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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

The 3 Most Common Exercise Mistakes

One of the reasons I believe so many of us have tried exercise programs - only to abandon them soon after - is that most of us fall into some common traps. With the best intentions, we set out to change the shape, size and vitality of our bodies, and then give up, sometimes even worse off than we started. Here are some of the common "wrong turns" we take - and how to correct them:

Mistake #1: Starting Off Too Quickly. If you haven't done this, you've seen it. After the holidays or right before the summer, we get ambitious and decide to finally get in shape. But either because we want to see the benefits right away, or because we think we have so much ground to make up, we bolt out of the gates, only to get burned out, overexhausted, or maybe even injured.

Solution: I have a basic rule I use with my patients. If they have been inactive for a long time, I help them set up a program that will take at least 6-8 weeks to work up to the workout routine that will get them to their ultimate goal. Any more dramatic ramp-up than that can be a recipe for disappointment, failure, or even injury. They are usually happy to start feeling and seeing results even before the initial phase concludes. More importantly, it's an enjoyable process and not boot camp.

Mistake #2: Following an Unbalanced Routine - This is a very popular trend among exercisers who find something they enjoy - and then do it every workout without variation. If you think about competitive athletes, you can see that power-lifters have lots of muscle from lifting weights but also a good deal of fat because they typically don't do cardiovascular exercise. Long distance runners do lots of cardiovascular exercise but very little resistance training, resulting in very little body fat (sometimes too little) and not much muscle. Because both these types of athletes train only for their particular event and not an overall general program, they are very prone to overuse injuries. The message here is that the recreational athlete or fitness minded individual just can't reach a healthy overall fitness level as easily or completely by sticking with only one activity.

Solution: The best plan for lowering body fat, increasing strength, range of motion, general fitness and to minimize injuries is to include strength, aerobic and flexibility training in your routine. Focusing on doing each of these components every week should

be your goal. Plus, including a variety of activities has an additional benefit of making working out much more fun!

Mistake #3: Trying to Diet Strictly While Starting an Exercise Program. Severely restricting your calories by cutting significantly back on the amount of food you eat won't work well when you start an exercise program. The problem is that your body actually requires more energy (calories) than it did before you started exercising in order to supply the calories needed while exercising. If you cut back too much, your body responds by becoming more efficient with the calories you do consume, because it thinks you're trying to starve it. Then when you return to normal eating habits, the same number of calories becomes too much, and the excess goes to storage (body fat.)

Solution: Improving your food choices, and avoiding overeating (eating more than you require to satisfy your hunger or eating too fast and feeling stuffed afterwards) is the answer. Making smart selections from the four food groups, minimizing high-fat foods and sugary treats will allow you to eat the right amount of nutrient-dense (healthy) foods to fuel your increased output. Eating smaller portions more often and eating more food earlier in the day, tapering consumption into the evening also helps you eat the right amount of calories to lose excess fat and then maintain a healthy body composition (lean-to-fat ratio.)

As you can see, the principles of a good exercise program and sensible eating are pretty basic. Only by exercising regularly and eating well (and not lots) will you achieve a good overall fitness level. The trick is putting it into practice for your own unique lifestyle, but it can be done.