

Exercise beneficial for the immune system

The Southland Times · 14 Jul 2022 · 22

Exercising regularly is good for people's immune systems with research suggesting that it may even lower the risk of getting upper respiratory infections, such as the common cold.



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ExerciseNZ chief executive Richard Beddie says even exercising as little as 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times a week is enough to bring about benefits.

Since exercising is good for building up immunity, some people might think that exercising while feeling sick can help sweat it out.

But Beddie says when it comes to the common cold, there's no evidence exercising while sick can shorten the illness, or even make the symptoms less severe.”

There are a couple of reasons why exercise is beneficial for the immune system, he says.

“The first may be partly explained by the hormones that are released during exercise.

“These are called catecholamines which people may better know as adrenaline and noradrenaline.

“These hormones play important roles in the functioning of the immune system by eliciting the quick release of important immune cells that help detect the presence of viruses or other pathogens in the body.

“They also increase the amount of movement of the immune cells between the blood and tissue which is important in helping immune cells detect and prevent illnesses caused by viruses or other pathogens.

“Research shows that exercise is one of the best ways we can naturally increase the levels of these important hormones in our body.

“When we exercise, it also increases blood flow in order to help our body keep up with the increased demands of exercise.

“Despite the benefits of exercise on our immune system, it’s difficult to know whether exercising while sick with a cold will help you get over your illness quicker than if you don’t exercise.

“There are currently no studies that have investigated this, largely because of how difficult it would be to conduct this type of study. This mostly because some of the participants would purposely need to be unethically infected with a virus to compare whether or not exercising has any affect.

“So the message is clear. People should use exercise as a prevention tool, not a treatment. Regular exercise is a fantastic way to help prime the immune system to fight many different types of infections, including the common cold and even covid.

“But people should not feel they have to exercise if they are sick. Sometimes the best remedy for a cold is rest, staying hydrated and taking any prescribed medicines if needed.”