. Because we are often faced with many demands, and a deluge of overstimulation, here are some tools to help you breathe and relax:

Easy Belly Breath for Calming, Reorganizing, and Energizing. Sit in a comfortable spot. Close your eyes. Imagine your belly is the ocean, and your breath, the waves. As the waves roll in, breathe in, and as the waves roll out, breathe out. Allow your breath to be natural and easy, flowing effortlessly like the waves onto the beach. Enjoy becoming more relaxed, nurtured, peaceful, and clear.



Methods of Breathing: All breaths start with a deep exhalation; then breathe in through the nose, and out through the mouth. All breaths are executed with excellent posture, form, with your eyes open or closed, honoring the self and others.

1. Complete breath/diaphragmatic breathing:

Place one hand on your abdomen, and the other on your upper chest. Slowly, and while visualizing the lungs as 3 chambers, breathe in, and fill your belly, chest cavity, and then the top of your lungs (by your collarbone, expanding the shoulders) with air. Exhale and repeat.

2. Rhythmic breathing, & sigh of exhalation:

Breathe in for a count of 4, hold the breath for a count of 7, and exhale audibly for a count of 8.

Relax and repeat.

3. 1:2 ratio: Breathe in and out fully. Breathe in for a count of 4, out for a count of 8. With practice you can change the count to 5:10, or 6:12.

4. 5-to-1 count: Say and visualize the number “5: as you take in a full deep breath in and out. Mentally count and visualize the number “4,” saying to yourself, “I am more relaxed than I was at 5.” Continue the countdown until you get to “1,” and are totally relaxed.

5. Concentration Breathing: Breath of Thanks: Breathe in for 7 counts, hold for 7 counts, and exhale out for 7 counts. Relax and repeat.

Incorporating Calming Activities at Work. Taking moments to engage in beneficial breathing is one way to incorporate more calming, relaxation activities into our work days. Others include:

- Siesta pods for a little necessary and beneficial rest time.
- Mats for prayer, rest, or meditation
- Availability of good, clean, fresh, (plant based) food
- Flex, time, and shorter or variable hours

POSITIVE EMBODIMENT: CARE FOR YOUR BODY, HEART AND MIND

“Embodiment” is a field of study dedicated to exploring and understanding the subjective experience of the body. Embodiment has to do with things like our proprioception: awareness of our body in space, and our comportment: how we carry ourselves, mentally and physically, during the day.

The hope is that this worksheet will inspire you to find ways to elevate your well-being for a lifetime. Taking moments for self care and reflection are important. So is appreciation for your self. Here are questions around physical activity, embodiment, and vibrancy to consider in lovingly tending for your body, heart, and mind:

Appreciative Questions and Reflections on Your Body and Vibrancy:

1. What aspects of my body can I notice or appreciate that I may take for granted?
2. When do I tend to have the most energy, or feel best during the day?
3. How can I incorporate more of this good energy into each day?
4. Think back to an experience when you really felt good physically. What was going on during this peak time? What can I apply in my life now?
5. Imagine optimal health. How does it feel? How can I create that?
6. How might I infuse more passion and zest into my life today?

RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

Want an Energy Boost; Making Positive Psychology Work: Podcast with Elaine O’Brien and Michelle McQuaid:



<https://www.michellemcquaid.com/podcast/want-energy-boost-podcast-elaine-obrien/>

Redefining True Health Care: Inaugural Summit on Happiness Science in Health <https://positivepsychologynews.com/news/elaine-obrien/2018051038438>

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Aamodt, S., & Wang, S. (2007, November 8). Exercise on the brain. *New York Times*.

Levitin, D. J. (2008). *The world in six songs: How the musical brain created human nature*. New York: The Penguin Group.

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RESOURCES

Contributed by Anne Brafford

Book Recommendations

- Tom Rath, *Eat, Move, Sleep*
- Tom Rath, *Are You Fully Charged? The 3 Keys to Energizing Your Work and Life*
- John Ratey, *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain*
- John Ratey, *Go Wild: Eat Fat, Run Free, Be Social, and Follow Evolution's Other Rules for Total Health and Well-being*
- Eva Selhub & Alan Logan, *Your Brain on Nature: The Science of Nature's Influence on Your Health, Happiness, & Vitality*
- David Carless & Kitrina Douglas, *Sport and Physical Activity for Mental Health*
- Wallace Nichols, *Blue Mind: The Surprising Science That Shows How Being Near, In, On, or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected, and Better at What You Do*
- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*

Videos

- Wendy Suzuki, *The Brain Changing Benefits of Exercise*, **TED Talk**