

Good Health

Excessive Exercise Can Be Dangerous To Your Health

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The cornerstones of good health have always included a proper diet and plenty of exercise. But is there a time when too much of a good thing can be dangerous? As the New Year approaches and brings countless pledges of more exercise, people need to beware of the risks involved with over-exercising.

There's no doubt about it: exercise is part of being healthy. But for some people, it can become an addiction and lead to physical and emotional consequences. Sometimes called compulsive exercise, certain people use extreme, continuous activity at the gym to lose an abnormal amount of weight, calm a powerful fear of being fat, pacify guilt or purge their body of calories.

A host of physical consequences can result from over-exercising. "If the exercise causes overuse injuries or if the person's physical performance is declining rather than improving, it may suggest over-training," says James C. Rosen, Ph.D., professor of psychology at the University of Vermont and head of the obesity advisory committee at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md. Overuse injuries include: pulled muscles, stress fractures, knee trauma, shin splints, strained hamstrings and ripped tendons.

There is evidence that women who over exercise may be at higher risk for certain types of injuries when compared with men. Women seem to be more likely to injure their anterior cruciate ligament, which is one of four ligaments critical to the stability of the knee joint. Although a definitive reason for this has not been pinpointed, several theories have been explored including female hip width and knee angle, discrepancies in muscle strength and hormonal influences.

It's important to note that overuse injuries are frequently seen in both women and men. Many studies support the belief that injury rates are more often the result of the type of exercise or sport rather than the gender of the participant. For both sexes, strains and sprains seem to be the most common type of injury.

The damage done by over exercise can have psychological implications as well. According to Rosen, "if the exercise significantly interferes with other responsibilities that the person agrees are important or if the person is losing enjoyment for physical activity and feels burned out," there may be a problem.

There's nothing wrong with adding a solid regimen of exercise to your New Year's resolutions, but try not to overdo it. Exercise can be very healthy, especially in moderation. Here are a few tips to prevent overuse injuries:

Stop exercising immediately if you feel pain. It's usually a sign that something is wrong. If the pain or discomfort persists after you have stopped, seek medical attention.

If you are starting a new exercise routine, start slowly and increase gradually.

Alternate the type of exercise you do every day. You should get at least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise daily and there are a variety of workouts to accomplish this: running, stationary bikes, elliptical trainers, and swimming, for example.

Replace your running shoes every 500 miles. The shoes can wear out and lose their ability to absorb shock, which will increase your risk of injury.

Women should consume the recommended daily intake of calcium through their diets or vitamin supplements, which is normally 800 to 1200 milligrams. This can lower their risk for stress fractures. Women who are pregnant or post menopausal need more calcium and should consult their doctors.

Become familiar with the signs of over exercising, "recognize the symptoms which include physical injury, declining performance, feeling burned out, feeling stale in terms of exercise or loss of motivation," cautions Rosen.

"Be honest with yourself about the impact of your exercise time relative to other responsibilities and people." If exercising is getting in the way of your daily activities or relationships, you may need to slow down.

Sources
Hurd WJ, Chmielewski TL, Axe MJ. Differences in normal and perturbed walking kinematics between male and female athletes. Clin Biomech. 2004 Jun;19(5):465-72. DeHaven KE, Lintner DM: Athletic injuries: comparison by age, sport, and gender. Am J Sport Med 1986; 14(3):218-224 Coolnurse.com, Preventing Overuse Injuries, 2004. (c) December 21, 2004 Society for Women's Health Research

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Fit Together Offers Tips on Long-Lasting Healthy Lifestyles

RALEIGH — Fit Together is offering North Carolinians healthy alternatives to overeating and too much TV watching and video game playing over the holidays.

Keeping children productively active is always a challenge for parents during holiday breaks. Fit Together is offering a practical resource that families can use to prepare healthy meals, plan activities and promote long-term ways to get fit and stay fit. Fit Together is one of the nation's most comprehensive statewide overweight/obesity prevention campaigns. Its Web site, www.FitTogetherNC.org, is full of quick tips and suggestions for making physical activity and healthy eating integral to your holiday celebrations. Now is the time also to start thinking about your New Year's resolutions and Fit Together can help while offering a twist on the traditional.

"Obesity and excess weight are serious challenges in North Carolina," said Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, chair of the NC Health and Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF). "Fit Together offers practical day-to-day solutions as well as a new twist on the type of New Year's resolutions North Carolinians can make to move toward healthy lifestyles."

In addition to eating smarter and moving more this season, Fit To-

gether urges North Carolinians to give a gift that will last for generations to come: a resolution to improve your community's approach to healthy lifestyles. Discover how to take action at www.FitTogetherNC.org and:

- Resolve to educate yourself on your children's activities while they're in school. What role does P.E. play in your child's education? Visit www.FitTogetherNC.org to find information on how some public school systems are making physical education a priority again.

- Resolve to start a workplace wellness program, like a walking club or healthy lunch group for you and your colleagues in '05. Go to www.FitTogetherNC.org to learn more about the variety of workplace wellness programs in North Carolina and how they're making a positive difference for both employers and employees.

- Resolve to make a difference in your community by using www.FitTogetherNC.org to find out how you can build sidewalks, greenways and bike trails in your community to help you, your family and your neighbors achieve a healthier lifestyle. You'll obtain a roadmap on how individuals can make changes in their cities and towns based on success stories from other North Carolina communities.

In addition to these community action ideas, www.FitTogetherNC.org also offers the following healthy solutions you can use this holiday season, found throughout Fit Together's resource-rich Web site:

- With your children home on vacation, here are some ways to keep your family active during the holidays...

- Plan family activities that provide everyone with exercise and enjoyment, like walking, dancing, biking, or indoor swimming.

- For example, schedule a walk or go skating with your family after a meal instead of watching TV. Make sure you plan activities that can be done in a safe environment.

- Reduce the amount of time you and your family spend in sedentary activities, such as watching TV or playing video games. If you are watching TV, think of it as an activity box. When it's on, do something - stretching exercises, weight training, sit-ups, marching in place, jump rope. Keep a hula-hoop on hand and give it a whirl during commercials.

- Play together. Join your children in a game of touch football or tag.

- Just because it's cold doesn't mean you can't be active indoors. Do laps around the mall before shopping.

- Healthy eating habits for you and your family in the New Year...

- Teaching healthy eating practices early will help children approach eating with the right attitude - food should be enjoyed and is necessary for growth, development, and for energy to keep the body running.

- Plan for snacking. Some 100-calorie snack ideas: one and one-half cups frozen grapes; two plums; one-half cup of sherbet; 1 ounce of cheese; a single serving box of cereal; one-half cup berries and a free cookie; three cups of air-

popped popcorn.

- Curb the urge to splurge. Satisfy your sweet tooth with a bite-sized piece of candy, a chocolate kiss or hard candy. If you freeze the chocolate first, it'll melt in your mouth more slowly.

- Trade plates. Use a salad plate instead of a dinner plate. It'll help you eat smaller portions.

- Go from light to heavy. Start your meal with a big salad with lots of vegetables and a low-fat or regular dressing on the side. Dip your fork in the dressing, then in the salad, to cut calories. Research shows that if you fill up on low-calorie foods first, you'll eat less of a calorie-laden entree.

- Tips for surviving holiday get-togethers...

- Though the holidays are a time for traditions, don't try to do it all. Simplifying your holiday will reduce your stress. Rely on family to help with preparations.

- Remember, too much sugar will rob you of energy rather than give you more.

- Be realistic about your health goals during the holidays. Accept weight maintenance vs. weight loss.

- When it comes to holiday parties, try these strategies:

- Snack before you go
- Don't skip meals to compensate for a party

- Eat slowly and savor the flavor
- Socialize away from the buffet table, bar, or kitchen

- Take moderate portions of specialty foods you really love

- Bring a dish to pass that you know is healthy

- Try spritzers or low calorie mixers, and limit use of alcohol.

- Learn more about ways to make your home, community and workplace a healthier place to be by visiting the Fit Together Web site, www.fittogethernc.org, on your computer or at your local public library.

Make A New Year's Resolution That Could Save Your Life

Each January, many Americans make an important decision to quit smoking cigarettes. Making this decision is the first step on the road to a tobacco free life, but how can people really quit smoking, considering that nicotine is highly addictive?

"The most important ingredient in successful smoking cessation is for the individual smoker to make a personal decision to stop smoking in order to avoid the risks to future health," says Frederic Grannis, M.D., a lung cancer specialist at City of Hope Cancer Center in Los Angeles. "Having said that, it must be understood that it is very hard to stop smoking. The smoker is addicted to nicotine and also has a complex behavior pattern and habit of smoking. Although some people can quit 'cold turkey', without any help, most people fail on their own and need additional help."

When people quit smoking, the body reacts to the absence of nicotine, resulting in withdrawal symptoms that can include depression, feelings of frustration or anger, irritability, difficulty sleeping, restlessness, headaches, tiredness and increased appetite.

Prospective randomized clinical research trials have shown that the three most effective methods for smoking cessation are:

Nicotine replacement therapy - The patch is probably the easiest form of nicotine replacement therapy, but some people prefer gum, inhalers or lozenges. No matter what method of nicotine replacement you prefer, be sure to follow the package insert instructions exactly.

Medical prescription - A drug called bupropion (Zyban) has been shown to be effective in increasing the chance that a smoker will be successful in smoking cessation.

Counseling - Either individual or group counseling is important. Dr. Grannis suggests six-week group sessions offered across the United States by the American Lung Association, American Heart Association or American Cancer Society. An interesting new approach for counseling is via the Internet. Indi-

viduals interested in attempting smoking cessation can seek help at the following web sites: www.californiamokershelpline.org, www.lungusa.org/ffs, www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm, www.cancer.org, www.tobaccofree.org/quitting.html

When people fail to quit smoking after trying one or two of the above methods, it may be best to combine all three approaches.

Once the physical symptoms of quitting are under control, it is time to focus on the psychological challenges. For many people, smoking is strongly linked to daily activities such as waking up, eating a meal, watching TV or drinking coffee. To cope with cravings that come at these moments, it is necessary alter your behavior. "For example, if you usually have a cigarette when you drink coffee, try taking a brisk walk instead of a coffee break, or consider drinking water or juice instead of coffee," suggests Dr. Grannis.

Other tips:

- Get rid of smoking related items such as lighters and ashtrays.

- Let your friends and family know you are quitting so that you have a strong support system, or consider attending a smoking cessation class.

- Avoid people and places where you are tempted to smoke until you are more confident about your ability to avoid the temptation.

- Alter habits to perform activities that you don't associate with smoking.

- Try alternatives such as chewing gum, hard candy or sunflower seeds.

- Find ways to keep your hands busy to distract you from the urge to smoke.

- Quitting smoking is difficult, but 46 million Americans have successfully quit. For more information about lung cancer research and treatment, contact City of Hope Cancer Center at 1-800-256-HOPE or visit www.cityofhope.org

Parents & Babies

Babies Were Born To Be Breastfed

(NAPSM) - Even though breastfeeding has been shown to help prevent a variety of health problems in infants, the U.S. has the lowest rate of breastfeeding in the world - and African-American women have some of the lowest rates among America's mothers.

Breastfeeding has been shown to help prevent the development of ear infections, diarrhea, respiratory diseases such as asthma, pneumonia, and bronchitis and help prevent children from becoming obese or overweight.

Yet, in 2003, only 51 percent of African-American mothers breastfed their infants in the early postpartum period, with that figure dropping to 24 percent at six months. By six months, the number of mothers breastfeeding their children exclusively drops to 9.8 percent.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health (OWH), breastfeeding offers babies many nutritional advantages. Breast milk contains 200 different infection-fighting antibodies that help protect infants from bacteria and viruses. As a result, breastfed babies are sick less often and have fewer doctor's visits.

While many women know that breastfeeding is the best nutrition for babies and are generally aware of its advantages, fears and doubts about their lack of success and the perceived inconvenience often outweigh the benefits. Many people are now aware that there are risks associated with not breastfeeding.

To illustrate the risks the Ad Council and OWH have launched



The exclusive breastfeeding rate at six months among African-American mothers has only reached 9 percent.

a new campaign, "Babies were born to be breastfed."

"Like our campaign says, 'Babies were born to be breastfed,'" according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Breastfeeding exclusively for six months is a powerful way to get a newborn off to a healthy start in life. This campaign will provide mothers with the information and the motivation to breastfeed."

The campaign includes television, radio, newspaper, magazine and outdoor PSAs that communicate the importance of breastfeeding. The television ads feature women taking extreme risks that would not be advisable during pregnancy and say, "You'd never take risks while you're pregnant. Why start after?"

All of the public service announcements conclude with the campaign tagline and direct audiences to call 1-800-994-WOMAN or visit www.4woman.gov to learn how they can protect their children by breastfeeding.