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Week 3 – Exercise – What and how much to help weight loss

Exercise or Physical activity

We all know that we need to do more exercise/physical activity to help prevent weight gain and maintain our quality of life. But how much should we do, how frequently and to what intensity?

With just 4 out of 10 men and 3 out of 10 women in the UK being active enough to maintain good health it is not surprising that many of us are overweight. Many of the causes of disease and disability in this country are associated with lack of physical activity. They include coronary heart disease, stroke, obesity, type II diabetes, hypertension, colon cancer, stress, anxiety, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis and lower back pain.

We all know that regular exercise helps to improve our quality of life and also with weight control. But it takes time and there is so much out there where do we start? How do we know what to do and who to go to? First of all think about how much you do at the moment, and what is the intensity and duration of what you are doing.

Keep an exercise diary for a week or so to see if you are doing as much as you think you are. Ideally you should be doing a combination of activities to improve your aerobic fitness (stamina), your strength and flexibility (suppleness). Then use your exercise diary to plan your activity for the week.

It is not necessary to join a gym or spend lots of money to increase your level of activity, but you do need to plan your activity and make a commitment to do it. So think carefully, what is it you want to achieve? Is the activity you're planning to do going to give you the results you want?

Make sure the activities you chose are those which you will enjoy doing and that you have time for, otherwise you will not stick to it. Try to make your plan varied and interesting so that you won't get bored.

Aerobic Exercise

Aerobic exercise helps to keep your heart, lungs and circulation healthy. It also helps to keep cholesterol levels and weight in check.

Ideally everyone should try to do at least 30 minutes on at least 5 days of the week of sustained 'moderate' level physical activity to maintain good health. This is the **minimum** you can do **more**.

So what is 'moderate' level physical activity?

'Moderate' physical activity is the level at which you can sustain the activity for half an hour or more at a level where you can still talk, but you are not able to sing.

Some people may not be in a position to complete 30 minutes of physical activity in one go. It is still beneficial to break this down to two sessions of 15 minutes or 3 sessions of 10 minutes as long as the 'moderate' level is achieved and a minimum of 30 minutes is accumulated.

Examples of aerobic activity are walking, running, swimming, cycling, dancing, aerobics classes, rowing, skiing.



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Strength Training

Strong well defined muscles help us to look and feel fitter. It isn't necessary to build big muscles; longer leaner muscles are more efficient and powerful.

Strength is important as it allows us to conduct daily activities such as lifting, carrying, gardening and DIY without too many difficulties. Strength is also important for good posture and balance. Poor posture can lead to a multitude of aches, pains and problems. Poor balance can lead to falls and injuries.

It is important to try to include an element of strength training at least twice every week. Try to vary and balance strength training e.g.:

- for core muscles - if you work on your tummy muscles, also work on your back muscles
- for leg muscles - if you work your quad muscles, also work your hamstrings
- for arm muscles - if you work your biceps, also work your triceps

It isn't necessary to do 100 sit-ups or 50 press-ups to increase your strength. Strength gains can be achieved in a fairly short space of time relatively easily. All you need to do is take the muscle or muscle group in question to overload to increase it's strength. This may be with your own body weight or with training equipment such as weights or bands.

Flexibility Training

Flexibility is important as it provides more power to the working muscle and allows us to complete everyday activities such as bending and reaching easily.

Whenever we exercise we should always do some preparatory stretching at the beginning of the activity (after the warm-up) to prevent injury and always complete our activity session by stretching out. Stretches are easy to do, but we don't always do them.

Over time our muscles shorten unless we stretch them regularly. If we don't stretch them, the shortened muscles start to pull on the joints and possibly other muscles putting the body out of it's natural balance. This feels uncomfortable and can lead to more aches and pains.

Increasing the flexibility of muscles gives us a greater range of movement, and also more power to the muscle when it is in use. This allows us to reach further, bend lower, throw further, jump higher, walk/run faster.

In Summary

- Try to do 30 minutes of moderate aerobic activity on at least 5 days of the week
- Twice a week include some strength training
- Always include flexibility - warm-up stretching and stretches at the end of the activity.

Most important of all **ENJOY** your activity if you want to keep it up.