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Keep moving: Exercise is good for both body and mind

The Standard Journal · 27 Apr 2022 · A7 · Sean Burrows is an Atrium Health Floyd Athletic Trainer. He is currently the head athletic trainer at Rockmart High School.

When it comes to the benefits of exercising, those that often come to mind first are a possibly slimmer waist and a smaller belt. While for most of us the goal of exercising is better physical fitness, there is perhaps a more important benefit — better cognitive skills. Physical activity often leads to better brain functioning, helping you learn better, solve problems more quickly and be more emotionally balanced.

As we age, most of us also run into problems remembering things as our brain power might be running at a lower gear. While some of that is the natural aging process, continuing to exercise is important. It can help your overall quality of life while improving your brain activity and sleep habits.

There is also the possibility that staying active can help lower your risk of what is called cognitive decline, including memory problems. There is no single factor that plays a role in the onset of dementia, but several studies have shown that those who do not exercise are more likely to experience a decline in cognitive functioning than those who continue to keep moving.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR

It is so important to make sure you visit your primary care physician on a regular basis to make sure you can stay as mobile as possible. Got a knee that gives you problems? Don't assume you need a knee replacement or surgery. Maybe it is arthritis or even just a sprained ligament. Get it checked out so you can keep walking or playing pickleball or hitting the golf ball.

Also, seemingly little things matter. Don't forget to get good shoes, no matter what you are doing. Even walking can be hard on your feet. A good pair of shoes or sneakers is an investment in your future.

HOW MUCH EXERCISE IS NEEDED?

It can be hard to figure out how active you need to be, based on your goals. Most experts agree that anywhere from 30 to 45 minutes a day is enough to keep you physically and mentally healthy, especially if you are 60 or older. If you have not started an exercise regimen and are overweight, that might be difficult at first. Do what you can do, and if you do it daily you will likely see your stamina increase. You don't necessarily need to join the gym to get much needed exercise. Take a walk, ride a bike. Try things that improve your balance, like yoga. See if you can jump rope. You don't have to get super active all at once. Take your time and find things you enjoy. If you hate the exercises you are doing, you won't stay with it very long.

TRY DANCING

Rocking to the oldies is a great way to burn calories, and you can dance by yourself or with someone else to make the activity more social. While there is no hard clinical proof, experts say that dancing can help keep your mind healthy because it forces you to coordinate several movements at once.

It is thought that learning to move your legs and your arms together is good for your brain. You also have to pay attention to the beat of the music, so the cognitive requirements of dancing are more demanding than you might suspect.

Other healthy tips include: Getting plenty of sleep Stop smoking

Limit alcohol consumption Watch your blood sugar Manage your weight Look for easy ways to stay in motion. You can do squats or sit-ups in your living room while you are watching TV. If you go shopping, parking a good distance away and make yourself walk. Avoid the escalator and walk up the stairs. Walk your dog. Yard work is also an easy way to stay busy. Anyone who has pushed a lawnmower knows that.

Keep moving to live well.