

- Exercise

Five fitness facts to fuel your workout

Things to keep in mind when you're running low on motivation

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There's rarely enough time in the day to accomplish everything we set out to do, and exercise is often what gets sacrificed when we're short on time.



So, how much physical activity does a person need to live longer and reduce their risk of chronic disease?

Here are research-based insights that might make you more excited about working out.

You can keep workouts short

Getting at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise each week from activities like biking or swimming is recommended. That corresponds to just over 20 minutes a day.

But you can benefit from even lesser, said Dr I-Min Lee, a public health researcher who studies exercise at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, US.

The first 20 minutes of physical activity per session confer the most health perks, at least in terms of longevity, Lee said. As you continue working out, "the bang for your buck starts to decrease" in terms of tangible health rewards, she added.

But what if you only have five or 10 minutes to work out? Do it. And it's also possible to experience mental health benefits, including reduced anxiety and better sleep, right after moderate-to-intense physical activity.

No need for intensity

You don't have to sweat profusely or feel wrecked after a workout to reap the rewards. Any physical activity that gets your heart beating a little faster is useful. If you've never tracked your heartbeat while exercising, it might be worth trying. For moderate exercise, the recommended target is roughly 50 per cent to 70 per cent of your body's maximum heart rate. (To calculate your maximum heart rate, subtract your age from 220.) Many people will hit this target during a brisk walk, said Beth Lewis, a sport and exercise physiologist at the University of Minnesota, US.

Estimating your maximum heart rate can help you gauge how hard you should be walking, running or cycling. But it's not perfect, since your natural heart rate during exercise may be higher or lower than the average.

Focus on health, not weight loss

Many people exercise with weight loss in mind, but merely increasing physical activity usually isn't effective. In a 2011 review of 14 published papers, scientists found that people with bigger bodies who did aerobic exercise for at least two hours a week lost an average of only 3.5 pounds over six months. And in a small 2018 clinical trial, women who did high-intensity circuit training three times a week didn't see significant weight loss after eight weeks. (They did, however, gain muscle.)

Exercise improves your overall health, and studies suggest it has a larger effect on life expectancy than body type.

Weekend-only routines are fine

In a recently-published study, researchers found that people who exercised at least 150 minutes a week, over one or two days, were no more likely to die for any reason than those who reached 150 minutes in shorter bouts.

When it comes to possibly living longer, “it’s actually the total amount of activity per week that’s important”, Lee said. But, she added, if you work out more often, you’re less likely to get injured.

Stretching is optional

Stretching doesn’t actually reduce your risk of injury. Instead of static stretching — doing things like touching your toes — Lewis recommends doing dynamic stretches before you exercise, such

as gently

standing. swinging each leg forward and back while